

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Bijni Raj Estate was a noteworthy and influential *Zamindary* Estate of undivided Goalpara District of Assam which occupies a distinguished position in the history of this area. A Socio-Economic study means the study about the Society and its people and Economic relation between Ruler and Ruled, Government and Civilians and *Zamindar* and Peasants. The Socio-Economic condition is not a stagnant process but it changes from time to time. Under the Bijni Raj Estate also Socio-Economic relation between the *zamindary* class and peasantry changed due to different reasons. Sometimes the relation was cordial and sometimes it became strained and went to the extreme point of peasant agitation.

Chandra Narayan who was also known as Bijit Narayan, was the originator of the Bijni Raj dynasty.¹ He was an offspring of famous Koch ruler Biswa Singa.² During the first half of sixteenth century Biswa Singha established the base of the Koch kingdom in Koch Bihar. When Biswa Singha expired, his son Naranaryan with the cooperation of his younger brother Chilarai alias Sukladhvaj broadened the geographical and cultural frontier of Koch kingdom to a great extent. When Chilarai expired in 1580 A.D., King Naranarayan separated the huge Kingdom of Koches into two divisions.³ Naranarayan persisted the custody of Koch Bihar proper under him and the rest portion of his kingdom, which embraced parts of Darrang, Kamrup and present Goalpara district was renamed as 'Koch Hajo'. This part was given to Raghudev Narayan, who was the son of great Chilarai.⁴

After the demise of Raghudev Narayan, his son Parikshit Narayan was selected for the throne of Koch Hajo kingdom. He was also considered as a tributary ruler under the subordination of Mughal authority. As soon as Parikshit Narayan died, a topsy-turvy situation became apperent there and his kingdom became crownless. In the middle of this confusing situation Chandra Narayan (Bijit Narayan), instituted the 'Bijni Kingdom' which incorporated a big part of Koch Hajo. Notably he was the son of Parikshit Narayan⁵

Geographically the Bijni Estate was surrounded by Bhutan Hills in the North side, Mandachal or lower part of Garo Hills in the Southern side, River 'Manas' margined the Eastern boundary and River 'Sonkosh' margined the Western boundary.⁶ The geographical region of the district of Goalpara, fabricated in 1822 by the British East India Company can be considered as the region of the Bijni Kingdom also. Chandranarayan administered Bijni within the period of 1671 to 1696 A.D., after the endowment of Charter from the Mughals.⁷

Beginning from Chandranarayan (Bijit Narayan), the founding father of Bijni Raj Estate many rulers belonging to this family ruled Bijni Raj Estate to the abolition of *Zamindari* by the Government of Assam. Succeeding Chandranarayan several rulers of Bijni family namely, Jay Narayan, Sibanarayan, Bijaynarayan, Mukundanarayan, Haridebnarayan, Balitnarayan, Indranarayan, Amritnarayan, Kumudnarayan, Queen Abhayeswari Devi, Jogendranarayan and Bhairabendranarayan ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate upto 1956 A.D.⁸ During the reign of the second king Jaynarayan of Bijni Dynasty, Ramsingha, the Mughal general of Mughal Emperor Jahangir *Badshah* invaded Assam. The invasion was led in opposition of the Ahom King and the king of 'Darangi *Rajya*', who was a supporter of the Ahom king. Ramsingha had to proceed through the Bijni Raj Estate to Guwahati during the time of his invasion.⁹ Bijni king Jay Narayan lend a helping hand to the Mughal invaders. Jay Narayan collaborated with the Mughals in their fight against the Ahom army. Ramsingha was very much impressed by Jay Narayan's valour and helping approach and he wrote a letter to the Mughal king, that Jay Narayan should be permitted to use the title '*Raja*' before his name. Thus the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate started to write the title '*Raja*' though they were actually *zamindars*. Later on the title '*Raja*' was recognised by the British also.¹⁰

Bijni Raj family was a tributary under the mighty Mughals. In Eastern India, Mughal rulers set up two categories of *zamindaries*. The first group encompasses independent ruling estates and recognised as *Raja* (hereditary *zamindar*) who acknowledged suzerainty of the Mughal rulers.¹¹ They had to pay annual tribute to the Mughals. The second group incorporated those officers, called *Chaudhury* who were accountable for collecting revenues. In later period they also came to be known as *zamindar*. The *Rajas* of Bijni associated themselves with the first category and they ruled as hereditary ruler in their particular estate.¹²

According to B.C. Allen, Bijni Raj Estate was the largest *zamindari* estate of undivided Goalpara district covering an area of 943 square miles, whereas Gauripur acquired the status of second largest estate by covering 423 square miles area.¹³ In revenue administration, the undivided Goalpara district incorporated two portions namely, the Permanent settled areas and the Temporary settled areas. In the Goalpara district four classes of *zamindars* were in existence at the time of attainment of *Diwani* by the British East India Company in 1765 A.D. When Colonial government attained the *Diwani* of Bengal, undivided Goalpara district was a part of Bengal. So as a *zamindari* estate of undivided Goalpara district, Bijni Raj Estate was also automatically transferred under the Colonial government. The *Raja* of Bijni, who was considered as tributary, was the original independent but overpowered Hindu *Raja*.¹⁴

