

## CHAPTER V

### **Economic condition of the peasants and formation of Peasants Organisations in the Bijni Raj Estate**

Economy is an issue which affects the overall life of any person. Under the Bijni Raj Estate peasants had to depend on agriculture and by cultivation they had hand to mouth existence without any option of savings. It is noticed that the people of Bijni Raj Estate did not have to spend their life in poverty and at the same time it can be said that their economic condition was not stable. Before the introduction of Permanent Settlement, the Bijni *Rajas* were rent collectors under the Mughals and the *ryots* were the owner of the land where they cultivated.<sup>1</sup> When British acquired the *Diwani* of Bengal, the Bijni Raj Estate which was a *zamindari* estate attached with Bengal, came under the administration of East India Company. The British accepted the previous tribute system paid to the Mughal government as land revenue. The British administration protected the interest of *zamindars* only but did not safe-guard the rights of peasants. The British administration gave the *zamindar* heritable, permanent and transferable right on the land. But at the same time, the *ryots* lost their occupancy rights under the British occupation.<sup>2</sup> Instead of owner of land the peasants became tenants and were subjected towards extortion by the *zamindar*.

#### **5.1. Nature and Status of Economy of Bijni Raj Estate:**

A self-sufficient village economy was the characteristic of Bijni Raj Estate. Majority of population of Bijni Raj Estate had to depend on agriculture. As rice was their staple food 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.<sup>3</sup> Along with paddy, different kinds of pulses, variety of fruits and vegetables were also produced by them. *Char areas* lying within the geographical boundary of Bijni Raj Estate had a rich culture of production of 'mustard' and 'jute'.<sup>4</sup> Local people also cultivated mustard plant to some extent.

They extracted oil from mustard seed, which they used for consumption as well as fuel for lightening lamps in their households. Jute was a very highly demanded commodity during the British period.<sup>5</sup> Generally sack made of jute was used in the packaging of different commodities such as, sugar, cotton, guano, cement etc. So the rulers of Bijni Estate welcomed the migration of East Bengal cultivators to their estate in order to enhance the jute production. The East Bengal cultivators were expert in the production of jute.<sup>6</sup>

The southern boundary area of Bijni Raj Estate was suitable for the production of two varieties of cotton, namely *Borkopah* and *Sarukopah*. All the food items used in daily life were produced by the people of Bijni Raj Estate with their own effort. But they faced scarcity of salt. During the Mughal and British period there was no production of salt in Bijni Raj Estate like most other parts of Assam. Though small quantity of salt brine was found in Sadiya and Naga Hills but they were not accessible to the people of Bijni Raj Estate. So the majority of rural population had to depend upon '*Khar*' as a substitute of salt. Local people prepared *Khar* by burning the ashes of plantain and sesame.<sup>7</sup>

Affluent subjects of Bijni Raj Estate purchased salt which were imported from Bengal. The *Raja* of Bijni Estate obtained a good amount of revenue from the Salt trade during the British period. The traders kept salt in warehouse in every market by paying rent to the *Raja* of Bijni. The petty traders purchased salt from the salt merchants at eight rupees per *mound*. The Garo people residing in the southern boundary of Bijni Raj Estate had to hand over three mounds of cotton to the salt traders of Bijni to get only one mound of salt.<sup>8</sup>

Women of Bijni Raj Estate were expert in spinning and weaving. Every family had a loom where women wove clothes not only for herself but for each and every member of the family. The Kachari women living in Bijni Raj Estate were accustomed with the production of clothes from the thread of *Eri* and *Muga*. They spin thread out of the shells of *Muga* and *Eri* cocoons. They also sold woven clothes in *hats* or weekly markets. Thus weaving had become a secondary source of livelihood for the people of Bijni Raj Estate. Few women of Bijni Raj Estate had the knowledge in dying yarn purely by indigenous process.<sup>9</sup> Though no big industry was present in Bijni Raj Estate, but small scale industries of making bamboo basket, utensils, oil pressing, carpentry etc existed there. A Boat making unit was also established by the Kachari people of Bijni Raj Estate.

The forest of the Bijni Raj Estate were very resourceful because different kinds of trees like, Sal, Sagun, Gamari, Aagar, Titachapa, Sisu etc were found abundantly there. The timber found in the forest of Bijni Raj Estate was a source of income for the estate as timber was highly demanded by the British East India Company for preparing the sleeper of railway track. A good quantity of timber was exported annually from the forest of Habraghat *pargana* of Bijni Raj Estate. Another positive gain from the forest of Bijni Raj Estate was the seizeable population of elephant.<sup>10</sup> In the Mughal Empire elephants were in great demand because it was required for purpose of transportation of man and material as well as used during the time of war. So the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate started to pay the annual revenue in the form of elephant to the Mughal rulers when it was under the suzerainty of Mughal. Even the Mughal rulers also had no problem in this arrangement.

Thus in the absence of any big industry and commercialization of agriculture, people of Bijni Raj Estate had to depend on the local *hats* and weekly markets to sell their products whether it may be agricultural commodity or weaving product. Money circulation was not very popular practice in the Bijni Raj Estate and in several times they preferred the barter system.<sup>11</sup>

There was no proper Banking system in the Bijni Raj Estate. But some moneylenders and a few Marwari merchants were present there who lent and borrowed money to the agricultural people after mortgaging their movable and immovable properties.<sup>12</sup> The moneylenders were greedy by nature and were always looking for chances to capture the mortgaged commodities from the simple and innocent people of Bijni Raj Estate.

## **5.2. Different kinds of Taxes that the general masses had to pay in Bijni Raj Estate:**

The Bijni *Rajas* followed a systematic Revenue Policy. The *Raja* or *Zamindar* was the supreme head of the estate and he looked after all the matters of administration. Appointment of the high revenue officials like other administrative staff was done after the approval of the King. The head of the administrative staff was *Dewan*. He had to look after the general administration

of the estate. He was also accountable for smooth revenue administration. As a delegate of *Zamindar*, *Dewan* had to settle inner disputes of the estate and supervised the cases relating to the *zamindari* at law courts. But it is also true that he could not work autonomously and necessitated verbal or written permission of the *zamindar* for the operation of his business. One of the famous personality of Assam Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, who was appointed as a *dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate put forwarded a number of new regulations for upgrading the revenue administration of the estate.

The Bijni Raj Estate was divided into a number of revenue circles which were known as *Dihis* for the ease in collection or gathering of rent.<sup>13</sup> These *Dihis* were:

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) <i>Dihi</i> Barahajari | (2) <i>Dihi</i> Dumuria     |
| (3) <i>Dihi</i> Jogikatani | (4) <i>Dihi</i> Birjaura    |
| (5) <i>Dihi</i> Boitamari  | (6) <i>Dihi</i> Bahalpur    |
| (7) <i>Dihi</i> Rokakhata  | (8) <i>Dihi</i> Raniganj    |
| (9) <i>Dihi</i> Futkibari  | (10) <i>Dihi</i> Fakiragram |
| (11) <i>Dihi</i> Dokara    | (12) <i>Dihi</i> Dolgoma    |
| (13) <i>Dihi</i> Damara    | (14) <i>Dihi</i> Krishnai   |
| (15) <i>Dihi</i> Rangjuli  | (16) <i>Dihi</i> Beekali    |

Along with these *dihis*, two more *dihis* namely, *Dihi* Bijni and *Dihi* Patiladoha were situated in Bijni *Duar* area.<sup>14</sup>

