INTRODUCTION
The Eighteenth Century was the period of tumultuous developments all over the world. The French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, Agricultural and Industrial revolutions had radically altered the political, socio-economic structure and indeed changed the face of Europe first, then affected whole world in a way or other.

The Eighteenth Century was also the period, when four great oriental states, repository of extremely autocratic power structure - with the focal points (king) concentrating all the authority, well functioning administrative machinery, pomp and grandeur, too had
declined - creating enormous void in the polity, which could not be replaced by any internal element. It further, signified the stultification of any element of growth in these state formations.

We are concerned here with the Mughal Empire, which had created an autocratic administrative structure, where the king was representative of God (Zilellah) and repository of divine wisdom and all authority was emanating from him. The unique administrative innovation like mansabdari system, jagirdar system, land revenue administration, incorporation of local and hereditary elements like zamindars and above all, creation of an eclectic culture had not only sustained the empire for more than 200 years, but also brought much desired geographical unity up to great extent in India.

The Empire created an administrative edifice – where recruitment, promotion, reward, punishment, transfer, assignment of mansab – all remain the prerogative of the Emperor. Besides, the Empire was able to create well organised postal system. The Mughal Empire was spread from Afghanistan to the eastern boundaries of Bengal and from Kashmir to Kamrup.

The present study is concerned to the state formations situated in eastern frontier of Bengal and most of them never formed part of the Empire. These state formations seems to had absorbed several
features of Mughals and thus inherited merits and demerits of these institutions as well.

The Mughal Empire had faced crisis in the first half of the 18th century, roots of which could be found in the later years of Aurangzeb reign. By 1745, the Mughal authority was greatly undermined and area under the command greatly reduced due to the emergence of successor states. The crisis was so pervasive that the Mughal State did not find any means to extricate itself from it. The crisis seems to have afflicted to Marathas, who, too, did not last long and with 1761 (Third battle of Panipat) their dream of stepping into the shoe of Mughals vanished forever.

In this crisis era, the Bengal emerged as an independent state and due to its establishment by the erstwhile Mughal nobility and its adoption of the Mughal institutions to a large extent- it characterised as ‘successor state’. The Bengal state seems to had inherited same weakness, which failed to resist the onslaught of colonial conquest in 1757.

The present work is concerned with four important state formations on the eastern frontier of Bengal, with exception of a part of Tripura State, these were never subjugated to the suzerainty of either the Mughal state or Bengal Nazimate. These state formations situated in the eastern frontier of Bengal notably Ahom – Assam,
Koch, Tripura and Cachari state faced ‘crisis’ in their state formation which appears to be direct and indirect outcome of the ‘crisis’ of the core (Mughal Empire and Bengal). The crisis in these state formation could not be arrested due to the absence of any indigenous growth which could have supplanted the crisis. On the other hand the ‘crisis’ paved the way for inevitable British colonisation of these state formations.

This study has made sincere effort to study this crisis in the 18th century in depth viz., genesis, evolution/process, final crisis and decline of these state formations vis-à-vis crisis and decline of the Mughal Empire and Bengal Nazimate.

The study has also incorporated the debate on 18th century India where the early imperialist historiography as well as the early nationalist historiography (Jadunath Sarkar, R C Majumdar) regarded the colonial conquest of state and economy in 18th century as fundamental ‘disjunction’ (‘break’), where each half of the century represented a radical contrast. They further characterised the period as ‘dark age’ and chaotic. For imperialist historians, the 18th century was a dark era which awaited the order and modernisation by the British rule and for early nationalist historians the colonial conquest led to the birth of modern civilisation in India. Of late, some nationalist historians too regarded the colonial conquest as similarly
'disjunctive' because the colonial conquest halted the growth of order and development and reduced India to an impoverished adjunct, source of raw materials, soldiers and wealth which sustained Britain's massive industrial strength. Thus, the colonial rule represents a radically different state formation in second half of the 18th century than the previous Mughal as well as Nazimate states.