During the time of permanent settlement undivided Goalpara district was comprised of twelve permanently settled estates. Again these permanently settled estates were comprehended with six *zamindaries*, namely Bijni, Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari and Parbatjoar. In the midst of these six *zamindaries* Bijni Estate was the earliest and commanding one. One progeny of Koch Royal family, Chandranarayan was the originator of Bijni Raj Estate, which at the time of its establishment incorporated twelve *parganas*, viz. (a) Habraghat (b) Khuntaghat (c) Mechpara (d) Chapar (e) Karaibari (f) Parbatjoar (g) Ghurla (h) Jamira (i) Taria (j) Gola Alamganj (k) Kalumalupara (l) Alamganj.¹⁵

Later on out of these twelve *parganas* a major part was disconnected from Bijni Raj Estate and was established as a semi independent chieftainship under the suzerainty of the Mughal Empire. In the middle of the 18th century Chapar and Mechpara *parganas* were formulated into two individual chieftainships. As the outcome of a grant, Parbatjoar *Zamindari* was developed. One Kabindra Patra after getting the *Nankar* grant from the Mughal emperor Jahangir established the Gauripur Raj Estate.¹⁶ In 1778 A.D., another competent predecessor Sri Bul Chandra Barua received the *zamindaries* of five *parganas* namely, Ghurla, Alamganj, Kalumalupara, Jamira and Gola alamganj. One of his succeeding legatee Pratap Chandra Barua gifted Dhubri to the government in 1859 A.D., for making it the headquarter of the district of Goalpara.¹⁷ Because of the burden of arrear of revenue, Mahendra Narayan Choudhury had to sell the Karaibari Estate in 1809 A.D., to Ram Nath Lahiri. Up to the acquisition of Karaibari Estate by the Government of Assam it was under the ownership of Lahiri ancestors. Thus out of

twelve *parganas* only two *parganas* viz., Khuntaghat and Habraghat were left under the Bijni Raj family.¹⁸

The capital or centre of administration of Bijni kingdom was shifted twice for divergent purposes. The first capital was situated in an around of modern Bijni town from the period of 1671 to 1864 A.D. The purpose for its transfer was an aggression led by 'Jhawlia', who was a local leader under the king of Bhutan.¹⁹ As Bijni was placed near the boundary of Bhutan kingdom, it was susceptible for further invasion from Bhutan. After careful consideration the *Raja* of Bijni brought the capital to another place named 'Dumuria', which is now identified as Dalan Bhanga. It was situated far away from the boundary of Bhutan. But as ill fortune would have it, a devastating earthquake befell on June 12, 1897, totally destroying the royal building of Dumuria.²⁰ Hence decision was taken to move the capital once more to Deohati forest area, and afterwards it was named as 'Abhayapuri'. Thus the present Abhayapuri town became the permanent capital of Bijni Raj Estate.²¹ Oral sources further let us to know that the capital was named after Devi Abhayamata, the worshipping family deity of Bijni ruling dynasty.

The society of Bijni Raj Estate consisted of lots of social divisions and different types of inhabitants. Along with the indigenous people like, Kachari, Mech, Koch, Rabha, a few Muslim people also lived in Bijni Raj Estate.²² The Kayasthas were the priestly class of Bijni Raj Estate. Some Garo people also lived in the southern boundary of the Bijni Raj Estate. In general society of Bijni Raj Estate was divided in four paradigms namely, Brahmana, Khatriya, Bashiya and Sudra which were further subdivided on the basis of their nature of work.²³

Although the people of Bijni Raj Estate were engaged with different types of works but more or less every person was related with agriculture. Their staple food was rice and they cultivated paddy in a huge scale. Mainly three varieties of paddy namely, *Ahu*, *Sali* and *Bao* were produced by them for their personal consumption and for the purpose of paying revenue.²⁴ Along with paddy, different kinds of pulses, variety of fruits and vegetables were also produced by them. *Char* areas lying within the geographical periphery of Bijni Raj Estate were fruitful for the production of 'mustard' and 'jute'.²⁵

Women of Bijni Raj Estate were expert in spinning and weaving. Every family had a loom where women wove cloths not only for herself but for all the member of their family. The

Kachari women who lived in Bijni Raj Estate were accustomed with the manufacture of clothes from the thread of *Eri* and *Muga*. They spun thread out of the shells of *Muga* and *Eri* cocoons.²⁶ They also sold woven clothes in *hats* or weekly markets.