For the purpose of collection of rent and *abwab* the division of the estate was made into revenue circles or *Dihis*. Under the control of the circle officer known as the *Tahasildar* or *Naib* there was a *Katchary* in each and every *Dihi*. The revenue officer of the *Dihis* of the Bijni Estate was titled as *Naib*. The preserved record reflects that the *Patgiri* system of rent collection was followed in the earlier periods of Bijni Raj Estate.<sup>15</sup>

*Raja* Indranarayan in 1819 A.D., first attempted the procedure of fixation of rent in the Bijni Raj Estate. He imposed rent in all winter paddy lands (*Sali* lands) at the rate of 12 *Narayanees* rupees per *hal*. But in Habraghat *pargana* area the real collection was completed at the rate of 9/- *Narayanees* rupees a *hal*. 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*. After a few years *Raja* Indranarayan tried to increase the rate of rent. But the tenants opposed vehemently for such an action taken by him. Consequently *Raja* Indranarayan appealed before the Governor General in council. As a result of which one Deputy Collector was appointed 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.<sup>16</sup>

Next to the land revenue an inveterate annual cesses and fees levied on the *ryots* in Bijni Raj Estate were as follows:<sup>17</sup>

*Dhap Salami*: It was a complementary fee of Rs. 1/-. It was collected from leading tenants visiting *Rajbari* to meet the *Raja* or *Rani*.

*Chunbun* or Forest Permit fee: It was a fee of rupees 3-7-0 per permit. It was collected from the subjects of Bijni Raj Estate for using forest materials free of cost.

Requisition of fruits, vegetables, goods etc: Generally the leading *ryots* had to supply a number of articles like fruit, vegetables and different kinds of goods, free of cost, at the time of observation of some religious festivals at *Rajbari*. Originally such type of requisition was done during the time of *Ambubasi*.

*Najar Salami*: Such type of *salami* fee was imposed on a tenant, when he took settlement of land from the *zamindar* or rehabilitated a settlement. It was occasionally a fixed sum and sometimes at a certain *bigha* rate. It was known as *Patum Salami* in the Bijni Raj Estate. The holding was put up for auction in certain cases like, if there was more than one claimant for one piece of land. Generally the settlement was completed with the highest '*Salami payee*'. This system was also called '*Dak Salami*'. After the completion of the settlement the collected amount was divided into two portions. The proprietor or *zamindar* got half of the amount collected through *Dak Salami*. The other half was circulated in the midst of *zamindary* officer of *Sadar* and *Muffasil*.

*Darkhast Salami*: It was a kind of *zamindary* court fee. It was collected in Bijni Estate at the rate of Rs. 2/- for each petition for settlement, mutation, remission etc. Later it was divided among

the *zamindar* and his officers. From this amount one rupee went to the *zamindar*, and the other rupee went to the officer who received the petition.

*Dakhil Khariz Salami*: It was in fact an alteration and modification fee payable on registration of names on ground of inheritance. It was set at Rs. 1/- for whole *instafa* and Rs. 3/- for partial *instafa*. In case of surveys required by application for land, boundary dispute regarding area etc charges were fixed at the rate of -/8/- *anna* for each holding.

*Marcha or Pan Bata*: It was a marriage fee which was collected in Bijni Estate in earlier period. The rate was decided at Rs. 2/- to Rs. 3/- for each marriage. The rate became diverse from Rs. 2/- to Rs. 15/- in certain cases that the marriages between the tenants of the same *zamindar* or between the tenants of different *zamindars*.

*Mankuji*: This was one kind of penalty fee. As a punishment of clandestine cultivation a tenant had to pay this fee. The amount of assessment was equal to 3 years back rent in Bijni.

Dalpuja Fee: This fee was levied upon the tenants for expenses of Dalpuja feast in South Salmara and Srijangram.

*Masuli or Miad*: It was one kind of demand fee. When any tenant failed to pay rent for one *kist*, a *Barkandaze* was deputed after the expiry of the *kist* to make demand for it, for this a fee of *anna* -/2/- was realised. After the collection one fourth of the total amount went to the *Katchary Jamadar* and the rest divided among the *Barkandazes* in Bijni.

Buffalo-*bathan* fee: It was a grazing fee for buffaloes which the buffalo owner had to pay.

Separate Account fee: This fee was realised in Bijni at Rs. 1/- for an annual rental to Rs. 4/- and Rs. 1/- beyond for opening a separate account of rent.

*Instafa* fee: The *Instafa* fee was realised in Bijni Estate at Rs. 1/- for entire *instafa* and Rs. 3/- for partial *instafa*.

*Tadanta* fee: This fee was based upon the status of the officer holding the enquiry. The *Tadanta* fee in Bijni Estate was *anna* -/8/- per diem for an *Amin's* visit, Rs. 3/- for a *Tehsildar*.

Survey fee: This fee was collected in case of surveys necessitated by application for land, boundary dispute regarding area etc. In Bijni Estate rate of survey fee was *anna* -/8/- per holding.

*Chanda* and *Magan*: The *Chanda* or *Magan* fee was made from time to time for some special purposes. In some time it was collected as war subscription.

Miscellaneous fees:

- (a) Petition fee for the writer of petition, from *anna* 4 to *anna* 8 when petition was drafted by member of dependant of *zamindari* staff.
- (b) Fees for copies of orders.
- (c) Fees for copies of *touzi*.
- (d) Fee for reinstatement of society.
- (e) Fee for killing bullock.<sup>18</sup>

### **5.3. Various Economic Problems related to Agriculture:**

Along with the burden of so many taxes and fees the peasant class of Bijni Raj Estate also faced some problems. The problems faced by the peasants of Bijni Raj Estate were as follows:

#### **5.3.1. Rural Indebtedness:**

Rural Indebtedness was more or less common in Bijni Raj Estate like other parts of Assam. In many cases the debt was unproductive, chronic and carried high rate of interest. The peasants of Bijni Raj Estate were heavily burdened under the pressure of so many taxes and fees, which they had to pay to the *zamindar*. Under such a circumstance, the poor cultivators could not be expected to save anything to meet future needs. As a result, a poor cultivator had to borrow in many stages of farming operation to meet his immediate needs as well as for maintaining the family. Sometimes he also incurs debt to meet expenditure on social and ceremonial functions. Crop failure due to drought and flood added to the misery of the peasants. At the time of crop failure, the peasants necessarily had to take loan from the agency which was easily approachable to them. The money lenders played a dominant role in the supply of rural credit. Such situation arose because the role of the government agencies and cooperative societies was insignificant in Bijni Estate. The absence of cheap and requisite credit institution facility drove the peasants into the grasp of the money lenders.<sup>19</sup> The money lenders charged a sky-high rate of interest. In this way, exploitation by the money lenders worked like a double-edged-sword, high rate of interest on the loans to the cultivators and low rates for their products. The profit made by the peasants was so small that in many cases it became impossible for them to repay the loan. Accumulation of interest year after another created the debt in a huge amount. The landed property of the debtor had to be mortgaged to the creditor if he fails to repay the loan.<sup>20</sup>

#### **5.3.2. Insecurity of Tenure:**

The privileged *ryot* and occupancy *ryot* could use the land as they liked and only on certain grounds they might be ejected. Here we have to know the difference between privileged *ryot* and occupancy *ryot*. A privileged *ryot* is a *ryot* entitled to hold at rates of rent not exceeding revenue rates. When a tenant has been able to continue his occupation over land for not less than 20 years, either at a rate of rent not exceeding the land revenue, or at half of the revenue rate in addition to the service rendered by him, he could attained the status of privileged *ryot*. A *ryot*, who have a right of occupancy in the land held by him, is known as occupancy *ryot*.<sup>21</sup> When a *ryot* has been in continuous occupation of the land for 12 years he acquires the occupancy right.

