

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

From the forgoing account it is proved that Bijni Raj Estate was one of the prominent and powerful *Zamindari* Estates of Assam throughout the Mughal era and Colonial epoch. But the history of Bijni Raj Estate is still unidentified to several persons because of lack of research work in this subject matter. The past history of the Bijni Raj family confesses that their predecessors were always loyal to their higher authorities, i.e. earlier to the Mughal authority and later to the Colonial authority. As a result the higher authorities also considered them as ally and friend.

In conclusion it can be determined that the rulers of Bijni Raj family assumed the title of both '*Raja*' (king) and '*Zamindar*' because of divergent circumstances. Chandra Narayan alias Bijit Narayan, one of the offspring of Koch ruler Biswa Singha, laid the foundation of the Bijni Raj dynasty after procuring a written *Farman* from the Mughal *Badshah*.¹ Chandra Narayan became the first king of newly generated Bijni kingdom, whose northern boundary touched Bhutan hills, southern boundary touched Mandachal alias lower part of Garo hills, river Manas demarcated the eastern boundary and river Sonkosh demarcated the western boundary.²

But the Mughal authority formally granted the title of '*Raja*' to the rulers of Bijni Dynasty during the period of second king Jaynarayan.³ There was a reason behind this grant or favour from the Mughals side. When Jaynarayan was the Bijni king, under the leadership of Mughal general Ramsingha an invasion was led against the Ahom king and the Darangi king of Assam. Notably Ramsingha was sent by Mughal king Jahangir. At the time of this incursion Ramsingha had to move across the Bijni *Rajya* and the Bijni ruler Jaynarayan offered all necessary help to the Mughal army. After the conclusion of battle, Ramsingha wrote a letter to Mughal emperor Jahangir, to allow Jaynarayan to use the title *Raja* before his name for his liberal and indispensable help that he extended to the Mughal soldiers. The Mughal Emperor accepted the proposal and from that time, the rulers of Bijni Estate used the title *Raja* before their

names. Later on the Colonial government of India too allowed the rulers of Bijni Estate to use the title *Raja*.⁴

During the reign of *Raja* Amrit Narayan the entire Bijni Raj Estate comprised of three divisions namely, *Nij* Bijni, Habraghat *Pargana* and Khuntaghat *Pargana*. *Nij* Bijni was considered as semi independent state outside the British territory. The Habraghat and Khuntaghat *parganas* were the permanently settled areas within the British territory. As a result of this system, rulers of Bijni Dynasty were termed as *Raja* of Bijni and *Zamindar* of Habraghat and Khuntaghat *pargana*.⁵ Therefore the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate were adorned with dual title, 'Raja' and 'Zamindar'.

Whilst Chandra Narayan (Bijit Narayan) laid the foundation of Bijni Raj Estate, the new kingdom comprehended twelve *parganas*, namely: (a) Habraghat (b) Khuntaghat (c) Mechpara (d) Chapar (e) Karaibari (f) Parbatjoar (g) Ghurla (h) Jamira (i) Tarai (j) Gola Alamganj (k) Kalumalupara (l) Alamganj.⁶ But with the passing of time these twelve *parganas* were gradually separated from Bijni Raj Estate and there grew up with a new and separate identity.

In the eighteenth century, Mechpara and Karaibari were detached from Bijni Estate and appeared as separate *zamindary*. The new *zamindari*s were acknowledged by Mughal administration. The Mughal administration recognized these new *zamindari*s for administrative purposes.⁷ According to A.A. Khan Choudhury, the tract was taken away from Bijni to form a separate estate covering 276 square miles area. Chapar *pargana* was taken away when Mukunda Narayan was the *Raja* of Bijni Estate. Chapar *pargana* was acquired by Jay Narayan Sarmah, a person who obtained grant from the Mughals. Likewise other *parganas* also started to split from Bijni Raj Estate and at the end only two *parganas* namely Habraghat and Khuntaghat remained with the Bijni family.⁸

In the undivided Goalpara district there were 12 permanently settled estates at the time of permanent settlement. These permanently settled estates consisted of six *zamindari*s, namely: Bijni, Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari and Parbatjoar. But the Bijni was biggest and powerful among them. Begin from Chandra Narayan many rulers from the Bijni Raj Daynasty, such as- *Raja* Jay Narayan, Sibanarayan, Bijaynarayan, Mukundanarayan, Haridebnarayan, Balitnarayan, Indranarayan, Amritnarayan, Kumudnarayan, *Rani* Abhayeswari Devi,

Jogendranarayan and Bhairabendranarayan ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate upto the acquisition of Bijni Raj Estate in 1956 A.D., by the Government of Assam.⁹ So we can say that the Bijni Raj family ruled over the Bijni Estate from a period of 1671 (foundation of Bijni Estate by Chandra Narayan) to 1956 (acquisition of Bijni Estate by government).

