CHAPTER IV

MECHPARA ESTATE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ZAMINDAR FAMILY
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Origin and extent of the Estate:

According to tradition, the Pargana Mechpara formed part of the Bijni Raj, and in the time of the Bijni Raja Mukunda Narayan the Pargana was taken away from the possession of Bijni Raj to form a separate estate by order of the Moghul Emperor through the intrigue of one of the officials of his court, who became the founder of the estate. His name was Thana Kamal lochan. According to Buchanan, one Bhagadatta Das Choudhury was the first zamindar of Mechpara estate. Though his descendants had claimed to be descended of the Ksatriyas, their ancestor was probably a Rabha.

The estate was a frontier tract bordering on the hills of the Garos and its original owners, or Chieftains, called Choudhuries, practically exercised, under the

Muhammedan Government, the paramount control over the people and the Garos inhabiting the plains at the foot of the Garo Hills. As a token of their acknowledgement to the Moghul Emperor, they paid a small tribute to the foujdar of Rangamati. The tribute was paid in the form of certain elephants and a small quantity of the precious wood called Agar.

On the accession of the East India Company to the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, the district of Rangamati, which lay on both sides of the Brahmaputra and stretched eastwards to the then independent Kingdom of Assam, passed under the British rule. The Mechpara estate and the sister Parganas of Kalumalupara and Karaibari included in this region were known, through the settlement proceedings as "tributary mahals" under the British Government. In the later days of the Moghul rule, the principal duties of the chieftains of these estates were to repress the incursions of the Hill tribes of the upland. After the country passed under the British rule, these choudhuries were placed much on the same footing, and this left them

4. Appendix V, Extract from a Memorandum on the North East Frontier of Bengal by Sir A. Mackenzie, 1869, pp. 30-37
In Major Hurst, F.C. & Mr. Smart, A.B., A Brief History of the Surveys of the Goalpara District, Shillong, 1971, p.XXII.
as independent as before. When the Decennial Settlement of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was made, the Chieftainship of Mechpara, like other zamindars among whom the permanently settled portion of the district of Goalpara was divided, was assessed at a nominal amount. The permanent nature of the revenue fixed in respect of this estate had been at various times questioned, but the estate had all along been treated as covered by the permanent settlement.

The Mechpara estate covered an area of 399 square miles. The entire estate was situated on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, and was a long strip of land mostly lying within the Goalpara Subdivision, only a small portion falling within the Sub-division of Dhubri of the old undivided Goalpara district. The estate had three main divisions, i.e., the pargana of Mechpara, "A" Mahal and "B" Mahal, the last two being within the administrative jurisdiction of the Garo Hills. The "A" Mahal was under the management of the Government, the zamindars getting 75 per cent of the gross collections. The "B" Mahal was managed by the zamindars, the Government getting 15 per cent of the gross collections. The land revenue assessed

5. Ibid., p. XXII.
was Rs. 2,235-8 annas and the local rates were Rs. 5,557-8 annas. The total rent-roll was said to be about Rs. 1,30,000/-. In addition to this the landlord derived a considerable income from their sal forests. The gross annual income of the estate increased to about 4 lacs in 1922.

Religion of the family:

The zamindar family of the Mechpara estate was Hindu by religion. The Choudhuries of this house were all Baishnabs. Baishnab Satra, Balijana, founded by this zamindar family is still functioning. They were the followers of the Mahapurusia Sect down to the time of the late Raja Bahadur Prithi Ram Choudhury. But contrary to the tenent of their true faith, they were allowed to perform Pujas, and they always celebrated Durga and other Pujas with great pomp. Yet the family deity of the Choudhuries of Mechpara was Madan Mohan. There was an interesting story relating to the celebration of Durga Puja in the Mechpara zamindary. It is said that one of the ears of one Choudhury of the family was torn away by an elephant while he was coming home from abroad. So, he was suggested to perform the Puja

7. Ibid., p.118
8. Revenue, B. June, 1922, No.64-72, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
of the mother goddess Durga. There is still another saying. The zamindars of the family were invariably engaged in wars against the Hill Tribes, who were ferocious. Once they were humiliated at the hands of the Garo mountaineers. Then they were suggested to worship Durga Devi, who was supposed to bless them with power sufficient to suppress the Hill Tribes. Thus, the zamindars, while maintaining their family deity, Madan Mohan, performed Durga Puja in the vicinities of the Rajbari.