Both the privileged *ryot* and occupancy *ryot* enjoyed the right of transfer and subletting. But a non occupancy *ryot* might be ejected not only on the grounds for ejection of the occupancy *ryots*, but also on the expiry of the period of lease. He could neither transfer his interest nor sublet his land without the consent of the landlord. The conditions and limitations of an under *ryot* was same with the non occupancy *ryot*.

A tenant who attained the occupancy right enjoyed full security of tenure. But, unfortunately the dishonest landlords denied occupancy right for the tenants in many cases. The tenants were either expelled are asked to accept fresh lease every year. In this way they continued to remain tenants-at-will. The fear and insecurity of tenure among the peasants of Bijni Estate paved the way for peasant agitation in future.<sup>22</sup>

### **5.3.3. Fragmentation of Holding:**

Fragmentation of holding means divisions of land in small plots which originally is held by an individual or by an undivided family. It is a direct result of partition and demand of each co-sharer on getting plots in each type of soil area. The effects of the fragmentation of holding or fragmentation of the land were detrimental both for the agriculture and the economic position of the agriculturist. It was one of the serious difficulties in the agricultural development and acts as a barrier to full utilisation of land. It involved waste of money, time and labour in moving workers, cattle and implements to and from farmstead or from one field to another. Large compact tracts of land as units of cultivation were physical premises for large scale scientific agriculture. Small holdings, further split up into scattered and smaller plots, could not be made the adequate basis for a prosperous agriculture.<sup>23</sup>

### **5.3.4. Transfer of land from cultivating to non-cultivating owners:**



Due to the growing indebtedness among the agriculturists in some cases transfer of land from the hands of the peasant proprietors to the moneylenders took place. The moneylenders exploited the economic helplessness of the peasant and were always in a tendency of increasing rates of interest. The moneylenders, in addition to legal methods, also employed some dishonest measures to force out the agriculturist such as making him sign a bond for a sum greater than what had been advanced to him, maintain artificial accounts and others. The moneylenders took privilege of the simplicity and ignorance of the peasant who could not identify fraud and of his poverty.<sup>24</sup>

In this way under the pressure of so many economic problems peasant class of Bijni Raj Estate became backward. These conditions happened not only in the case of Bijni Raj Estate only, but poverty stricken condition of the peasants was common all over Assam in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> For such a condition of the peasant class we cannot directly blame the rulers of Bijni Raj Estate. This is because they were not directly connected with the peasants. For the collection of different taxes and fees there were officers like revenue collector, *Kananguha*, *Amin* etc. The whole agricultural condition was made complex by the intermediaries or middlemen of the *zamindar*. The source of anger and deprivation at last resulted in outburst in the form of peasant agitation.

#### **5.4. Zamindar Tenant Relation in the Bijni Raj Estate:**

The relation between the landlord and the tenants under the Bijni Raj was neither very cordial nor very offensive. It can be termed as a relationship of formal maintenance of hierarchy. However all the tenants can not be said to be happy under the *zamindari* rule of the 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 social formalities like marriage, *sraddhya* and other occasions they had to spend the savings what they have preserved. So it was very tough for them to pay the rent to the *zamindar*.<sup>26</sup> Apart from these there were occurrences of crop failure, which had a negative

impact on them. Several unfortunate tenants could not pay the annual land revenue (rent) in due date. They were pushed to distress and ruination because of the gathering of arrear.

W.W. Hunter has tried to focus a reference about the reports of the Deputy Commissioner in the matter of *zamindar* tenant relation in the entire undivided Goalpara district:<sup>27</sup>

“As a whole, no extra ordinary greed or desire was shown by the *zamindars* and their subordinates. Also the tenants did not refuse to submit themselves to the established authority. This resulted in developing a pleasant relation between the landlord and the peasants. Very few legal procedures relating to the land matters were instituted and also cases of oppression in connection with extraction of rent were hardly reported. Overall such cases can be considered as very few and far between which might have occurred occasionally. If the landlord finds that an arrear of rent is due, or alleged to be due, he prefers settling the matter by himself instead of taking legal course of action which is both complicated and time consuming. The landlord would rather arrest and detain in custody the defaulting tenant or some member of his family. Such detention will remain till the time the tenant pays the money to satisfy the landlord’s demand. In case the tenant fails to pay the rent, a sum equal to the amount claimed as rent is nominally borrowed from a sub-ordinate or relation of the landlord and a stamped bond is signed by the alleged defaulter, as in cases of ordinary dept. Thus the landlord receives the money that was due from the tenant. Now if the tenant fails to pay the borrowed amount with interest to the nominal lender, then he was made legally bound to pay the same by the court of law. If the tenant complains about the manner in which such bonds were executed and detaches himself from any liability, then he is subjected to further pressure. It has been seen that either the tenant’s brother would be detained in custody for a period of nine days at the house of the landlord or the tenant himself for four days, until some solution could be found out and bond executed. In certain cases the landlords were sentenced to one year imprisonment by the Magistrate in charges of illegal confinement of tenants. However in legal terms, these detentions were not considered as wrongful confinement and merely a dispute between the landlord and the tenant. This led to the release of the accused landlord by the court of law. The tenant then had to face the consequences of taking legal course of action. The tenant was sued on the bond by the lender, who had obtained a decree.”<sup>28</sup>

In cases where the tenant failed to repay the money with interest to the lender a decree was obtained in the civil court against the tenant. Thus the money was realized through court from the tenant by the lender. According to Hunter, such cases, though not frequent were by no means singular. In majority of cases, the tenant accepted his liability after executing the bond.

This clearly reflects the history of the *Zamindar*-Tenant relation that existed in Goalpara during the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Zamindar* was the sole owner of land. He was at liberty in respect of survey settlement, assessment, collection and enhancement of rent. The tenant had no permanent, heritable and transferable rights on land, under their possession. Regarding collection of land falling in arrears, repression and coercive measures like arrest and detention were adopted. However such cases were stated to be few in number. Enhancement of rent was the inherent characteristic of the *zamindari* administration. When the *Zamindar* attempted to impose new tax or increase the old ones the tenants generally flocked together.<sup>29</sup> They stopped payment which led to agrarian troubles in many parts of Bijni Raj Estate.

The *zamindar* resorted to multitude of oppression in matters of ruling the *ryot*, of which club law was common. They caused distress to the *ryots* by club law. The estate servants were tyrannical. If the *ryots* refused to pay rent at revised rate, the estate servants took the law into their own hands and resorted to club law, viz., in Bijni Raj Estate, one Jogendra Nath Bhattacharjee, employee in charge of cash book had been posted at Baitamari *Katchary* for collecting enhanced rent. A band of six or seven club men had been sent to that place before he came there. He caused private enquiry to be made, while collecting rent from the *ryots*. The *ryots* could not but carry on his mandate. He ordered one Amrit Kanta Kalita be seized and had him struck with stick. In consequence of grievous hurt, Amrit died shortly after.<sup>30</sup>

The tenants under Bijni Raj Estate were dissatisfied with their *zamindars* for various kinds of collection and exactions from them. Many of these collections were not justified. '*Bhiksha*' or '*Magan*' was a chief source of collection from the tenants. Eminent writer Amalendu Guha has mentioned that on occasion of heavy expenditure in the ruling family like marriage, *sraddha*, pilgrimage and other, the *zamindar* with the help of *jotedars* collected obligatory *Bhiksha* or *Magan* from the tenants. By means of such *Magan Raja* Balit Narayan collected money after an intermission of every three years.<sup>31</sup> In addition to land revenue, the tenants had to pay two other taxes namely '*Jalkar*' (water tax) and '*Bankar*' (forest tax). Adding together with forest tax the tenants had to pay tax for cutting valuable tree, which was known as '*Gorkati*'. This tax was in fact unlawful. The *zamindar* was also benefitted by grazing tax which he collected for grazing cows and buffalos in the '*Char-Chapori*' areas from the owners.