As a result of discussion of genealogical history of Bijni Raj Dynasty in conclusion it can be said that adoption played a significant role in the history of Bijni Raj Estate. In the absence of natural heir in few cases the rulers of Bijni Estate had to adopt their future heir for the throne. But noticeably they adopted inheritor from amongst the members of their own family. As a result of which the royal blood lineage remained intact within the family of Bijni Dynasty.

The Bijni Raj Estate was under the Mughals in earlier period and later it passed over to the British East India Company by virtue of the Mughal Emperor's *Farman* of 12 August, 1765 A.D.¹⁰ When it was underneath the Mughal government Bijni Raj had to pay an amount of Rs. 5998 for Bijni Estate and an amount of Rs. 3486 for Bijni *Duar* as yearly tribute. In due course the tribute exchanged to a yearly delivery of 68 elephants for Bijni and 40 elephants for Bijni *Duar*.¹¹ The practice of paying revenue in cash was not formed in Bijni Raj Estate inspite of constant venture of the Mughal administration. Up to the first half of 19th century the *ryots* or tenants of Khuntaghat and Habraghat *pargana* paid fifty percent of their total revenue in homemade cotton cloths in lieu of cash to the *Raja* of Bijni.¹² Since the *ryots* did not desire to pay the revenue in cash so the *zamindar* also confronted difficulty to pay annual revenue in cash to the Mughal government. Inevitably though the revenue was fixed in money, the Mughal government had to accept their tribute in elephant, cotton, aagar wood etc instead of cash money.

After acquiring the *Diwani* right over Bengal by the East India Company, the Bijni Raj Estate had to pay revenue in the form of elephant to the British. During the period of 1776 to 1787 only 90 elephants were received out of 816. In 1788 A.D., at the direction of the collector of Rangamati the mode of payment in kind was again converted to an annual money payment of Rs. 2000/-, along with a deduction of Rs. 850/- as a recovery of *sayer* abolition.¹³ Consequently the British government received total revenue of Rs 1150/- per annum from the Bijni Raj.

The present work has proved that the Bijni *Rajas* had trade and tax related relation with Garos and Bhutias. When the Bijni Raj Estate was under the Mughal rule, it demanded *Sayer*

duties from the Garos on their products sold at the border markets established by them. The rulers of Bijni Estate carried on collecting those tariffs in the earlier administration of the East India Company. But on 28th July 1790, the Governor General in council directed to stop the *Sayer* collection process.¹⁴

Garos of Garo Hills came down to plain areas of Bijni Estate to sell their commodities. In the frontier markets and weekly *hats* of Bijni Estate Garo Cotton occupied a major position as a trade item. Garo people bartered cotton with rice, cattle, pigs, goats, salt etc.¹⁵ Even some Garo people resided within the periphery of Bijni Estate.

The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate had also economic and land relation with the Bhutan kingdom as the Bijni *Duar* falls in close proximity with the Bhutan kingdom. The foot hills of the Bhutan kingdom formed the Bhutan *Duars*. The Bhutan kingdom occupied this tract upto the Koch kingdom in 17th century. The government of Bhutan provided the status of tributary chief to the *Raja* of Bijni along with the *Raja* of Sidli.¹⁶ The Bijni Raj Estate had commercial relation with Bhutan. The Bhutias came with mobile home together with skins, blankets, chintz, musk, walnuts, gold dust and hills ponies for annual trade. At the same time in exchange they took back indigo, broad cloth, leather, copper, spices, lead and hogs from Bijni Raj Estate.¹⁷ In later stage the annual trade turnover ascended to one lakh rupees. The barter system was followed during trading between the Bijni and Bhutan kingdom.