The abundance of forest resources benefitted the people of Bijni Raj Estate along with their king. Variety of trees like, Sal, Sagun, Gamari, Titachapa, Aagar, Sisu and lots of medicinal plants could be found in the forest of Bijni Raj Estate.²⁷ Bamboo and reed were also available, which the peasantry used for the construction of their houses. They also used firewood for cooking purposes, which can be easily procured from the forest. The fauna of Bijni Raj Estate consisted of Elephant, Tiger, Leopard, Assamese Macaque, Golden langur, Hoolock Gibbon etc. Variety of bird species namely Partridges, Jungle fowl, Baya Weaver, Greylag Goose, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Common Myna, House Sparrow, Asian Koel, Mallard, Pigeon, Pond Heron, Florican, Wild Duck etc were also available. But the charm of the jungles of Bijni Raj Estate was Elephant. Even the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate used elephant for their transportation.²⁸ Elephant safari was considered prestigious in those days.

There was no big industry and no big market in Bijni Raj Estate. So the people went to local *hats* and weekly markets to buy or sell their products and necessary articles. A section of Garo and Bhutia people also came down the hills to the markets of Bijni Raj Estate for buying their essential commodities as well as to sell their products. Majority of the business dealings were done through the barter system. Money circulation was also going parallelly but in a very small scale.²⁹ Both *narayanee* rupees and *sikka* coins were under circulation in the Bijni Raj Estate.

In the course of British rule, even if the land revenue system in Assam was mainly *Ryotwari*, but *Zamindari* system persisted in Goalpara and Cachar districts.³⁰ The Bijni Raj family enjoyed the rights of ruling the estate like other six *Zamindaries* of undivided Goalpara district. The existing feudal system was provided with an advanced structure by the British administration to safeguard their imperial interest. Under the British rule the *Zamindars* became the owners of the land.³¹ They also enjoyed the right to transfer possession and hereditary right over land. Gradually the tenants lost their right over the land and land became a saleable commodity.

A methodical Revenue Policy was maintained by the Bijni *Rajas*. The *Raja* was the ultimate authority of the estate and he had to choose the high revenue officers. The appointment of administrative staff was done by the king. The head of administrative staff was *Dewan* who was assigned with the duty to look after the administrative functioning of the estate. He was also accountable for smooth revenue administration. Well known personality of Assam like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, served as *Dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate. He implemented many novel regulations in the sphere of revenue administration which prevailed in the Bijni Raj estate.³²

The Bijni *Rajas* were bound to pay the Mughals yearly tribute of an amount of Rs. 5998 for Bijni Estate and an amount of Rs. 3486 for Bijni *Duar*. Subsequently the tribute was substituted by the delivery of 68 elephants for Bijni and 40 elephants for Bijni *Duar* once in a year. The valuation of each elephant was set at *Narayanee* Rs.88. If there was any deficiency in the delivery of elephants generally *Nazim* send a *sezawal* (contractor) into the *Raja's* Estate to take an alternative to make up the shortage.³³

After achieving the *Diwani* right over Bengal by the British East India Company from the Mughals, they also got the authority over Undivided Goalpara District, which was attached with Bengal at that time. As a consequence, from that time Bijni Raj Estate had to pay their tribute to British East India Company. The Bijni *Rajas* paid their contribution in the form of elephants to the British. In the years 1776-1787 A.D, out of 816 only 90 elephants were delivered.³⁴ So upon recommendation of the collector of Rangamati in 1788 A.D., the method of payment in kind was again converted to an annual monetary payment of Rs. 2000/-. Nevertheless the *Raja* of Bijni was allowed a deduction of Rs. 850/- from the annual payment as reimbursement for abolition of *Sayer* (duties gathered from the Garos). Hence, the Colonial government received total revenue of Rs. 1150 per annum from the *Raja* of Bijni.³⁵

Different varieties of land tenures and tenancies existed in the Bijni Raj Estate all through the period of Mughal and British authority. Land tenure in Bijni Estate can be divided into six categories, which were: *Makrari Maurasi*, *Maurasi*, Ordinary Tenants or *Jotes*, Services Tenures, *Chandina*, Special Tenures.³⁶ The *Dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate, Mr. R.C.Sen submitted a report to A.J. Laine, (D.C. Goalpara). According to this report in the Bijni Raj Estate three kinds of tenancies were present. These were: (a) *Paitrik Sali* tenants, (b) Occupancy tenants and (c) Ordinary tenants.³⁷

Overall a satisfactory relation existed between the landlord and the tenants in the Bijni Raj Estate. At the same time it cannot be admitted that tenants of each and every categories were happy under the administrative system of Bijni Raj Estate. Unsatisfied group of cultivators belonged to that category whose right over the land was not permanent. There were objection also regarding the rate of revenue charge which they had to pay to the *zamindar*. However not very frequently but rates were reassessed from time to time. Apart from agriculture basically the tenants had no supplementary source of earning. Cost of agricultural commodities was very economical. Consequently tenants were unable to save extra money in their hand. During the time of social formalities like marriage, *sraddhya* and other occasions they had to spend their savings which they have preserved. So it was very tough for them to pay the rent to the *zamindar*.³⁸ Apart from these there were occurrences of crop failure, which had a negative impact on them. Several unfortunate tenant could not pay the annual land revenue (rent) in due date. They were pushed towards suffering and ruination because of the gathering of arrear. Regarding the connection between the *zamindar* and the tenant in Goalpara, W.W. Hunter made a reference to the reports of the Deputy Commissioner that there was no extraordinary greed showed on the part of *zamindars* and their assistants and the relation between the landlord and tenant was tolerable one.³⁹