The rulers of Bijni Estate levied penalty also in some cases. As per the record collected by Buchanon from Habraghat *pargana*, religious preachers or Vaishnava *bhaktas* collected money from the masses in the excuse of social compulsion, from where they had to donate a part of sum to the Bijni *Raja*. Salt purchased from such penalty money was further divided equally into ten parts, one part of which goes to the *zamindar*, one part goes to the *rajpurohit*, two parts goes to the *guru* and *purohit* of the person under instigation and rest of remaining parts were divided among the societal members. The *Rajpurohit's* annual income from such penalties was estimated to be Rs. 500/-. Such a policy was adopted by the Bijni *Rajas* to showcase their benevolence rather than for monetary gains.<sup>32</sup>

Because of the imposition of various kinds of taxes and obligatory contributions tenants of Bijni Raj Estate were not very satisfied and contended. Nevertheless there was no major trouble recorded. However A.J.M. Mills had mentioned an evidence of a quarrel that had been going on between the *zamindar* and the tenants of Habraghat *pargana* of Bijni Raj Estate from 1823 A.D.<sup>33</sup> The reason of their grievance was the imposition of new rents over those lands other than *Sali* lands, which started the origin of the quarrel. As an exceptional measure the government sanctioned a resettlement of the Goalpara *zamindari*s in 1822. The matter had been taken up by Mr. Scott and he had initialised and completed settlements in some villages. Recommendation for abolition of all irregular cesses and mere transitory assessment of some rice land was done by him. But he was unable to complete the entire work as he had to take the charge of Commissioner of Assam proper. Taking advantage of the state of affairs the tenants laid down their claim to hold their lands, and tried to make rice lands rent-free.<sup>34</sup>

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was allotted with the duty of *Dewan* in Bijni Raj Estate in 1849. For the period of 1849 to 1850, when he was the *Dewan* in Bijni Raj Estate, he framed a set of regulation known as *Phukan Dewanar Kayadabandi* to improve and legalize the relation between *zamindar* and tenants. A proposal was extended by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan to commence a survey intended for the settlements of land in Habraghat and Khuntaghat *parganas* and to affect the law of distraint for arrears of rent.<sup>35</sup> This measure of *dewan* infuriated the *ryots* and they contrasted it fervently. The *zamindar* for the purpose of compensating his loss of revenue from illegitimate cases, petitioned the authorities to pass an executive order in his favour. The *ryots* contested this also. The collector of Goalpara and the commissioner of Assam

valley districts validated instructions in opposition to the *zamindars*. Even the case was referred to the board of Revenue of Calcutta. The Board of revenue ordered to finish the settlement. For the purpose of this case on behalf of the *zamindar* Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan went to Calcutta to pursue the case. On behalf of *ryots* Dewan Prem Narain attended the case.<sup>36</sup>

In 1883 A.D., king of Bijni Estate *Raja* Kumud Narayan died. After his death an internal strife was started between his two wives, namely *Barrani* Siddheswari and *Sarurni* Abhayeswari. This quarrel is also known as '*Sarurani-Barranir Dhuma*' in the locality. This internal dissension inside the court encouraged the *ryots* to start a rebellion. The peasants gathered in a *Ryot Sabha* (conference of *ryots*) at Jogikhopa for the purpose of presenting a memorandum of their problems and complaints to the *Bar Rani* Siddeswari. But Jiwan Ram Phukan terrified the peasants through blank firing. Jiwan Ram Phukan was the principal adviser and helper of *Bar Rani*. This incident made the peasants disloyal and rebellious. Agitating peasants acknowledged one Chandra Narayan as the *Raja* of Bijni instead of *Bar Rani* Siddheswari. This upheaval of the peasants against their higher authority is popularly known as '*Barpatgeerer Hangama*'.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless this confrontation was initially related to tenants' problem, but soon after the problem became more concerned with the subject of inheritance to the throne of Bijni Raj. At last the problem was solved by the interference of Court-of-Wards. Notably the British government took steps to reconcile the disputed trouble between the *zamindar* and the tenants in the estate when the Bijni Raj Estate was under the administration of Court-of-Wards.

The land survey of Habraghat and Khuntaghat *pargana* which was left unfinished by David Scott was resumed again. An extra Assistant Commissioner and some *Amins* were engaged for this function. They have concluded the survey and the settlement in Habraghat and Khuntaghat *parganas*. After that a new rate of rent was fixed. In February 1862 A.D., 500 *ryots* of Khuntaghat *pargana* moved up in opposition to the new higher rate of assessment. Adjacent to it another grumble of the tenants was that the *Amins* of the Deputy collector had included homelands as plot of *Ashu* land. For this system the *ryots* were bound to pay rent at the rate of Rs. 1/- for land which must be assessed at -/4/- *anna* per *bigha*. Nevertheless a compromise was reached in 1864 A.D., and according to it the rate was reduced -/8/- *anna* per *bigha* on homeland.<sup>38</sup>

The relation between the *zamindars* and the tenants in Bijni Raj Estate was not pleasant upto the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tenants of Bijni Raj Estate during 1903 A.D. submitted a sequence of complaints to the government in opposition of the Bijni Raj. They tried to convey the government that the *ryots* were paying more revenue than the actual rate of rent. The receipts of revenue given to them were fraudulent and untrustworthy, because there was no mention of land. Furthermore they complained that the lands of the *ryots* were offered for rent to such persons who were agreeable to pay extra rents. A number of *ryots* had been insolvent by the implementation of civil court decrees. The government also displayed a very poor response to this situation. On the other hand the tenants submitted another two petitions to the government during October and November of 1903. All these petitions carried their accusation that the *ryots* were made mandatory to pay more revenue than was actually needed. If the *ryots* objected to it they were meted with ill treatment. In addition to this they further highlighted that the people had been driven to misery due to some epidemic like, *Kala Azar* and some natural calamity like, earthquake of 1897. The people were unable to understand the real value of land because of their illiteracy. They could not lay their problems and inconvenience before the government owing to lack of education.<sup>39</sup> Even the government's response to such happenings was not adequate enough. Practically government turned a deaf ear to the petition and complaints of the tenants and admitted only the indistinctness of the revenue receipts.

In the mean time the tenants' discontent became a reason of great apprehension for the government, along with the enlightened middle class of the Bijni Raj Estate. Within the period of 1897 to 1917 A.D., a large number of memorials and petitions were presented to the Government of Assam by the tenants of Bijni *Zamindary*.

### **5.5. Effects of Immigration on the Economic life of the people of Bijni Estate:**

Immigration and migration are considered as synonym to each other, but literally there is little difference between them. Immigration means transfer of the people from one place to another or from one country to another country for the purpose of livelihood. On the other hand migration means the people who left one place or country for livelihood and not for the purpose of living forever.