The indigenous inhabitants or aboriginal people of the Bijni Raj Estate were Koches, Bodo Kacharies, Rabhas, and Meches. Kayasthas and Kalitas along with a few number of Muslim population and Garo population also inhabited in Bijni Estate.¹⁸ Even today the successors of Garo families of Bijni Estate are residing in Khakarpur village of present Bongaigaon district. The ruling family of the Bijni Raj Estate belonged to the Koch clan. The chief occupation of the people of Bijni Raj Estate was agriculture. In addition to agriculture people also engaged in other businesses like manufacture of homemade production, trade and also personal service. The Meches or Bodo Kacharis of Bijni Raj Estate were very expert in rearing of silk worms from which they obtained raw silk called *endi*. But the society of Bijni Estate had a feudal character.

As one of the major conclusion of the study it can be ascertained that the society of Bijni Raj Estate was divided into various classes on the basis of social ranking, nature of work and religious belief. In the social ranking of the Bijni Raj Estate, *Raja* or *zamindar* and nobility hold the first position. In the administrative machinery *Raja* or *zamindar* was the head of estate. *Dewan* was an important post for administrative staff, looked after the general administration of the Bijni Estate and all the political economic affairs of the *Rajbari*.¹⁹ But it is also true that *dewan* could not act independently and he had to acquire acknowledgement formally from the *Raja* or *Zamindar* for the transaction of his business.

Next to the foregoing posts a second group of middle aristocracy was formed by *Tehsildar* or *Naib*, *Jamanavis*, *Subanavis*, *Kanungo*, *Tankinavis* and *Amins*, *Barkandazes* etc. *Tehsildar* or *Naib* were the officer in charge of the *Dihi Katchary* area under the Bijni Estate.²⁰ *Jamanavis* were the revenue officer of Bijni Estate who supervised the work in respect of fixation of rent, preparation of *Jamabandi* and *Touzi* and deals with the mutation cases of the *Dihi Kacharies*. *Subanavis* and *Jamanavis* were the officer of Judicial Branch and their posts were created at that time when Bijni Raj exercised judicial power in later Mughal episode. Under the inspection of *Kanungo*, *Tankinavis* were worked as surveyors. Thus the administrative machinery system of Bijni Raj Estate was maintained by different class of officials.²¹

The last and most important class of society of Bijni Estate were peasantry, *ryots* and *bandi-beti*. *Ryots* may further classified into four different groups, namely (a) Priviledged *ryot* (b) *Ryot* holding at fixed rates (c) Occupancy *ryot* and (d) Non-occupancy *ryot*.²² Peasantry covers almost the whole population of Bijni Raj Estate. But at the same time there was another class of people, who got land from *zamindar* through agreement and cultivated the land with the help of hired peasant. Priest, teacher, Brahmana, Kayastha employees and relatives of landlord were privileged class of the Bijni estate society who cultivated their lands by the *Adhiars* (Share croppers).²³ Thus the *Adhi* system was also in circulation in Bijni Raj Estate.

Almost all the people of Bijni Raj Estate were followers of Hinduism and Islam, whereas a section of them followed their own ethnic believes. But Hinduism was the dominant religion of Bijni Raj Estate. All the three sects of Hindu religion, namely, Saivism, Saktism and Vaishnavism were followed by the masses, but Saivism acquired prominence as the rulers of Bijni Dynasty were devoted to it.²⁴ The Bijni *Rajas* followed a secular policy and made liberal

grants and donations to other religion as well. However they were the ardent followers of Saivism and established a number of temples to promote Saivism among the people of Bijni Raj Estate. It has been observed that a process of infusion and assimilation of sects could be seen in the Bijni Raj Estate. The Bijni *Rajas* also donated revenue free land for the establishment of Vaishnava *Satras* in their Estate.²⁵ Thus the society of Bijni Raj Estate was marked by co-existence of different social and religious groups with their own distinctive identities.

The bountiful natural and forest resources boosted the rural economy of Bijni Raj Estate. The forests of Bijni Raj Estate were well off with different types of trees and medicinal plants like, Sal, Aagar, Segun, Titachapa, Sisu etc.²⁶ Bamboo tree was found in every house of Bijni Raj Estate, which they used for house building and preparing different household furniture and other fishing tools. Among the forest sources timber was a product of great utilization. Rural population of Bijni Raj Estate used timber for house building, making of different furniture and also applied for making some kinds of boats. The jungles of Bijni Raj Estate had a wide variety of flora and fauna species. A wide variety of animals such as Elephants, Tigers, Buffalos, Deers, Monkeys, Rhinos, Hoolock Gibbons, and Golden Langurs etc dwelled in the forest areas. Of all the animal species there was a seizeable population of elephants that could be found in Bijni Raj Estate.²⁷