Eric Stokes argues that the colonial rulers did not transform or revolutionise the inherited system rather represented a continuity of systems with slight modifications. Thus Stokes implied a 'continuity' of state forms across the 'divide'.

Recently scholars like C A Bayly, Muzaffar Alam, Frank Perlin and Andre Wink, challenged the theories of 'disjunction'.

According to Bayly the Mughal Empire by its fall rendered a service by letting a large number of indigenous groups develop and so enabled a number of network, established by local castes and 'community' and immigrant groups together with merchants and money lenders - to flourish. British expansion might in the beginning

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have hurt some of these groups, but ultimately it represented a compromise with many of them.

Andre Wink, accepting Bayly’s view of the 18th century, offered another ‘continuity thesis’ i.e., of the Mughal Empire and the Marathas. Muzaffar Alam analysed the first half of the 18th century, where he asserts that the politics and administration of the 18th century Punjab and Awadh continued the economic growth of the 17th century.

M Athar Ali, questioned the evidences marshalled out by Alam and therefore, rejected the conclusion. According to him, Alam’s evidences were slender, his comparison of Ain’s jamadami with 18th century revenue rolls, which appear double because it was not calibrated against the tremendous rise in price. Due to the very doubtful nature of the evidences, he rejected Muzaffar Alam’s final assertion of growing tendency among the nobles and officials to hold jagirs on a permanent and quasi-permanent basis and the struggle to convert madad-i-ma’ash into milkiyat, the emergence of the ta’alluqa, tahhud and ijara as the most acceptable form of government. And the consensus among the regional powers to maintain the Mughal imperial symbols to obtain legitimacy and thus, stability and security

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of their spoils and all indicated the 18\textsuperscript{th} century endeavour to make use of the possibilities for growth within existing social structure. In other words, Alam also found some sort of 'continuity' in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

M Athar Ali has rejected Perlin's assertion that an imperial system has no significance for the economy. He has also criticised Bayly for not comparing 17\textsuperscript{th} century development with the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and for finding emergence of Hindu and Muslim zamindars as 'indigenous' and 'external' elements on whom the English power was dependent on the basis of compromise and collaboration. It lent little weight to his thesis of Mughal decline and reinforced position of the urban classes and the bureaucracy. Bayly and Alam's description shows a number of zamindari uprisings. S P Gupta, Satish Chandra and Iqbal Hussain have studied Amber, Maratha and Rohilla chieftains, and it appears that the reassertion of the zamindar's power could not lead to the restoration of feudal condition. It would not be in zamindars' own interest to give up the right to collect agricultural surplus as land revenue, whether as nominal jagirdars, ijaradars, ta'allluqdar\textsc{es} etc., giving rise to a great admixture of state rights with hereditary rights. Athar Ali further asserts the difficulty to prove that the mutually conflicting small political units were individually stronger than the Empire. Irfan Habib, too, finds splintering of India
in Eighteenth Century has catastrophic economic consequences. Bayly does not consider this aspect and argued that the base of these units were strong because of its liberal policy or compromises with the local 'elites'. But according to Athar Ali Mughal Empire has also promoted eclectic culture. He says that Bayly not only ignored the cultural aspects but his position on the Mughal Empire is not very definite. After admitting that the Empire implied certain amount of development of commerce and markets, he did not draw any conclusion, like the decay of Empire could affect such developments.

Athar Ali describes the attempt to find a theory for 18th century India as a whole, futile and supports the conventional thesis of 'disjunction' which, according to him, explains the realities of socio-economic history of India.