Under the Bijni *Zamindari* the peasant class had to pay a number of taxes (*Abwabs*) as well as land revenue. The load of these *Abwabs* was unmanageable for the peasants who could not pay even the land revenue on a regular basis. Simultaneously one type of land survey called *Akandaz Jarip* was administered by the Bijni *Rajas* which created great discontent among the *ryots*. The inhabitants of Bijni Estate put forwarded a number of applications to the British administration describing the subjugation of *Zamindar*. But all the efforts ended with no result. At last the annoyance of the *ryots* took the shape of peasant's revolt.⁴⁰

The tenants were discontented with their ruler for various kinds of collection and extortion from them under Bijni Raj Estate. Numerous of these collections were not defensible. Prime source of collection from the tenants was the '*Bhiksha*' or '*Magan*'. According to Amalendu Guha,

“The *zamindar* with the help of *jotedars* collected obligatory *Bhiksha* or *Magan* from the tenants for marriage, *sraddha*, pilgrimage and other function of heavy expenditure in the ruling family.

By means of such *Magan Raja* Balit Narayan collected money after an interval of every three years.”⁴¹

Along with land revenue, the tenants had to pay two other taxes which were '*Jalkar*' (water tax) and '*Bankar*' (forest tax). In addition to forest tax tenants of Bijni Raj Estate were bound to pay a tax namely '*Gorkati*', which was collected for cutting valuable tree.⁴² Actually it was an illegal tax. *Zamindar* even collected a grazing tax for grazing cows and buffalos in the '*Char-Chapori*' areas. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan compiled some definite rules and regulation for collection of these taxes when he served as a *dewan* in the Bijni Raj Estate.⁴³

Levy of multiferous taxes and unavoidable contributions from time to time made the tenants of Bijni Raj Estate unhappy. But there was no record of major agitation. At the same time A.J.M. Mills referred that a commotion had been going on in the middle of *zamindar* and tenants since 1823 A.D., in Habraghat *pargana* under Bijni Raj.⁴⁴ The imposition of new rents on the lands apart from *Sali* lands was the major root of conflict. In 1822 A.D. the government endorsed a resettlement of the Goalpara *zamindaries* as a significant course of action. Mr. Scott took up the matter and initiated settlements in various villages. He proposed abolition of all irregular cesses and started provisional assessment of some rice land. But he was unable to finish his work because he had to take the charge of Commissioner of Assam proper. The tenants lay hold of this advantageous state of affairs and set up a claim to hold their lands, but rice lands were rent-free.⁴⁵

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was chosen for the post of *Dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate in 1849 A.D.⁴⁶ During his service period as *Dewan* from 1849 to 1850 A.D., he composed a set of regulation namely *Phukan Dewanar Kayadabandi* to standardize the relation between *zamindar* and tenants. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan proposed to carry out a research for the settlements of land in Habraghat and Khuntaghat *parganas* and to affect the law of distraint for overdue rent amount.⁴⁷ This action infuriated the *ryots* who protested against the measure vigorously. The *zamindar* in order to compensate himself for the loss of his revenue from illegal cesses, gave petition to the authorities to pass an executive order in his favour. The tenants even contested this also. An order against the *zamindar* was passed by the collector of Goalpara and the Commissioner of Assam valley districts. The case was referred to the Board of Revenue, Calcutta. The Board of Revenue ordered to complete the settlement. To pursue the case in

support of Bijni *zamindar* Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan had to go to Calcutta. *Dewan* Prem Narain dealt with the case on the side of *ryots*.⁴⁸

A number of troubles had been going on amid the *zamindars* and the tenants of Bijni Raj Estate upto the early part of 20th century. In opposition to the Bijni Raj in 1903 A.D. the tenants of Bijni came up with a series of accusation before the government. Their problem was that they had to pay extra revenue than what was actually due. The revenue receipts given to them were untrustworthy, because mention about the land was absent there. The lands of the *ryots* were let out to persons who were eager to pay more rents. By means of the implementation of civil court decrees many *ryots* had been bankrupt. But the response from the government side was very pitiable. Nevertheless during October and November of 1903 the tenants put forwarded two petitions to the government.⁴⁹ In these petitions they tried to convince government to redress their prolems. In addition to this they further informed that the people had been driven to misery because of *Kala Azar*, Earthequake of 1897 etc.⁵⁰ The people were unable to understand the real value of land because of their illiteracy. They could not properly present their grievances before the government due to lack of education. But inspite of their relentless efforts, the government did not take them seriously, which resulted in the genesis of peasant uprising.