With the beginning of the British administration the process of immigration and migration started in Assam. The new type of influx may be classified as follows-

- (a) Immigration of the tea garden labourers to Assam.
- (b) Immigration from East Bengal.<sup>40</sup>

In the Bijni Raj Estate there was hardly any problem associated with immigration of tea garden labourers. So now we will discuss about the effects of East Bengal Immigration on the economic life of people of Bijni Raj Estate. Practically immigration was welcomed by the *zamindar* class for different reasons like- shortage of labourers, land abundance from the economic point of view, desire to get more revenue etc.<sup>41</sup> Landless immigrants from over populated East Bengal came to the Bijni Raj Estate and undivided Goalpara district in the last part of nineteenth century and first part of twentieth century.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the migration of thousand of cultivators from Eastern Bengal reshaped the demographical statistics and transmuted the regional economy of Bijni Raj Estate. At that time Bijni Raj Estate covered the maximum geographical area of undivided Goalpara district. So the effects of immigration into undivided Goalpara district were common with that of Bijni Raj Estate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial states impetus on agrarisation began to show fruitful results in undivided Goalpara district. Measurement and classification of large areas of woodland, forest, wastelands and cultivable lands was undertaken and earmarked as fairly distinct geographical domains. The colonial records reflects that during the last decade of nineteenth century i.e., between 1880s and 1890s and also in 1920s, there has been remarkable changes in the social order of the region as a result of extending the limits of arable land along with implementation of the 'colonisation of wastelands' scheme.<sup>42</sup>

From the early part of nineteenth century, the practice of giving land on lease to those who have capital to facilitate reclamation was started by the Bijni *Zamindary* Estate of Goalpara.<sup>43</sup> During that period *Ryotwari* system was followed in the major portion of Assam, except the area of Goalpara and Cachar. The Goalpara and Cachar district were under the Permanent settlement system. Records show that by the end of the nineteenth century, only 2143

square miles of area was under cultivation in Goalpara out of the total area of 4433 square miles. The remaining areas were converted into 'wastelands' which does have scope for cultivation.<sup>44</sup>

The 'Wasteland Scheme' that was implemented in Goalpara was started in order to negate this trend and to initiate the process of settlement of the uncultivated areas of land in the province. In the late nineteenth century, the colonial perception of land was that of a resource which could be controlled and improved and considered it to be a quantifiable object of knowledge which was measurable.<sup>45</sup> This scheme of wasteland was characterised by categorisation of land into 'waste' and 'arable', permitting immigrant cultivators from neighbouring regions into Goalpara, giving more importance to the *jotedar* class as well as hardening the boundaries between the tenurial strata in Goalpara. During the middle part of the nineteenth century, the process of permanent cultivation that was earlier declared as 'wasteland' was started.<sup>46</sup>

As was quite evident, well into the twentieth century also, the *jotedars* were termed as 'reclamation' tenants by the colonial officials. These officials were influenced by the idea that *jotes* were created solely for the purpose of reclamation which was apt for a district like Goalpara. The *Jotedar* class also left no stone unturned to further strengthen their position by extending the boundaries of settled agriculture. In Bijni Raj Estate too, the *jotedars* were considered as 'enterprising cultivators', who if consider a wasteland to be favourable would settle down in that land after due permission from the *zamindar*. It was seen that the Bijni *zamindars* settled a number of wastelands with the *jotedars* within the Bijni Raj Estate.<sup>47</sup> Thus *Jotedars* became the principal agent in the creation of a settled agrarian order in the Goalpara district. The status of the actual cultivator became that of a subtenant of the *jotedar* and at times he was further degraded into subtenant of a subtenant.

However during the early part of the twentieth century, there were very few *jotedars* in Bijni Raj Estate and alternative forms of cultivation was prevalent in large areas of the estate. But by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, the effect of colonial pressure could be seen in Goalpara district. This was evident from the fact that under the influence of colonial law, new rules were enacted to exert pressure on the society whose ultimate aim was widening of public space for immigrant settlers. As a result of which there was migration of a number of cultivators from the plains of Eastern Bengal to Goalpara.<sup>48</sup>



Not only during the pre-colonial period, but also during the colonial period, migration of cultivators from Eastern Bengal to the Goalpara could be seen. However the migration of cultivators depends on the season and high occurrence could be seen during the jute season when the demand for labour increases. Also on offers of special terms and conditions, the cultivators from Bengal were specially invited to settle in the wastelands of Goalpara during the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The settlement officials believed that the immigrants would take land on tenures from the *zamindars* with the concession of a revenue free period.<sup>49</sup>

South Salmara, Lakhipur, Chapar and Bilasipara which falls on the western part of the undivided Goalpara district witnessed the maximum problem of immigration. Statistics reveal that by the year 1881 the population of the immigrants in Goalpara district was estimated to be 49059. Demographic changes were clearly visible as during the period 1881-91, the population was increased by 1.4 percent and rose to 2 percent in the next decade.<sup>50</sup> In 1901, immigrant population from Mymensingh district came in large numbers and settled down in Goalpara. The colonial records clearly states that although between 1905 and 1907 there were a large migration of cultivators from Mymensingh and other districts of East Bengal to Undivided Goalpara, but it did not have any significant impact on the proportion of population to land.<sup>51</sup> As per the census of 1921, which points out that nearly about three lakh cultivators had migrated to Assam from East Bengal and out of which one lakh forty one thousand had settled in the undivided Goalpara district alone. The figure of 141000 had 78000 were Mymensinghia cultivators.<sup>52</sup>

Gradually these immigrant populations took possession of all the lands which they found suitable for cultivation. From Goalpara district these immigrants started spreading to other districts of lower Assam. The immigrants in the form of cultivators and labourers came to Assam as single travellers. But with time, they started to immigrate with their families. It was seen that men folks would come first to secure land and construct houses and then the family followed.<sup>53</sup>

The misery of the local tenants also increased due to their inability to pay revenues and crops and became defaulters again and again. Upto the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was no shortage of cultivable land in the undivided Goalpara district as well as in the Bijni Raj Estate. The cultivators from East Bengal were hard workers and produced a variety of crops such as rice, paddy, lentils, mustard, and jute along with seasonal vegetables. The East Bengal cultivators had this unique style of producing two or three types of crops in one plot of land.

They produced variety of pulses, Amon etc one after another during the month of September, October and November.<sup>54</sup>

Not only the men but also the women folk of the immigrant settlers would work hard in the field. This system of cultivation was an important feature of agricultural work of the immigrant settlers. The British government in Assam was impressed with their hard working style and asked the *zamindars* and *jotedars* to import more and more cultivators from East Bengal so as to fill up the vacant land of *Char* areas.<sup>55</sup> Production of varieties of crops along with payment of taxes on time by these immigrant cultivators impressed the superiors. They used to pay the land revenue in time to the *jotedars* and the *jotedars* to the *zamindar*, which the local cultivator failed in most circumstances.

During the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the nature of tenurial relationships in undivided Goalpara district was affected to a large extent due to the migration of cultivators from East Bengal. These migrated cultivators established themselves as 'defacto' *jotedars* in several estates of undivided Goalpara district and gradually started blending with the settled communities. In Bijni Raj Estate for example, the cultivators who had held the land directly under the *zamindar* and *jotes* were now increasing being settled with immigrant peasants.<sup>56</sup>

The post immigration period also witnessed increase in rent to be paid by the tenants which the *zamindary* records failed to acknowledge. However there was an increase of rent that affected the older tenants but the *zamindars* considered it to be a very small amount and on the other hand it was a matter of concern for a very small numbers of tenants.<sup>57</sup> The older tenants put forwarded a petition to the *zamindar* in this regard which clearly indicates that such a rent hike affected both the *chukanidars* as well as the *jotedars*.