Irfan Habib argues that all theories of the eighteenth century must start with the problem of the economic role of the Mughal Empire before its decline and refuted the 'continuity' theory by comparing evidences from the 17th century and both the halves of the 18th century e.g., insurance and interest rates from Gujarat and Malwa, state of agriculture and trade, land revenue taxation, local hereditary right holders (particularly from Rajasthan and Maharasatra), currency, merchant capital, banking and credit,
brokerage and centralised administration.\textsuperscript{4} He says, 'insufficient as our present evidence for economy under the indigenous 18\textsuperscript{th} century regimes is, it is enough to make us entertain doubts about their having witnessed any significant measure of economic growth". The performance in terms of population increase, extension of cultivation or expansion of trade was not superior than the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Comparing with Chinese state, he asserts that the splintered India got colonised at least 100 years earlier.

Bernard S Cohn introduced a new methodology to interpret 18\textsuperscript{th} century India, by his work.\textsuperscript{5} He seeks to examine the social/cultural structure and politics, where kinship, religious transactions, ruling lineage and chieftainships were given prominence, as extensive social formation and thus accordingly 18\textsuperscript{th} century India has been viewed from four levels of political system – the imperial, secondary, regional and local. Cohn calls the successor state Bengal as secondary which needs an examination. Following the same methodology ('ethno history') A M Shah, Karen Leonard and Philip Calkins have worked on Gujarat, Hyderabad and Bengal respectively.

\textsuperscript{5} Bernard S Cohn, An Anthropologist Among the Historians and other Essays, New Delhi, 1987.
Philip Calkins concludes⁶ that the decline of imperial power brought changes in the provincial system with emergence of regional ruling groups (previously sub-ordinate interest, indigenous landed ruling groups and groups representing commercial and financial interests,), but it did not bring chaos, decadence or perhaps a decline in administrative efficiency. M Athar Ali does not find himself in agreement because he does not find emergence of regional oriented ruling groups. That is why it requires fresh enquiry.

It is apparent that Bengal and particularly eastern frontier did not get enough focus in the ongoing 18th century India debate except in a few cases. Scholars have rarely paid attention to the development in the eastern frontier region of Bengal (presently north-east India – a region constituted by more than 420 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes). This is partly due to the non-inclusion of the region in their framework and largely due to the non-availability of the information. On the other hand scholars situated in north-east India have produced several seminal works but treated their theme largely in isolation of Mughal State and 18th century framework. It is rather interesting to see that almost all kindgoms/chieftaincies emerged in course of time found themselves in midst of crisis in the 18th century.

It appears that they were closely integrated with Bengal and then with Mughal India and crisis in Ahom, Cachari (Dimasa), Tripura and other such state formation were in one way or other connected with the 18th century development or crisis in Bengal and Mughal India. The thesis is an attempt to understand the mechanism of similar crisis in the region and its effect besides it has also examined the development in the light of the 18th century debate.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

A number of works have been done covering some parts of the 18th century Bengal. So far as comprehensive study of 18th century crisis with emphasis on eastern frontier states (present North East India) has been made.

R C Majumdar's *History of Bengal* and Jadunath Sarkar's *History of Bengal Muslim Period* by and large confined to political aspects though they have included some of political incidents involving eastern frontier states. N K Sinha's pioneering work, *The Economic History of Bengal* 3 vols, quite useful for the latter period. It did not analyse Nizamate economy in detail. The limitation of N K Sinha's work is apparent, because it was published much earlier than the present debate started taking some shape. P J Marshall's *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740-1828* and S Choudhury's *Trade
and Commercial Organisation in Bengal 1650-1720 do not use Persian (including local) sources as well as sources in regional languages\textsuperscript{7} (see objective and data). Abdul Majed Khan's work *The Transition in Bengal 1756-1775* concerns to a small period.

Among the recent publications Richard M Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*,\textsuperscript{8} provides some insightful interpretation on the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and first 60 years of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Although he has referred to many prominent eastern frontier places, like, Sylhet, Chittagong, Sonargaon but has not included the integration with the adjoining social formation in his study. Similarly, he has not used information from regional sources etc., as well as some important historical work on the region. However, Eaton's analysis of the integration of Bengal with India and markets beyond Indian frontier s and consequent impact on the socio-economic formation is quite interesting. The present study will have an analysis of these aspect in the context of 18\textsuperscript{th} century crisis. His description of religious gentry and their role in the expansion of cultivation will assist us in our formulation, even though, he did not extend his period under study beyond 1760.