Genealogy of the zamindar family:

Little is known about the earlier generation of the zamindar family of Mechpara. Khana Gabura (1406-1447 A.D.) was the father of the founder of the estate. His name was Khana alias Thana Kamal or Kamal Lochan (1447-1504 A.D.). He was succeeded by his son, Megha Ram (1504-1561 A.D.). Megha Ram's son Gobinda Ram (1561-1621 A.D.) was succeeded in turn by his son Mukunda Ram (1621-1674 A.D.), and Mukunda Ram was followed by his son, Sobha Ram (1674-1730 A.D.) in succession to the zamindarship of Mechpara. Sobha Ram was succeeded by his son, Rana Ram Choudhury (1730-1790 A.D.) whose tenure was eventful. The headquarters of the Mechpara zamindary was originally located at Buridagar between
Hatugram and Rangdchall Hill. It was shifted to Tisimpur for a short period of time during the lifetime of Rana Ram, and then again to Hatugram. Among the earlier generations of this family, Rana Ram was a man of unusual enterprise and courage. He succeeded in subduing the Garos with strong hand. Several villages were conquered, and the Garo chiefs were compelled to deliver cotton, the Chief product of the mountain, on terms favourable to him.

At that time Mechpara was a petty zamindary, and its jama was included in the jama of Karaibari zamindary. It was said that the Mechpara zamindar always evaded paying his share to the Karaibari zamindar, which compelled the zamindar of that estate to lodge with the British authority complaint against Rana Ram Choudhury. Eventually, his relations with the British East India Company were strained. "He is a villain", wrote Baillie (the Collector of Rangamati), to Board of Revenue on October 23rd, 1788, "who commits depredations and robberies both in the river and his neighbourhood, and contumaciously refuses to come in though I have sent repeated perwanahs to that purpose." 9

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9. Ibid.

At the head of a band of 500 Barkandazes, led by one Raghunath Singh, Rana Ram Choudhury attacked the Company's residence at Goalpara, but he was repulsed by Baillie who with 29 men, with rank and file, offered stiff resistance to him. Being hopelessly frustrated in his attack on Baillie, Rana Ram Choudhury retired to the hills, no sooner the supreme authority had heard of his attack on Baillie, than it was ordered that the zamindary of Mechpara be confiscated and put up to sale. Nothing was definitely known if he was apprehended or imprisoned; his property was confiscated. Rana Ram died sometime on February, 1790. However, at the request of Rana Ram's mother, Baillie recommended to the Government that Mahi Ram, the eldest son of Rana Ram, should succeed to his father's zamindary. On July 21, 1790, Mahi Ram Choudhury was allowed to succeed to his father in the zamindary of Mechpara.

Control of the Garos and Saver Compensation:

As referred to above, formerly the Choudhuries of Mechpara held, under the Moghuls, the low areas of the Garo Hills on the south of the estate, and it was their principal duty to repress the incursions of the Garos.

11. Ibid.
As all the cotton came from the hills, the Choudhuries of Mechpara established in all the important passes Hats or Markets. These Hats were well guarded by the Barkandazes, armed retainers of the zamindars, to which the merchants of the plains resorted. The Choudhuries collected from these merchants and the Garos alike dues either in cash or in kind, which formed one of the main sources of their income. By the time when the estate was settled in perpetuity, the British Government abolished these dues called sayer by compensation to the zamindar of Mechpara, an amount of Rs. 677/- per annum being fixed as compensation.