A petition was sent to the *Raja* of Bijni by the *jotedars* of the *Dihi Dolgoma* village of Habraghat *pargana* which falls in the estate of Bijni, requesting the queen to evacuate these migrant cultivators from the land under their illegal possession and was given land holdings for a period of hundred years. The petitioners accused the *zamindar* of bringing suits against the *ryots* to pay arrears of rent as well as ejection. They wanted to establish their rights over the land and hence requested for a *sanad* which will secure them from future invasion from immigrants. Another petition was sent by Thanda Ram Das along with other *jotedars* of the Khuntaghat

*pargana* of Bijni Raj Estate to the *Rani* Abhayeswari, objecting to the new surveys that were conducted after the settlement of the wastelands in the region. The *jotedars* also were reluctant to pay any increase in rent and accused the *Tehsildar* of the province for his malicious high demand.<sup>58</sup>

During the time of widespread protest against the illegal occupation of land by the migrant cultivators in undivided Goalpara district, emerged a peasant leader named Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.<sup>59</sup> In the year 1928 A.D., Abdul Hamid Khan came to 'Bhasani *Char*' of undivided Goalpara district from Pabna Tangail in search of land. He received help from a local preacher in his quest. After few days he moved to a place called Ghagomari and became famous as 'Bhasani Maulana'. The term 'Bhasani' associated with his name is derived from the *char* Bhasan, a low lying *char* area in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam.<sup>60</sup>

The peasant leader Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was an ardent supporter of the Muslim immigrant cultivators and fought for their rights against the *zamindari* class. He established himself as the leader of marginalised peasants of Assam. He was elected to Assam Legislative Assembly in the year 1937 A.D. as an independent candidate.<sup>61</sup> This clearly reflects his wide spread popularity among the common masses in the undivided Goalpara district. Bhasani submitted a draft in the Assam Legislative Assembly demanding to alter the 'Goalpara *Prajasatta Aain*' and made it more peasants friendly. But his draft did not came up for discussion in the Assembly as the government felt that this draft was against certain terms and privileges which were attributed to the *zamindars* during the time of permanent settlement.<sup>62</sup>

Bhasani not only impressed the Assam immigrants but he equally tried to satisfy the needs of the peasant population of Bengal. From the year 1928 to 1936, he travelled up and down the Brahmaputra and visited the *char* areas of the immigrant Muslim settlers and other inaccessible areas of Assam. He planned to bring the entire immigrant Muslim peasants under one peasant programme with a motive to demand for land. He protested against different kinds of exploitation, oppression and harassment meted to the peasants of the undivided Goalpara district.<sup>63</sup> He was in support of providing civil rights to the peasants for cultivating their land.

## **5.6. Genesis of Peasant Uprising and Formation of Peasant Organisations:**

*Zamindar* and *Ryot*, *Jotedar* and tenant- from when such types of divisions came into existence, the history of peasant agitation also started and is as old as such divisions. But the history of forming a permanent peasant organisation is not so much old in lower Assam. From time to time different agitations of the people that arose during that period also gave rise to peasant movement, but they were not permanent in nature. 'Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilani*' can be considered as first peasant organisation in entire undivided Goalpara district and Bijni Raj Estate also.<sup>64</sup>

Tenants of Bijni Raj Estate were not organised in a body. They shaped some local agitation and submitted innumerable memorials to the government for redressal of their grievances. In 1903, tenants of Bijni Raj Estate prepared a list of complaints against the Bijni Raj and submitted it to the British government.<sup>65</sup> Their complaints were as follows:

- (a) The *ryots* were liable to pay more revenue to the *zamindar*, than the actual amount of revenue.
- (b) The receipts which were given to tenants were untrustworthy and there was no mention about the land.
- (c) There was a tendency of let loose the *ryots* land to persons who were inclined to pay extra rents.
- (d) Certain *ryots* had been disintegrated by the implementation of civil court decrees.<sup>66</sup>

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1903, another petition was submitted to the British authority proclaiming that-

- (a) The *Rani* (Queen) was a nice lady, but her officials were critical and the *Dewan* was tyrannical.
- (b) Peasants had little chance to present their grouse before the Queen because of her *Parda Nashi* System.
- (c) The *ryots* were compelled to pay extra revenue than was actually required and if somebody protested against it, he was behaved with mistreatment.<sup>67</sup>

The petition of 21<sup>st</sup> November 1903 was given to the government stating that-

- (a) Among the people of Bijni Raj Estate ten percent were poverty stricken and impecunious, and there was not a single educated man among them who could put down their grievances in front of the government.
- (b) The general masses had to suffer this deplorable condition because of- (i) *Kalazar* (Black fever), (ii) Earthquake of 1897 and (iii) lack of proper education, due to which people could not understand what was land and what value was attached to it.
- (c) When new land was leased out to the people, they were compulsory to pay Rs. 2/-, and they paid *anna* -/4/- on each rupee for rent.
- (d) some officer were more greedy and they collected Rs. 2/- or Rs. 4/- in excess to that.<sup>68</sup>

Again in January 20, 1912, a team consisted of Thanda Ram Das, Kali Charan Das and others submitted petition to the Chief Commissioner of Assam Valley district saying that-

- (a) In Bijni Raj Estate the survey for revenue resettlement was conducted without the consent of the people.
- (b) The *zamindar* had continued to convey Suits against the *ryots* for arrears of rent as well as for ejection, even if ejection suits were closed for the time being.<sup>69</sup>

In 24<sup>th</sup> June 1912, a memorial was presented by Madharam and others to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in which they mentioned that they have befitted with a number of rights and advantages from time immemorial under the Bijni Raj. But such rights and advantages were denied to them after the coronation of Queen Abhayeswari on the throne of Bijni Raj Estate. The memorialists considered this conspiracy as a persuasion of the three Bengal *Dewans* under the Queen Abhayeswari. In addition to that the memorialists mentioned that the *ryots* of the Bijni Raj Estate have become victim of exploitation by different ways. They further listed their major problems in this way.<sup>70</sup>

- (a) It was necessary for the *ryots* to apply for *pattas* for which they asked to pay *Salami* of Rs. 2/- to Rs. 10/-.
- (b) *Mankuji* was registered on lands which were claim back by a *ryot* without application.

- (c) Fragmentary cession or handover was not allowed by the Raj.
- (d) Without the knowledge of tenant rents were maximised in several times.
- (e) The receipts of the land were defective; it did not display the particulars like, the rate of rents, class of lands, areas of holding and arrears due.
- (f) If a tenant became unable to pay increased rate, notice of eviction was sent to him.
- (g) Benefit of free grant of Sal trees should be allowed to them for repairing of their houses etc.<sup>71</sup>

There was a continuous dispute between the Garos and the *Raja* of Bijni. The source of dispute was certain lands which were occupied by the Garos. The Garos brought an allegation against the *Raja* of Bijni that he was trying to oust them from their own land. In 1902, the Garos invaded Habraghat *pargana* of Bijni Raj Estate. Under the leadership of Sonaram Sangma, 700 Garo people collected subscription from the different localities of the hills, marched from the hills across Habraghat *pargana* to Dolgomaghat on the Brahmaputra where they constructed an encampment of grass huts, and they proclaimed Garo Raj and pasted some notice ordering tenants not to pay rents to the *zamindar*.<sup>72</sup>

In 1915 A.D. the Garo tenants of Habraghat *pargana* of Bijni Raj Estate under the leadership of Mangal Singh and some other put down a petition to the government demanding Garo tenants' right on certain things like:

- (a) Right to collect fuel, straw etc.
- (b) Right to cut down Sal trees to build houses and to manufacture ploughs.
- (c) Right to cut down trees (grown) on own holdings, and to graze cows in the *zamindari* forests.<sup>73</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the Garo tenants demanded those rights on the basis of local custom which was acknowledged to them by the previous Bijni *Rajas*.

Thus by submitting different petition and memorial to the government the peasant class wanted to draw attention on their demands and started a tenants' agitation in Bijni Raj Estate. The Garos under the leadership of Sonaram Sangma also joined into agitation and rose against the subjugation of Bijni Raj.