On the other hand the tenants' discontent became a reason of great trepidation for the government as well as for the progressive middle class of the Bijni Raj Estate. A large number of memorials and petitions were submittted for the period of 1897 to 1917 A.D., to the government of Assam by the tenants of Bijni *Zamindary*. Even the Garo *ryots* inhabited in the frontier areas of Bijni Raj Estate send a memorandum on 15 November 1915, before the government in opposition to the subjugation of the *zamindar*.⁵¹

While the peasant class had to face some troubles under the Bijni Raj Dynasty, at the same time they got some privileges also from this dynasty. When no one thought about the importance of education for all the common people, irrespective of their caste, Abhayapuri, the capital of Bijni Raj Estate exhibited an exception. It was the result of hard labour of Queen Abhayeswari, ruler of Bijni dynasty. Nevertheless Queen Abhayeswari had no academic qualification but she displayed an urge for the spread of English education alongside Sanskrit Education. A Sanskrit *Tol* was established in the capital of Bijni Raj Estate in 1907 A.D.⁵² It is

known that Queen Abhayeswari bore the educational outlays along with food and lodging of the students studying in that *Tol*.

Since the first half of 20th century many centres of Modern Education began to set up in Bijni Raj Estate. In the name of Queen Abhayeswari in 1904 A.D., Abhayeswari High School has been inaugurated. In the pre-independence stage female education in Assam was underdeveloped. But Bijni Raj Estate displayed an exception by establishing a Girls' M.E. School in 1938 A.D., in Abhayapuri, last capital of Bijni Raj Estate. This school was developed to High School in 1942 A.D.⁵³ The School was entitled after Jogendra Narayan (adopted son of queen Abhayeswari) as 'Jogendra Narayan Memorial Girls' High School.' In comparison to earlier rulers, great impetus had been given by the later rulers in the direction of edification as well as various welfare schemes were initiated to improve the overall condition of their subjects.⁵⁴

In the 1930s, the *Zamindars* of undivided Goalpara district as well as the *zamindar* of Bijni Estate began to incentivize the cultivators of East Bengal to come to Assam and settle themselves in the fertile *char* areas.⁵⁵ By establishing the farmers from East Bengal, the *Zamindars* enriched themselves to a great extent. But this system created many severe social and economical problems later. As an indirect result of all these developments, there was the emergence of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani in the politics of lower Assam in the 1930s.⁵⁶

The intrusion of huge number of immigrant settlers from East Bengal has revolutionized the social and economic configuration of lower Assam. The value of land elevated and the rent of land also rose significantly. The *zamindar* and middle men were delighted as they were capable of enhancing their income exceedingly. This surplus income was mainly due to the immigrant settlers.⁵⁷ This large population was fascinated by the presence of the *Char* lands which were situated in river tracts of the Brahmaputra. The *Jotedars* who had lands in these tracts put up their land in auction to the highest bidder. The farmers from East Bengal were able to purchase the lands whereas the local farmers failed to make ends meet.⁵⁸

Though rent laws and legislation were passed by the government from time to time, they were not sufficient to safeguard the rights of the peasant class of Bijni Raj Estate. The Assam

Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 was the pioneer among them.⁵⁹ After that Goalpara Tenancy Act was passed in 1929, The Assam *Adhiars* Protection and Regulation Act passed in 1948. Ultimately the independence of India laid the foundation of a new era. Thereupon government brought many changes in the rules and regulation of economy and politics. Conclusively the Assam State Acquisition of *Zamindaries* Act of 1951 straightened out the track of abolition of *zamindary* system from Assam.⁶⁰ As a repercussion of all such developments the abolition of Bijni Raj Estate formally happened in 1956 by the Government of Assam.⁶¹

Every event has its own pros and cons. In that order the abolition of *zamindary* system in the Bijni Raj Estate had both positive and negative impact. On one hand abolition of *zamindary* system was advantageous for the peasant class but for the Bijni Raj family it can be measured as an order of hardship and great loss. After the abolition of Bijni *zamindary*, government was endorsed with the power to evolve a new land policy where all the land owners were treated proportionately.

Existing family members of Bijni Raj family are still residing in the royal palace situated in Abhayapuri, the last capital of Bijni Estate. But now they do not assume any administrative power and their status is equivalent with that of the common masses of a democratic country. Hence the present research is a motive to draw a portrait of society and economy of Bijni *Zamindary* within the periphery of the Bijni Raj Estate.

Scope and Significance of the Study:

The impact of *zamindary* rule on the socio-economic life of peasant class of Bijni Raj Estate has a great historical importance. The principal motive of the present study is to describe about the Bijni Raj Dynasty and the condition of the peasants under the *Zamindary* system of this Estate. The Bijni Raj Estate was one of the distinguished and noteworthy *zamindary* estates of Assam throughout the period of Mughal and Colonial episode. But because of insufficient research work history of this estate remained hidden to a large extent and was mysterious for the public. Many historians have undertaken research work on *zamindary* system of undivided Goalpara district. But the undivided Goalpara district covers many *zamindaries*, as a result of which each *zamindary* estate does not get proper importance individually and there are lots of

vaccum in establishing the history of this area. So the present study has been undertaken to fill up this lacuna.