The self-sufficient village economy was a characteristic of Bijni Raj Estate's economy. The main activity of agrarian society of Bijni Raj Estate was the cultivation of paddy. The agrarian society cultivated products such as rice, vegetables, fruits and pulses for their personal consumption. They also cultivated mustard plant from which mustard oil was extracted which was used for consumption as well as fuel to light lamps in the houses. Silk or Cotton production was done to some extent from which the women folk wove their traditional garments. Cotton cultivation was mainly done by the Garos residing in the neighbouring areas of the Bijni Raj Estate. But to some extent cotton also was grown in highland of Bijni Estate. Two types of cotton namely *Borkopah* and *Sarukopah* were grown and harvesting was done twice in a year.²⁸

The people of Bijni Raj Estate neither had to spend their life in poverty nor was their economic condition very sound. Under the Mughal domination Bijni *Rajas* were collectors of rents and *ryots* were the owner of the land they had cultivated. But when the British acquired the *Diwani* of Bengal, the *zamindari* estates which were under the Mughal authority earlier were

passed over to the hands of East India Company. As a result authority over the Bijni Raj Estate was also transferred to the British from the Mughals.²⁹

Another conclusion of the study established the fact that the Bijni *Rajas* followed a systematic Revenue Policy along with a number of taxes. The *Raja* or *zamindar* was the supreme head of the estate and he appointed the high revenue officials. The *Dewan* who was the head of administrative staff and looked after the general administration of the estate was also responsible for smooth revenue administration. As a representative of *Zamindar*, *Dewan* had to settle inner disputes of the estate and supervised the cases relating to the *zamindari* at law courts.³⁰ But it is also true that he could not work independently and need oral or written permission of the *zamindar* for the transaction of his business. Renowned persons of Assam like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, who served as *Dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate, introduced many new regulations in the revenue administration of the estate.³¹

The Bijni Raj Estate was divided into some revenue circles called *Dihis* for the benefit of collection of rent. These *Dihis* were such as- *Dihi* Barahajari, *Dihi* Dumuria, *Dihi* Jogikatani, *Dihi* Birjaura, *Dihi* Boitamari, *Dihi* Bahalpur, *Dihi* Rokakhata, *Dihi* Raniganj, *Dihi* Futkibari, *Dihi* Fakiragram, *Dihi* Dokara, *Dihi* Dolgoma, *Dihi* Damara, *Dihi* Krishnai, *Dihi* Rangjuli, *Dihi* Beekali. In addition to these the state had two *Dihis* in Bijni *Duar* namely- *Dihi* Bijni and *Dihi* Patiladoha.³²

The division of the estate was made into revenue circles or *Dihis* for the purpose of collection of rent and *abwab*. In each *Dihi* there was a *Katchary* under the control of the circle officer known as the *Tahasildar* or *Naib*. The revenue officer of the *Dihis* of the Bijni Estate was called *Naib*. It is on record that formerly rent was collected by the *Patgiri* system in Bijni Raj Estate.³³

Fixation of rent in the Bijni Raj Estate was first attempted by Raja Indranarayan in 1819 A.D. He imposed rent in all winter paddy lands (*Sali* lands) at the rate of 12 *Narayanees* rupees per *hal*. But the actual collection was made at the rate of 9/- *Narayanees* rupees a *hal* in Habraghat *pargana* area. In other *pargana* areas it was collected at 10/- *Narayanees* rupees. At the same time in khuntaghat *pargana* the rate of rent was rupees 6/- a *hal*.³⁴ After a few years *Raja* Indranarayan tried to increase the rate of rent but the tenants opposed it vehemently. As a

result *Raja* appealed to the Governor General in council and he appointed one Deputy Collector to make a regular settlement of the estate. But prior to 1825 A.D., the rates realised from rice land were haphazard and on varying monetary standards.