\textsuperscript{7} See bibliography list.
Sushil Choudhury's work, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal*, limited its scope by studying only the non-agricultural production, its trade, European companies, merchants and price trends, thus, ignoring a larger sector such as, agricultural production, surplus extraction and distribution, role of religious institution in production, consumption pattern of the commodities, role of service gentry and so on. Evidence shows that a large number of commodities were traded between Bengal and Eastern Frontier States and he has rarely mentioned the significance of such trade.

Irfan Habib's paper, 'The Eighteenth Century in Indian Economic History', contains extremely useful analysis of the impact of British colonisation of Bengal and how systematic plunder sustained the British economic growth. But he has ignored effects on eastern frontier of Bengal.

Similarly we find several seminal work on Assam. Amalendu Guha, 'Economy of Assam' has analysed the economy of Assam and described the changes under Mughal influence. But he has not paid much attention to the Mughal state impact on social and cultural aspect and how the import of cultural traits produced the crisis.

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10 In *Cambridge Economic History of India, vol. 1*, (eds.) T Roy Choudhury and Irfan Habib, Delhi, 1982.
Another pioneering work on medieval Assam has been done by Tejimala Gurung 'Social Formation in 18th Century Assam'\(^{11}\). She has analysed the evolution of the social formation and however, as it is obvious the examination of crisis in these state formation vis-à-vis crisis in the Mughal India was not in her purview. Similarly the research article of Sajal Nag 'Socio-economic structure of Medieval Assam'\(^{12}\) enlighten us with insightful interpretation, but still the paper concern itself only with the development in medieval Assam.

On Koch-Behar, we have some pioneering works notably by S N Bhattacharyya (A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy)\(^{13}\) Richard M Eaton (The Rise of Islam in Bengal Frontier), Amanullah Khan, (History of Koch Behar) . These works have discussed the rise and fall of the Koch Kingdom. Similarly on Tripura and Dimasa State we have many works, notably by N R Roychoudhury, Tripura Through the Ages\(^{14}\) and by J B Bhattacharjee, Social and Polity Formation in Pre-colonial North East India.\(^{15}\) These are very informative about the evolution of the respective state formation. The Tripura chronicles

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\(^{13}\) S N Bhattacharyya, A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, Calcutta, 1929.

\(^{14}\) N R Roychoudhury, Tripura Through the Ages, New Delhi, 1983.

\(^{15}\) J B Bhattacharjee, Social and Polity Formation in Pre-colonial North East India, Delhi, 1991.
Rajmala\textsuperscript{16} edited by Mahadev Chakraborty \textit{et al}. provide enormous information on the crisis. But all these works have not considered the crisis of Mughal India vis-à-vis these state formations and have not analysed that the Mughal influence in these state formations could also produce similar crisis in these state formations.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

Thus the present study is a modest attempt to provide a perspective to the crisis in these states and their subsequent colonisation. Although our framework of the study explicitly wishes to study the crisis in the state formations located on the eastern frontier of Bengal a critical analysis of the 18th century crisis and decline of Mughal state and its successor state Bengal is not only implicitly interwoven in such endeavour but it is also imperative to provide a perspective to the proposed study. The study is therefore, a modest attempt:

(i) to analyse circumstances which produced crisis in the Mughal Empire and then in its 'successor' state Bengal in the 18th century, which finally culminated in their decline and subjugation by British power. An attempt will be

\textsuperscript{16} Mahadev Chakraborty \textit{et al}. ed., \textit{Rajmala} by K C Sinha, Agartala.
made to understand the crisis by taking into account the 18th century India debate.