Intervention of the British Government in bringing the Garos under the subjection of the estate:

In Mahi Ram Choudhury's time (1790-1822 A.D.), the Garos made incursions into the plains within his zamindary. The headquarters of the estate was removed to Jaleswar in consequence of the Garo incursions in 1222 B.S. Mahi Ram Choudhury invited the intervention of the Government, and

12. Appendix V, Extract from a Memorandum on the North East Frontier of Bengal, Op cit., pp.XXIV-XXII.
with the help of the British Government he brought the Garos under his subjection. In recognition of this assistance he agreed to pay 25 per cent of the income derived from the tract known as "A" Mahal to the Government. He was a pious zamindar and made several grants of land for the maintenance of the family idol, Madan Mohan14.

Mahi Ram Choudhury recovered the taluk of Goalpara which had been sold by his father. He was succeeded by his son Prithi Ram Choudhury (1822-1874 A.D.). The headquarters of the estate was ultimately shifted to Lakshipur, which remained as Rajbari till the acquisition of the zamindary by the Government of Assam. Prithi Ram Choudhury planned this town, planted trees, opened a fruit garden and settled in it artisans and Brahmin Priests. He was the most distinguished zamindar of this family and the estate reached the height of prosperity under his management.

The British Government conferred on him the title Rai Bahadur. On the 19th of July, 1857, Governor-General Canning granted him a sanad. He rendered services to the British Government by providing coolies and making other

provisions for the force engaged in the expedition against the Garos. Government conveyed him thanks for it.\footnote{15}

After the death of Rai Bahadur Prithi Ram Choudhury dissensions among his sons brought the estate to embarrassing condition. It was most likely that the law of primogeniture prevailed in the Mechpara estate till the death of Prithi Ram Choudhury. After his death there was a dispute among his seven sons regarding succession to the estate. Consequently, the estate was partitioned into separate managements. Four of the sons (Kahgendra Narayan, Uddhab Ram, Kamala Kanta, and Bhadreswar) took among themselves -\(^{11}\)- annas interest in the estate, and the other three (Bhola Nath, Tilok Ram, and Loknath) agreed to take the remainder, i.e., -\(^{5}\)- annas interest. There had been no disturbance in the share of the first group of sons of Prithi Ram, but there was again litigation among the members of the second group of his sons. Bholanath, (the then only living son of Prithi Ram), Loknath and Tilok Ram were the sons of the same mother. Loknath died without heir, Tilok Ram died leaving only a widow (Gobinda Priya).

\footnote{15. Letter No. 1281 from L.C. Abbott, Officiating under Secy. to the Government to Rai Bahadur Prithi Ram Choudhury, Zamindar of Mechpara, found in the family of the ex-Zamindar of Gauripur Raj estate.}
Bholanath's mother sued Bholanath and Gobinda Priya for the share of the late Loknath. The suit was compromised. Bholanath's share was fixed at -/3/- annas on condition that he would maintain his mother till her death, and that of Gobinda Priya was fixed at -/2/- annas.

The first split was between the -/11/- annas and -/5/- annas share holders. After about 30 years the -/11/- annas share broke off into two -/5/6/-pies management, thus making in all three independent managements. Some time after, one of the two, -/5/6/- pies shares, broke off into two managements increasing the management into four. In 1901, there came in combined -/16/- annas management, which remained for 10 years. In 1911 there was another split into -/13/- and -/3/- annas managements. A few years after, the -/13/- annas management broke into -/5/-6/ pies, -/4/9/ pies, and -/2/9/ pies managements, bringing the number of management into four.

Administration of the Court of Wards:

Perpetual family squabbles had utterly ruined the management, which was divided into four. It involved the tenants in all kinds of difficulties. The situation became

so menacing that Rabindra Narayan Choudhury, one of the proprietors, had to approach the District Judge for an order regarding the appointment of a common manager under the provision of the Bengal Tenancy Act. The Judge allowed reasonable time to the proprietors to appoint a common manager; but as they failed, the judge handed over the estate to the Court of Wards, vide his order No. 9 of 6-3-1917.17.

The Government by Revenue Department Notification dated 8th April, 1917 ordered assumption of the charge of the estate by the Court of Wards under Section 95(a) of the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885, and, under the provisions of the Bengal Court of Wards Act, 1879. On the 14th April 1917, A.J. Laine, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara assumed charge of the estate on behalf of the Court of Wards.