Along with the land revenue the recurring annual cesses and fees levied on the *ryots* in Bijni Raj Estate were as follows- *Dhap Salami*, *Chunbun* or forest permit fee, *Najar Salami*, *Darkhast Salami*, *Dakhil Khariz Salami*, *Marcha* or *Pan Bata*, *Mankuji*, Dalpuja Fee, *Masuli* or *Miad*, Buffalo-*bathan* fee, Separate Account fee, *Instafa* fee, *Tadanta* fee, *Chanda* and *Magan* etc.³⁵ The peasant class of Bijni Raj Estate became unhappy and discontented with the *zamindar* because they charged and levied various kinds of collection from the tenants. The principal source of collection from the tenants was *Bhiksha* or *Magan*. The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate collected mandatory *Bhiksha* or *Magan* from the tenants on different occasions that were held in the ruling family like marriage, *sraddha*, pilgrimage etc. which required extravagant spending. Dr. Amalendu Guha has mentioned in his writings that *Raja* Balit Narayan through this *Bhiksha* or *Magan* system collected money from the tenants at the interval of every three years.³⁶

Besides land revenue tenants of Bijni Raj Estate also had to pay '*Jalkar*' (water tax) and '*Bankar*' (forest tax). Along with the forest tax the tenants also had to pay a tax namely '*Gorkati*' for cutting of valuable tree. This was actually an unlawful tax. The owners of cows and buffalos had to pay one type of grazing tax to the *zamindar* for the grazing of their animals in the *Char-Chapori* areas.³⁷ Though the tenants of Bijni Raj Estate were unhappy with the burden of so many taxes and compulsory contributions but there was no evidence of any major trouble.

In the report about the district of Goalpara (18th May, 1853), Moffat Mills has mentioned about the conflict that had been going on in the midst of the *zamindar* and *ryot* from 1823 in Habraghat *pargana* under Bijni *Raja*. The main reason of conflict was levying new rents on the lands other than *Sali* land. As a special measure in 1822, government gave permission for resettlement of the *zamindari*s of undivided Goalpara. The whole affair was taken up by Mr. Scott and he negotiated settlements in some villages. He recommended eliminating all irregular cesses and temporary assessment of some rice land.³⁸ But he was unable to finish his work because he had to take responsibility of Assam proper. Taking benefit of the situation the tenants set up a claim to hold their lands, but still rice lands were rent free.

In the Khuntaghat *Pargana* also difficulty and distress raised to extreme. Gunabhiram Barua has pointed out different reasons for the outbreak of rebellion in Habraghat and Khuntaghat *pargana*. Firstly, an unenthusiastic land settlement was done with the *ryots*, as a result of which many *ryots* occupied land in more than enough of the amount for which they paid their rents. Secondly, a considerable portion of the *ryot* retained the payment of rent unresolved for years together. The *ryots* raised their voice whenever the *zamindar* endeavoured to start fresh agreement. One of the renowned personalities of Assam, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan was appointed as *Dewan* in 1849 for Bijni Raj Estate. For the administrative convenience of the Bijni Raj, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan framed a set of regulations called as '*Phukan Dewanar Kaidabandi*'.³⁹ Gunabhiram Barua has stated that, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan suggested to take forward a survey for the settlement of lands in Habraghat and Khuntaghat *parganas* and to practise the law of distraint for the dues of rent. This included incentive to the problem. The *ryots* opposed it with force and ferocity.⁴⁰

However, the *zamindars* looked for an equitable assessment of rent to compensate them for the loss of revenue from illegal cesses. This was contested by the *ryots*. The collector of Goalpara and the Commissioner of Assam Valley district passed their orders against the *zamindar*. The case was referred to the Board of Revenue, Calcutta. In 1852, the *zamindars* got a hearing from the Government of India, and the Board of Revenue admitted that the settlement should be completed.⁴¹ It should be mentioned that Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan was sent to Calcutta to pursue the case on behalf of the *zamindar*, while *Dewan* Prem Narain attended the case on behalf of the *ryots*.

Although the Board of Revenue admitted that the *zamindar* had the right to enforce demands, the case was not finally settled. The authorities wished for a compromise. Accordingly, the then collector of Goalpara, Agnew took initiative to call a tripartite conference. In May 1852, the conference was held, but ended in fiasco. In August, the tripartite conference was held for the second time at the *zamindary katchary* at Dalgoma in which Agnew was present as a representative of the government, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan for the *zamindar* and some leading *ryots* on behalf of the *ryots*. Agnew's opinion was completely in favour of the *ryots* and he had the belief that the *ryots* were exploited by the *zamindar*.⁴² Thus the conference failed to come to a decision.