In the recent decades the trend of writing of history has changed. The focus of writing history is not anymore on political developments, but on other economic, social and cultural aspects. More particularly, attention has been diverted to the common masses, the peasantry etc., rather than the kings and the aristocrate class. Under such state of affairs the present study has tried to make a detailed and meticulous study about the Socio-Economic stipulation of peasants under the Bijni *zamindari*. The history of India and even the history of Assam neglect the peasant uprisings of lower Assam. When we study about the peasant revolts in Assam we only notice about the revolts of Phulaguri, Patharughat, Rangia, Lachima etc. But very few historians have written or have done research on the peasant agitation that took place in the lower part of Assam. So it is important to let the world know about the condition of peasantry under the Bijni Raj Estate which was the largest *zamindari* estate of undivided Goalpara district. Consequently the research on *zamindari* system of Bijni Estate is very significant and has a lot of relevance. It is expected that society will be advantageous from this research work by receiving hitherto unseen information of Bijni Raj Estate.

Area and Period of the Study:

The Study Area covers the Bijni Raj Estate of Undivided Goalpara district of Assam. The Bijni Raj Estate was established in 1671 by Chandra Narayan (Bijit Narayan) and the *zamindari* of Bijni Raj Estate was abolished in 1956 by the Government of Assam. So the period of the study covers from 1671 A.D. to 1956 A.D., because during this period only Bijni Raj Estate was proclaimed as a *zamindari* estate with certain right like *Raja*.

Objectives:

The objectives of the present study are:

- (1) To study about the origin and genealogy of Bijni Raj Dynasty.
- (2) To highlight the Socio-Cultural life of the people of Bijni Raj Estate.

- (3) To study about the land and revenue policy of the Bijni *Rajas* and economic condition of the peasants under the *zamindari*.
- (4) To discuss the various land reform Acts introduced by the government which paved the way for abolition of Bijni *Zamindari*.

Review of Literature:

A review of existing literature has revealed that there has been no indepth study particularly on Bijni Raj Estate. A few books discussing the social condition, economic condition and *zamindari* system of undivided Goalpara district have been published. One important book which brings into light the ruling of Bijni Royal dynasty is the *Bijni Rajbangsha* (Goalpara, 1876), written by Tarini Prasad Sen. Mr Sen has described the rise of Bijni Royal family, events connected with the life of rulers and the *Vamsavali* of Bijni Royal dynasty in his above mentioned Bengali book.

Dr. Santo Barman in his book *Zamindari system In Assam During British Rule: A Case study of Goalpara district* (Guwahati, 1994), has given some informations regarding *zamindari* administration of Bijni Raj Estate. But Dr. Barman's book has embraced along with Bijni, other *zamindaries* also like Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari and others. So discussion about Bijni is very short. Topics like administrative system of Bijni *Rajas*, their clash with the Bhutiyas have been mentioned in a very short manner.

In the book written by Dr. Amalendu Guha, namely *Jamindar Kalin Goalpara Jilar Artha Samajik Awastha: Eti Oitihatik Dristipat* (Guwahati, 2014), some information can be found about the administrative system of the *zamindars*, condition of the *ryots* and oppression of the rulers over the subjects. The other renowned historians of Assam have confined their writings with the Peasants Revolts of Patharughat and Phulaguri only. The sufferings of the peasants of lower Assam have been completely neglected. Dr. Guha however has tried to enlighten the people about the sufferings of the peasants of lower Assam and the birth of peasant's movement in lower Assam.

Sibananda Sarma in his book *Goalpara jilar Itihas* (Bilasipara, 1976), has given some useful information about the condition of Goalpara under British rule and *Zamindari*

administrative system in Goalpara. In this book we find some useful information about Bijni Raj family also.

W.W. Hunter's book *A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.II* (London, 1879), is a significant book to reconstruct the history of undivided Goalpara District and Bijni Raj Estate. In this book Hunter has elaborately discussed about Goalpara district including the Eastern *Duars*, Garo Hills, Naga Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Sylhet and Cachar. Many socio-economic informations of undivided Goalpara District along with the *Duars* like, ethnical division of people, types and condition of agriculture, administrative divisions and medical stipulations are explained in an organized approach.

Dr. Amalendu Guha in his book, *Planter Raj to Swaraj* (Delhi, 2012), written in Marxist framework, has elaborately dealt with the land revenue system introduced in Assam by the British administrators from the time of treaty of Yandaboo 1826. The British system mainly suited their purpose and was harmful for the peasants of both lower and upper Assam.

Ambika Charan Choudhury's book *Bijni, Sidli, Mechpara aru Parbatjowaror Itihas* (Bongaigaon, 2007), gives us a brief history of Bijni Raj Estate. The book starts from the days of Chandranarayan, the founder of Bijni Raj Estate. Life history of all other kings, including the last king *Raja* Bhairabendra Narayan can be found in short in this book. The book is written in Assamese language. Though the volume of the book is small, the writer has noted all important facts about Bijni Raj family.