The following statement shows the names of different share-holders with their respective shares as registered in the Dhubri Collectorate before the administration of the estate was taken by the Court of Wards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Proprietors</th>
<th>Respective shares</th>
<th>Previously constituted share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bholanath Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 3 - 0</td>
<td>0 - 3 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Rabindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 2 - 9</td>
<td>0 - 4 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Gobinda Priya Choudhuramee</td>
<td>0 - 2 - 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Jitendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 2 - 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Rajendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 11</td>
<td>0 - 5 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Jatindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 1 - 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Surendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 6 - 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Narendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Nagendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Satyendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td>0 - 2 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Prabhat Chandra Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Jajendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Dhirendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 5(\frac{1}{2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1/-</td>
<td>1/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the proprietors stated above Rajendra Narayan Choudhury and Satyendra Narayan Choudhury were the members of the English Bar. Dhirendra Narayan Choudhury was a minor under the guardianship of his brother Nagendra Narayan Choudhury.18

During the time of the assumption of the charge of administration by the Court of Wards, three names were substituted in the list of the proprietors of the Mechpara Ward’s Estate. They were Durgeswari Choudhuranee, Pramila Kumari Choudhuranee, and Kamal Krishna Choudhury.19 We learn from our personal enquiry in the family of the ex-zamindars of Mechpara estate about the descendants of Rai Bahadur Prithi Ram Choudhury, that Jitendra Narayan Choudhury, one of the descendants and owners of the estate died childless. He adopted one Jagadindra Narayan Choudhury, who also died leaving no heir to inherit him. Thus, Durgeswari Choudhuranee, the wife of Jitendra Narayan Choudhury, inherited him as proprietor of -2/9- pies share of the estate. Similarly, the minor proprietor, Dhirendra Narayan Choudhury died without any issue. His wife Pramila Kumari Choudhuranee inherited him as the

18. Ibid.
proprietor of the 5\% pies share of the Mechpara estate. Tilok Ram's widow, Gobinda Priya Choudhuraneed had one daughter. She adopted Kamal Krishna Choudhury, the second son of her daughter, and accordingly he became the proprietor of the -/2/- annas share of the estate.

On 22nd February, 1926, Rajendra Narayan Choudhury, the proprietor of the -/11/- pies share of the Mechpara Ward's estate died, and the name of Sourindra Narayan Choudhury, son of the deceased, was substituted in the list of proprietors\(^{20}\).

Narendra Narayan Choudhury, one of the proprietors of the Mechpara Ward's estate, died on the 19th of November 1931, leaving three sons as his heirs:

2. Sailendra Narayan Choudhury aged 19 years.
3. Arun Chandra Choudhury - aged 7 years.

They inherited 5\% pies share of the whole estate\(^{21}\). After the death of Robindra Narayan Choudhury, his sons Ranjit Narayan Choudhury, Jay Narayan Choudhury and Surjya Narayan Choudhury respectively inherited -/2/9/ pies share of the whole estate\(^{22}\).

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22. Papers found in Dhubri Collectorate, Dhubri.
### Mechpura Estate: Genealogical Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khana (Than) Kamal (1406-1447 A.D.)</th>
<th>son Khana (Than) Kamal (1447-1504)</th>
<th>son Neela Ram (1504-1561)</th>
<th>son Gobinda Ram (1561-1621)</th>
<th>son Mukunda Ram (1621-1674)</th>
<th>son Sambha Ram (1674-1730)</th>
<th>son Raja Ram (1730-1790)</th>
<th>son Mah Ram (1790-1822)</th>
<th>son Prith Ram (1822-1874)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>son Kama, (Than) Kamal (1447-1504)</td>
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<td>son Gobinda Ram (1561-1621)</td>
<td>son Mukunda Ram (1621-1674)</td>
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<td>son Mah Ram (1790-1822)</td>
<td>son Prith Ram (1822-1874)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sources:
1. Court of Ward's letter No. 25 dt. 11-4-22
2. Personal enquiry

*Anna and pies indicate the share of property.*