After the death of Amritnarayan, when the Bijni *Zamindari* came under the administration of the Courts of Wards, Government took steps to settle the quarrel that was going on between the *zamindar* and the *ryots*. With this end in view, an E.A.C. and some *Amins* were employed for the task. Within the period from 1858 to 1862, they completed the survey and settlement. As a result of this new settlement, the revenue collection in Khuntaghat and Habraghat *pargana* was increased about three times in 1875 than that of 1853. In February, 1862, 500 *ryots* of Khuntaghat raised their grievances on the higher rate of assessment. Their grievances were two folds- firstly, the rate of assessment was high; and secondly, the *amins* of the Deputy Collector had included in the home lands, a plot of *Asu* lands and consequently they had to pay rent at the rate of Rs. 1.00 for land which ought to be assessed at four *annas* per *bigha*. In 1864, however compromise had to be done and the rate was reduced to 8 *annas* per *bigha* on homeland.⁴³

After the suicide of Kumudnarayan (*Raja* of Bijni) in 1883, when a quarrel of greater dimension was continuing between the *Rani* Abhayeswari and Sidheswari (widows of Kumudnarayan), a wave of peasant movement again raised its head. At that time, Jiwan Ram Phukan was the chief adviser to the *Bar Rani* Sidheswari. When the peasants assembled in a *Ryot Sabha* (conference of the *ryots*) at Jogighopa to submit their memorandum of complaints to the *Bar Rani*, Phukan made a blank firing in the air with a view to frighten the peasants. This made them rebellious. The agitating peasants proclaimed one Chandra Narayan as the new *Raja* of Bijni in place of *Bar Rani* Siddheswari. It is worthnoting that the said Chandra Narayan was first given in adoption as heir to the *Raja*. This rebellion was known as '*Barpatgeerer Hangama*'.⁴⁴

In Bengal, when the Rent Law of 1869 was replaced and a more comprehensive tenancy Act was enacted in 1885, the oppressed tenants of Bijni Raj Estate also looked for a better tenancy act for them. But the government did not pay attention to it and the *zamindar* was let free to exploit the *ryots* at their pleasure. In this situation, the *ryots* started agitation for redressing their grievances, especially for a rent law, right from the beginning of this century.⁴⁵ The peasant agitation started not only in Bijni Raj Estate but the same situation happened in all *zamindari* estates of undivided Goalpara district.

The *ryots* combined locally and submitted the petitions and memorials to the government from time to time which contained the grievances of the *ryots* against their land lords. In 1903,

the tenants in Bijni submitted a series of complaints against Bijni Raj. The agitation was started by the tenants against *zamindar* for their misrule and the demand for a better Rent Law for the district of Goalpara had become a concern for the government. The Chief Commissioner of the Assam Valley districts, Monahan was entrusted with responsibility to ensure into affairs of the permanently settled estates.⁴⁶

In 1910-11 certain tenants headed by Kalicharan Brahma agited for- (i) preparation of records of tenants' right (ii) permanent status for tenants (iii) rules for regulating enhancement of rents. In 1915, the Garo tenants of Habraghat *Pargana* headed by Mangal Singh petitioned government demanding Garo tenants right to collect fuel, straw etc., to cut down *Sal* trees for building houses and making ploughs, to cut down trees on own holdings, to graze cows in the *zamindari* forests.⁴⁷ It is worth mentioning that on the basis of local custom they claimed those rights which was recognised by the former *Rajas* of Bijni.

It should be noted that the tenants' agitation in Bijni Raj Estate during the period under review was widespread. Added to it was the agitation of the Garos, who under the leadership of Sonaram Sangma rose against the oppression of Bijni Raj. Though the peasants of Bijni Raj Estate along with the other peasants of *zamindari* estates of undivided Goalpara district raised their voice time to time but they were unable to gather themselves in an organised form. The first organised peasant movement in Assam started with the establishment of 'Nikhil Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilani*' in 1933. The fifth and last annual conference of the 'Nikhil Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilani*' was held at Salkocha on 17-18 February, 1940, under the presidentship of Swami Sahajananda Saraswati.⁴⁸ Till then it was under the wings of the Congress. This may be recognised as a significant event in the history of Goalpara district by focussing itself as an attempt in organising the peasants on the basis of a clear class oriented struggle under the presence of the red flag.