At the time when the drafting of Tenancy Bill was undertaken, some tenants of Bijni Raj Estate presented a memorial to the governor of Assam in council defining some of their rights and resentment.<sup>74</sup> Their demand which they wanted to include in the Rent law was to provide some traditional rights to them, such as:

(a) Allow to graze cattle in the *Khas* land.

(b) Allow to cut thatching grass from *Khas* land for the purpose of making roof of their houses free of charge.

(c) Permit them to take away dead Sal posts free of charge from the Estate forest for their personal need.

(d) Let them to cut or sell the fruit and other trees which were planted and grown up in their own land according to their own need and pleasure. Through this memorial the tenants prayed to the government for safeguarding their above mentioned customary rights from the risk of future violation in the Tenancy Bill.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of so many petitions and demands, Goalpara Tenancy Act was passed in 1929, and it gave occupancy rights to the *ryots*, who held land for 12 years.<sup>76</sup> But in this Act there was no clause for the upliftment of the condition of *Adhiars*, and they were left on the same position, as they were before. As a result peasant agitation continued.

The grievances of the tenants turned into a peasant agitation against the *zamindar* and mixed up with the political movement. Though the peasants of Bijni Raj Estate failed to create any strong peasant organisation, but they joined with 'Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan*' to raise their voice. From 1933, the Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* (or *samiti*) started to represent local grievances, particularly those of the tenants of *zamindari* estate. The Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* observed its first yearly session at Balbala, second one was in Dudhnoi, third in Malegarh and the fourth one was held in Borghola. The Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* was reorganised as an allied Congress body in 1935 A.D.<sup>77</sup>

When Jawaharlal Nehru came to Goalpara on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1939, Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* presented a memorial to him highlighting on some important issues like- necessity of primary education, lack of drinking water and incompleteness of *Praja Satta* Act etc. Around

one lakh member of different sub division of Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* worked for the upliftment of the condition of peasantry.<sup>78</sup>

In 1934, Socialist Congress Party was formed whose ideology was something different from United Congress Party. From that time upto 1942, members of the Communist Party worked with this Socialist Party. At the initiative of the Communist members, the establishment of All India Peasant Committee was a historic incident.<sup>79</sup> Effects of all these developments spread into Assam, Goalpara and even Bijni Raj Estate also.

In 17<sup>th</sup> February 1940, under the presidentship of Swami Sahajananda (leader of All India *Krishak Sabha*) Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilan* observed its fifth yearly session at Salkocha. It was a bold step to unite all kinds of tenants by forgetting class divisions in the history of peasant struggle of undivided Goalpara district.<sup>80</sup> In 1942, one Communist leader of Assam, Pranesh Biswas organised a peasant rally in Dhubri for procuring paddy seeds. As a result of it under the presidentship of Muhammad Abdullah Rasul (peasant leader of Bengal and also a member of Communist party) a peasant conference was held in Haorapara village, which was ten miles away from Dhubri. Hemaruddin Molla and Muhammad Chabu were the main organisers of this conference. It can be considered as first peasant conference under the banner of Communist party in Goalpara district.<sup>81</sup>

In 1944, Goalpara Peasant Conference was held under the active participation of Congress leader Jogendra Nath in Balijana. Under the encouragement of Jogendra Nath many *Sabhas* (meetings) were organised against the atrocities of Bijni and Mechpara *zamindar* in different parts of Goalpara district. The *Adhiyar* movement which was first started in Goalpara later spread into Basugaon, Abhayapuri, Bilasipara, Phutkibari, Tulsibeel, North Salmara, Patiladaha and many other neighbouring places.<sup>82</sup>

In the last part of 1945, one young tribal social worker Rabin Basumatary met Pranesh Biswas and requested him to organise a tribal peasant conference. After that the preparation of Gaurang Tarang *Krishak Sanmilan* (Gaurang Tarang Peasant Conference) was started and a reception committee was formed with Mahendra Brahma as president and Rabin Basumatary as secretary. Along with the economic problems of tribal peasants, development and preservation of



tribal language and culture were the main topics of discussion in this Gaurang Tarang Peasant Conference.<sup>83</sup>

In the Gaurang Tarang Peasant Conference which was held in Kokrajhar a large number of Bodo tenants participated. Along with the Bodos some Rabha, Nepali and Muslim people of Bijni *Duar*, Simoni *Duar*, Magurmari and Sesapani village also attended this conference. Peasant *Sabhas* and Communists took the initiative of reconstruction of Tribal League. From that time Tribal League became active in the economic matter which earlier limited their work within social and cultural field.<sup>84</sup>

The Gaurang Tarang Conference encouraged the peasants of Bijni *Duar* and Tea garden labourers. As a result a conference of tea garden labourers was held at Magurmari village. After so many protest and pressure of peasant leaders and organisations Assam government passed the *Adhiyar Act* in 1948 A.D. The Act of Abolition of *Zamindari* which was passed in Assam Legislative Assembly in 1951 is also can be considered as result of peasant agitation of *Zamindari Estate*.<sup>85</sup>

Thus it is seen that monetary crisis and many other economic problems pushed the peasant class towards agitation. The relation between the *zamindar* and the tenant was more or less satisfactory, though not very cordial, at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. But gradually it began to deteriorate. It was mainly due to accumulation of arrear of rent due, or alleged to be due to the landlord. The *zamindar* in order to avoid complicity of a regular suit in a court of law, preferred to arrest the defaulting tenant and somehow extract the money. This created bitterness between the *zamindars* and the tenants. Enhancement of the rate of revenue was another cause of dissatisfaction and strained relation between the *zamindar* and tenant in the Bijni Raj Estate. So long the people were uneducated, there was no large scale uprising against the *zamindar*. But with the spread of education the tenants gradually began to understand the injustice done to them. So prayers, representations and uprisings against the *zamindar* began to take place. In the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century memorandums in large numbers were submitted to the British government against the *zamindars* for the injustice done to the tenants. This state of affairs continued upto the passing of Goalpara Tenancy Act in March, 1929. However this act also was not sufficient to make the *Zamindar-Tenant* relation a cordial one. Upto the abolition of

*Zamindari* by the government of Assam in 1956 peasants had to raise their voice for the protection of their rights.

---

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A.A.Khan Choudhury, *Koch Beharer Itihas*, N.L. Publishers, West Bengal, 1936, p.240.
- <sup>2</sup> S.C. Gupta, *Agrarian Relations and early British Rule in India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1963, p.78.
- <sup>3</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.II*, Trubner & Co., London, 1879, p.54.
- <sup>4</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Jamindar Kalin Goalpara Jilar Artha Samajik Awastha*, Bhabani books, Guwahati, 2014, p.52.
- <sup>5</sup> Sanghamitra Misra, *Becoming A Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*, Routledge Publication, 2013, pp. 96-98.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Ambikacharan Choudhury, *Koch Rajbangshi Jatir Itihas aru Sanskriti*, Ratnapith Prakashan, Bongaigaon, 1969, p.72.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Martin Montgomery, *Eastern India (The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics)*, Vol.5, Cosmos Publications, New Delhi, 1976 (Reprint), p.137.
- <sup>9</sup> Surity Sarma Brahma Choudhury, *Abhayapuri*, Bongaigaon, 1992, p.25.
- <sup>10</sup> Sasibhusan Faujdar, “Bijni Rajyar Itihasar Tathya Pati Sangraha”, *written document preserved in the house of late Girish Chandra Das*, Abhayapuri.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Sibananda Sarma, *Goalpara Jilar Itihas*, Sadhanalay Prakashan, Bilasipara, 1976, p.48.