The book *Koch Beharer Itihas* (West Bengal, 1936), written by Amanatulla Ahmed Khan Choudhury is a milestone in the history of Koch Kingdom. Mr. Khan Choudhury has written his book in Bengali language and concentrates mainly on Koch Bihar Kingdom. But we can receive some valuable information about Koch Hajo Kingdom, Bijni Raj Family and Beltola Raj Family also from this book.

Gunabhiram Barua wrote the biography of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, namely *Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jiban Charita* (Guwahati, 1971), in Assamese language. Many important information and data can be found in this book relating to Bijni Raj Estate. Gunabhiram Barua has mentioned in his book that before the joining of Dhekial Phukan as a *Dewan* of Bijni Estate, there was no good system of maintaining proper records of the estate.

Though Gunabhiram Barua's book is biographical one, it supplies many datas about the administrative work under Bijni Raj Estate.

Sanghamitra Misra in her book *Becoming a Borderland, The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India* (Delhi, 2013), mentioned many primary sources relating to undivided Goalpara district and Bijni Raj Estate. In the third chapter of her book Misra has discussed about land, law and problem of migration during the colonial period. In this book Misra has included her self prepared map of undivided Goalpara district during the late nineteenth century which has benefitted us to demarcate the boundary of Bijni Raj Estate.

Ambika Charan Choudhury's another book *Ratnapithat Abhumuki* (Bongaigaon, 1977), also gives some important information about Bijni Raj Estate. The book is a historic cultural introduction of western Assam with special reference to Goalpara district right from the epic age. But still it gives a penpicture of Bijni Raj family.

Dr. Jagannath Patgiri's book *Abibhakta Goalpara Jilar Satra aru Math Mandirar Itivritta* (Guwahati, 1991), deals with several historical Satras and Temples of undivided Goalpara district and Bijni Raj Estate which generally gives us knowledge about the religious belief and condition.

Khagendra Nath's book *Swadhinata Sagramat Goalpara Jilar Abadan* (Goalpara, 1997), gives us some information about undivided Goalpara district during the Colonial rule.

Edward Gait's great literary contribution *A History of Assam* (Calcutta, 1906), which is a landmark of Assam History, gives us some useful information about the Goalpara district and Bijni Raj Estate.

S.K. Bhuyan's book *Anglo-Assamese Relations* (Guwahati, 1974), also throws light on many unknown things about undivided Goalpara district, when it was under British occupation.

In the book *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol.II* (Guwahati, 2007) H.K. Barpujari, while narrating the events that took place in Assam during the medieval ages, does not pay much attention to the Bijni Raj Dynasty. He points out the installation of Chandranaryan (Bijit Narayan) as the *Raja* of Bijni in Koch context. Moreover, only a brief reference is made about the establishment of Bijni Raj Dynasty.

Amalendu Guha's another book *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam* (Calcutta, 1991), throws light on social, political and economic condition of Assam during the medieval period and the impact of introduction of British rule in Assam.

Sarbeswar Rajguru in his book *Medieval Assamese Society* (Assam, 1988), has made a detailed study about the society of Assam during medieval period. Though this book is not directly related to Bijni Raj Estate we can extract some socio-cultural informations of Assam in the medieval age.

Surity Sarma Brahma Choudhury has written a very small volume book namely *Abhayapuri* (Bongaigaon, 1992). Her book is a brief note on Bijni Raj Estate. Surity Sarma Brahma Choudhury has finished her book only in forty two pages concentrating mainly on queen Abhayeswari Devi, one of the benevolent rulers of Bijni Raj Estate.

Ismail Hossain's Assamese book *Asomot Moulana Bhasani* (Guwahati, 2005), is a study on Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the famous peasant leader of Assam and East Bengal. Bhasani's benefaction for the East Bengal immigrant peasants of undivided Goalpara district was portrayed very nicely in this book.

Rajen Saikia in his book *Social and Economic History of Assam, 1853-1921*, (Delhi, 2001), furnish valuable datas which help us to trace out the commencement of Assamese middle class during 19th century.

P.C. Goswami in his book *The Economic Development of Assam* (Delhi, 1988), attempts to focus on the root of economic defeciencies of Assam. As a result of immigration what type of demographic transformation took place in Assam in colonial period has been discussed in this book.

D.D. Mali's book *Revenue Administration in Assam* (New Delhi, 1985), helps us to formulate an idea of revenue administration of Assam during medieval period. Mali has divided his book into twelve chapters which contains a comprehensive description of revenue administrative system of Assam in the Ahom period.

K.N. Saikia's book *The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886* (Guwahati, 1965), is advantageous for understanding the genesis of land revenue regulation in Assam. In this book

K.N. Saikia has elucidate every aspect of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886, which is considered as landmark in land and revenue regulation of Assam.

Bhaben Narzi in his book *Boro Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti* (Guwahati, 1966), presented the socio-cultural life of the Bodos in a systematic manner. He has covered each and every point of Bodo culture including dress, ornaments, food habit, marriage system, religious belief etc. Within the geographical area of Bijni Raj Estate many Bodo people resided. As this research work has been based on the socio-economic life of the people of Bijni Estate, Bhaben Narzi's book helps us to ascertain the socio-cultural life of the Bodo people.