In 1938, Assam Tribal League was formed under the leadership of Satish Chandra Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma, Haladhar Brahma and others; though it had no programme of action on the basis of economic demands of tribal peasantry. With a view to giving an organised form to the historic peasant movement of Goalpara, Pranesh Biswas was sent to Goalpara in 1942 and Nandeswar Talukdar in 1944. At the initiative of '*Krishak Sabha*', the peasant conference was held at 'Gaurang Tarang' of Kokrajhar in 1944 A.D.⁴⁹ This conference inspired a

new type of revolutionary and organised peasant movement in Kokrajhar along with Goalpara district.

Thus a series of remonstrations from the side of peasants enforced the government to introduce some rent laws and legislation. The government of Assam introduced 'The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation' in 1886, 'Goalpara Tenancy Act' in 1929 and 'The Assam *Adhiars* Protection and Regulation Act' in 1948 for the benefit of peasantry.⁵⁰ But such acts and regulations failed to satisfy the peasants. Ultimately the government passed 'The Assam State Acquisition of *Zamindaries* Act' in 1951, as a result of which acquisition of Bijni Raj Estate took place in 1956.

Last but not least, the study finds out a conclusion that after establishing their centre of administration permanently in Abhayapuri the rulers of the Bijni Raj Estate initiated numerous developmental programmes for their estate. Every coin has two sides. Similarly, though the peasants of Bijni Raj Estate had to suffer under their rulers at the same time they also enjoyed some benefits from their rulers. The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate took a venture for the advancement of education in their estate. Earlier rulers of Bijni Raj Estate did not get enough time to concentrate on education. But after finally establishing the centre of administration in Abhayapuri, the post rulers started to establish educational institutions for scholastic advancement of their subjects. The rulers of Bijni Dynasty did not curtail their duty only by establishing schools but also rendered scholarship to those students who had a bright career but economically not sound.⁵¹

Similarly the earlier rulers of Bijni Estate were not accustomed with the modern medical facilities and mostly people went to *Kaviraj* and *Ojha* for their treatment. The *Kavirajes* and *Ojhas* tried to cure diseases by the use of herbal medicines which they manufactured from the locally procured medicinal herbs. But after the establishment of capital in Abhayapuri, the ruler of Bijni Estate took importance on medical facility and established a private dispensary. The *Bijni Rajas* invited efficient doctors from Calcutta and Dhubri also.⁵² The ruling family bore all the expenditure for the maintenance of this dispensary. Though the medical facilities were in an underdeveloped condition but we can not say that common people were totally deprived of any kind of medication.

The rulers of Bijni Raj Dynasty were religious by heart. Though they were followers of Shiva and Shakti cult they also patronized Neo Vaishnavism. As a result of royal patronage many temples and *satras* were established in geographical area of Bijni Raj Estate. The rulers of Bijni dynasty issued many *Devottar*, *Dharmottar* and *Brahmottar* grants for religious purposes. *Bijni Rajas* granted many tax free lands to the temples and *satras* for their development.⁵³ Most of the inhabitants of Bijni Estate were followers of Hinduism and many temples and *satras* were established at that time as a result of liberal grants from the *Bijni Rajas*.

The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate were kind hearted also. For instance during the reign of Queen Abhayeswari, the First World War started. At the call of Mahatma Gandhi, Abhayeswari made a donation of Rupees one lakh in cash to the allied forces, where the British were a member.⁵⁴ Moreover she donated one ambulance. She further offered the Services of one thousand *Jawans*, who were her subjects to fight for the British cause. For all these valuable service the British government honoured queen Abhayeswari by offering 'Kaisar-i-Hind' Gold medal.⁵⁵

Thus after the complete assessment over the Bijni Raj Estate it can be assumed that the condition of peasantry under the *Bijni Rajas* was neither deplorable nor very good. The society of Bijni Estate was feudal in character, where every person except beggar, posses a minimum area of land. When the Bijni Raj Estate was under the Mughal ascendancy tenants paid their revenue by their produced goods. But after the transfer of authority to the hands of Colonial government, the British strictly followed the rule of money payment in revenue system. So the *Bijni Rajas* also started to collect land revenue in cash from the *ryots*. Along with the burden of paying land revenue in cash peasants were also harassed with different kinds of taxes. The tenancy laws and legislations were also not successful to rescue peasants from the subjugation of the *zamindar*. Thus the peasants' discontentment ultimately paved the way for the abolition of *zamindari*. Though the Bijni Raj Estate was abolished by Assam State Acquisition of *Zamindaries* Act but we cannot deny the fact that the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate tried their best for the upliftment of the condition of peasantry.

Endnotes

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