- <sup>13</sup> Santo Barman, *Zamindari System in Assam during British Rule (A case study of Goalpara district)*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1994, p.119.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Manahan's Report on the Affairs of the Permanently Settled Estates*, No.1503, R & F, submitted to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, E & A (Eastern Bengal and Assam) on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1907, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.
- <sup>16</sup> A.J. Laine, *An Account of the Land Tenure System of Goalpara; with criticism of the existing Rent Law and Suggestions for its Amendments*, Shillong, 1917, pp.131-132.
- <sup>17</sup> *Report Submitted by R.C. Sen, Dewan of Bijni Raj Estate to A.J.Laine, D.C. Goalpara*, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> P.N. Driver, *Problems of Zamindari and Land Tenure Reconstruction in India*, New Book Company, Bombay, 1949, p.127.
- <sup>20</sup> Laxmi Nath Tamuly, *Bharatar Swadhinata Sangramat Asamar Awadan (Sanghat Aru Sahajogitar Itihas)*, Rupohi Prakashan, Johat, 1988, pp.45-51.
- <sup>21</sup> Narendra Chandra Dutta, *Land Problems and Land Reforms in Assam*, S. Chand & Co, 1968, p.54.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp.55-56.
- <sup>23</sup> A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2010, pp.44-47.
- <sup>24</sup> Narendra Chandra Dutta, *op.cit*, p.57.
- <sup>25</sup> Santo Barman, *op.cit*, p.143.
- <sup>26</sup> Amalendu Guha, *op.cit*, p.58.
- <sup>27</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit*, pp.67-68.

- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *Assam in the Eighteen Century*, Omsons, Delhi, 1985, p.76.
- <sup>30</sup> *Rev. A., No.86-102*, Sept.1913, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Guwahati.
- <sup>31</sup> Amalendu Guha, *op.cit*, pp.58-59.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.59.
- <sup>33</sup> A.J. Maffat Mills, *Report of the Province of Assam*, Second Edition, Guwahati, 1984, pp.286-287.
- <sup>34</sup> *Bengal Government Papers*, File No.380, 1866, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
- <sup>35</sup> Dhiraj Lahkar, *Asomor Mohan Swapnadrasta Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan*, Panchajanya, Guwahati, 2012, p.32.
- <sup>36</sup> Gunabiram Baruah, *Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukanar Jiban Charitra*, Assam Publication Board, Guwahati, 2004, p.58.
- <sup>37</sup> Ambikacharan Choudhury, *Bijni, Sidli, Mechpara aru Parbat Jowaror Itihas*, Ratnapith Prakashan, Bongaigaon, 2007, p. 24.
- <sup>38</sup> Santo Barman, *op.cit*, p.124.
- <sup>39</sup> Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *Ouponibeshik Amolot Asom*, Ashok Book Stall, Guwahati, 2008, p.89.
- <sup>40</sup> Khabir Ahmed, "Asomoloi Prabajan Kiyō Aru Keneke Hoisil", *Article published in Weekly Jamiat*, Special Issue, October, 1994, p.42.
- <sup>41</sup> Harekrishna Deka, *Prabajan Aru Anuprabesh: Eta Samasyar Duta Rup*, Aank-Baak Publisher, Guwahati, 2014, p.59.
- <sup>42</sup> B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara, Vol.II*, Shillong, pp.124-126.
- <sup>43</sup> *Notes by the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the extension of cultivation in Assam and the colonisation of wasteland in the province, 24 Sept. 1898*, Assam Secretariat Proceedings, *Revenue A, File nos. 128-38*, Nov. 1898.

- <sup>44</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit*, pp.32-34.
- <sup>45</sup> Peter Robb, *Ancient Rights and Future Comfort, Bihar the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and British Rule in India*, Richmond, 1997, p.146.
- <sup>46</sup> P.C. Goswami, *The Economic Development of Assam*, Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, 1988, p.71.
- <sup>47</sup> A.J. Laine, *op.cit*, p.98.
- <sup>48</sup> Sanghamitra Misra, “Changing Frontiers and Spaces: The Colonial State in Nineteenth Century Goalpara”, *Article published in Studies in History, Vol.22(2)*, 2005, pp.226-231.
- <sup>49</sup> *Letter from L.J.Kershaw, Secretary to the chief commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the government of India, 5 June 1905*, Shillong, ASP, Revenue A, June 1905, File nos. 176-78.
- <sup>50</sup> *Census of India, 1911*, Part 1, p.08.
- <sup>51</sup> *Copy of notes recorded by P.G. Melitus, 25 May 1909, Commissioner’s Conference, 1909*, in Revenue A, Feb 1913, Nos. 6-9, File No.IITR, 1913, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
- <sup>52</sup> *Census of India, 1921*, Volume III, P.41.
- <sup>53</sup> K.N. Majumdar, *History of Mymensingh*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Calcutta, 1907, p.41.
- <sup>54</sup> P. Mahanta, *Assamiya Madhyabritta Srenir Itihas*, 1991, p.262.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Sanghamitra Misra, “Law, Migration and New Subjectivities: Reconstructing the colonial project in an Eastern Borderland”, *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 44, 4(2007), p.425-61.
- <sup>57</sup> *Report of the Dewan of Bijni on the allegation made by certain tenants at pargana Habraghat and Dihi Botiamari*, Revenue A, Sept. 1913, Assam State Archive, Guwahati.
- <sup>58</sup> *Petition dated 20 Jan. 1913, from Thanda Ram Das, Kali Ram Das and others of Bajitpara and Batiamari, Pargana Khuntaghat, Goalpara*, in Revenue A, Sept., 1913, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

- <sup>59</sup> Ismail Hossain, *Asomot Maulana Bhasani*, Abimat Publication, Dispur, Guwahati, 2005, p.65.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Amalendu Guha, “East Bengal Immigrants and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani in Assam Politics 1928-47”, *Article published in Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol.13, No.4*, October 1976, pp.419-453.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Anam Abdus Sobhan, *Satabdir Jananeta Maulana Bhasani*, Dipti Prakashan, Dacca-1100, p.22.
- <sup>64</sup> Amalendu Guha (2014), *op.cit*, p.92.
- <sup>65</sup> Santo Barman, *op.cit*, p.149.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, pp.149-150.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Revenue B, 1904, No. 473-489*, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur, and Santo Barman, *op.cit*, p.150.
- <sup>69</sup> *Revenue A, September 1913, No. 86-102*, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
- <sup>70</sup> *Revenue A, August 1912, No. 20-25*, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur, and Santo Barman, p.151.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>72</sup> *Revenue A. June 1905, No. 144-175*, Assam Secretariat Archives, Guwahati.
- <sup>73</sup> A.J. Laine, *op.cit*, pp.25-32.
- <sup>74</sup> *Revenue A, December 1927, No.64-75*, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> Jitendra Nath Das, *An Introduction to the Land Laws of Assam*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p.89.

- <sup>77</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2012, p.147.
- <sup>78</sup> Khagendra Nath, *Swadhinata Sangramat Goalparar Abadan*, Goalpara, 1997, pp.78-79.
- <sup>79</sup> Pranesh Biswas, *Asomot Krishak Andolon Janajatiya Krishakar Bhumika*, Natun Prithibi, Guwahati, 1976, p.46.
- <sup>80</sup> Kamallesh Gupta, *Asomer Krishak Sangramer Ekti Adhyaya: Kuthari Andolon*, Prachi Dharitri, Sarad Sankhya, Jayco Printers, Guwahati, 1998, p.68.
- <sup>81</sup> Amalendu Guha (2014), *op.cit*, p.92.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, pp.93-102.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>85</sup> Ambikacharan Sarkar, “Bijni Rajyar Camu Parichay”, *Article published in Souvenir volume of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Abhayapuri Session, Abhayapuri, 1977, p.87.*