The scholars mentioned above have made a painstaking effort to bring into light, different aspects of Bijni Raj Estate. But there are lots of missing links or gaps in the existing works. Some of them do not contain detailed information. Information about some aspects is unsystematic and scanty. Hence there is the need of further research work. The review of literature reveals the lack of an in-depth analysis of the society and economy under the Bijni *Rajas*.

Methodology:

The research work has been completed using the ethno-historical method which involves a critical use of both Primary and Secondary sources, based on internal and external criticism. A qualitative approach has been adopted for this work. The Primary sources include archival documents which deal with the economic and land revenue matters of Bijni Raj Estate. Primary sources such as gazetteers, letters, proceedings, petitions, different Acts, revenue files and papers and census reports have been collected from the Assam State Archives and Assam Secretariat Record Room.

Besides these, informations from the secondary sources are also being taken in completing the aforesaid work. Among the secondary sources, reputed books on Bijni Raj family and books about the *zamindari* system in Assam during Colonial epoch are consulted. Various articles and journals written regarding the *zamindari* system as well as the condition of the peasants in the *zamindari* period are also helpful in this regard. To generate the universe of the study, relevant secondary sources are collected by intensive library work which is undertaken in

the library of Gauhati University, Bodoland University, Abhayapuri College Library, Dhubri District Library and many others.

The study also includes informal discussions and interview schedule. During the time of field study, discussions were held with the existing family members of Bijni Raj family and some knowledgeable persons residing in Abhayapuri town (last capital of Bijni Raj Estate).

Oral sources are also utilised for collecting information regarding the Bijni Raj Estate. The oral sources included oral tradition on socio-economic study of peasantry and numerous religious viewpoints which prevailed inside the Bijni Estate. After completion of archival and library work and extensive field study, the collected resources and informations were arranged and scrutinized comprehensively and finally laid out to form the design of the study.

The entire subject matter has been studied from historical, sociological and economic point of view. To make the study more convenient, the work has been divided into the Seven Chapters.

Chapterization:

The first chapter of the thesis is a comprehensive account regarding the Bijni Raj Estate and the Socio-Economic condition between the zamindari and its people. Moreover the Scope of the study and the Area and Period of the Study, Objectives of the work etc are included in the first chapter. This chapter also included methodology used in this research work, review of existing literature relating to Bijni Raj Estate, sources of data and the limitations of our study.

The Second chapter draws light on the Genealogical History of the Bijni Raj Estate. This chapter also deal with the origin and chronology of different *Rajas* of Bijni dynasty starting from the Bijit Narayan (founder of Bijni dynasty) to the abolition of *zamindari* by the government of Assam (1956) during the period of Bhairabendra Narayan. Life history of every ruler and important incidents that took place in Bijni Raj Estate in their reign has been discussed in an elaborate manner.

The third chapter is a discussion about the land policy of the Bijni *Rajas* under the Mughals and the British. The British authority introduced a money economy in Bijni Raj Estate

which created a problem for peasants, because they wanted to pay their revenue through the products produced by them. Again different important facts relating to Land Policy, like, types of the land tenures in Bijni Raj Estate, different kinds of tenants and monetary and tax related relation of the Bijni *Rajas* with Garos and Bhutias are discussed in a systematic manner. The third chapter also focuses on the process of change in the matter of land in Bijni Estate during the Colonial rule.

The fourth chapter deals with the social condition of the people under Bijni Raj Estate. This chapter also includes the population and social division of people of Bijni Raj Estate, occupation of the people of Bijni Estate, agricultural condition of the people under the Raj, contribution of Bijni *Rajas* towards Education, religious belief prevailed in Bijni Raj Estate and miscellaneous aspects of socio-cultural life of individuals of Bijni Raj Estate.

The fifth chapter hypothesised on the Economic condition of the peasants and formation of peasants' organisation in the Bijni Raj Estate. This chapter also briefly reviewed the different kinds of taxes that the general masses have to pay in Bijni Raj Estate, various economic problems related to agriculture, *zamindar* tenant relation in Bijni Raj Estate and effects of immigration on the economic life of the people of Bijni Raj Estate. It also gives a comprehensive account on genesis of peasant uprising and formation of peasant organisations in the Bijni Raj Estate.

The Sixth Chapter is a depth discussion about the Acquisition of the Bijni Raj Estate by the Government of Assam. Importance of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, Goalpara Tenancy Act, Assam *Adhjar* Protection and Regulation Act, Assam State Acquisition of *Zamindaries* Act on the abolition of *zamindari* system in Bijni Raj Estate are hypothesised in the sixth chapter. Thus the evaluation of various rent laws and legislation introduced by the government before and after the independence provides a clear picture of abolition of *zamindari* system.

The Seventh Chapter is the last chapter of the thesis which contains the conclusions and observations obtained after the detailed study in the forgoing chapters.

Endnotes

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