(ii) To analyse crisis in the state formation of Ahom (Assam), Koch Behar, Tripura and Dimasa located on the eastern frontier of Bengal.

(iii) To establish similarity between the crisis afflicted to the Mughal State as well as Bengal State and eastern frontier state formations.

(iv) To analyse further, whether influences/impact of the Mughal State in the political, social, economic and cultural structure of the state formation situated on the eastern frontier of Bengal, produced the crisis or not. Thus, the study seeks to establish linkages between the two.

And finally,

(v) by undertaking the above study in proper perspective it proposes to integrate the apparently sporadic and isolated development in the north-east India with the development in the rest of India.
ORGANISATION

The thesis has been divided into 9 chapters including Introduction and Conclusion for the sake of methodical presentation. However, the continuity of the narrative has been maintained across the chapters. Each chapter except Introduction contained thematic introduction and conclusion besides the essential narrative/analysis.

The first chapter (Introduction) introduces the problem mentioning briefly the 18th century crisis and debate and need of the present work particularly in respect of state formations situated on the eastern frontier of Bengal. The introductory chapter also set out the objective of the study.

The second chapter contains a critical discussion on the various Mughal institutions like Mansabdari and Jaigirdari system, land revenue administration which discusses the magnitude of land revenue demands, and how these institution sustained the Empire for more than 200 years. The section II of the chapter further deals with the political developments in the Empire after death of Aurangazeb as well as it has also analysed the emergence of Bengal Nazimatee as 'successor state' and the political developments under the nazims (nawabs).

The third and fourth chapter are devoted to the genesis and process of crisis in the Mughal Empire and Bengal nazimate. It
analyse the crisis and stultification of any internal growth which could have arrested the crisis. The resultant weakness of these two states led to subsequent colonial conquest. An endeavour has been made in section II of the fourth chapter to understand the character of the colonial state with reference to the 18th century debate, where the Cambridge School of Historians denied the existence of such crisis and rather indicate economic growth which signify 'continuity' in the historiography, whereas Indian scholars, particularly those belonging to Aligarh identifies existence of crisis and regarded the emergence of British power as 'break'.

The fifth chapter deals with the state formation in Ahom-Assam; with reference to its political, socio-economic and cultural practices of the state. The chapter further analyse the impact or influence of Mughals on Ahom State formation and resultant developments. The chapter also analyse the process of crisis in 18th century Ahom – Assam State vis-à-vis Moamaria rebellion, which had weakened the state so much that colonial intervention become inevitable.

The sixth chapter is apportioned to the state of Koch Behar. The chapter analyse, the emergence of state and its interactions with others since the pre-Mughal Bengal period, in the form of cultural imports like sanskritization, Hindu caste system. The chapter also
describes the Mughal conquest of the area and imposition of Mughal revenue system which led peasants to rebel and expulsion of the Mughal officials from the territory. But the contradictions in state formation finally weakened the state and which was incorporated first in the Mughal Bengal then the British Bengal but lastly it gain princely state position after accepting subsidiary alliance.

The seventh chapter deals with the Tripura state formation, its genesis, sanskritization process, i.e., cultural importation, impact of Mughals on the polity as well as the contradiction leading to the crisis and final subjugation to the British rule.

The eighth chapter similarly describes a tiny state formation on the frontier - Dimasa state. The chapter analyse the emergence of state, sanskritization process, impact of Mughals on its polity as its territory forming boundary with the Mughal Bengal, and the gradual weakening of the state due to crisis that led the king to petition to British rule for assistance.

The ninth chapter contains major finding of the study and propounded that the developments in the core - the Mughal state and Bengal were bound to influence the developments, on the periphery, i.e., the eastern frontier state formation, even though they were not part of the Mughal state organically and thus, the 18th century crisis
was so pervasive in the sense that the history of the frontier states (north-east) is an integral part of the Indian History.