

Selected Jotedars of Western Dooars: Their Role in Spread of Socio-Cultural Activities

Sukumar Barai

Asstt. Professor in History Dr.Meghnad Saha College Itahar, U/ Dinajpur,
W.B.733128, India

Abstract

It's a regional study of the area of northern part of North Bengal of West Bengal. Aims of the study are to highlight the positive activities of the rich peasantry like Jotedars. The Dooars or Duars are the floodplains and foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in North- East India around Bhutan. In English Dooar means "Door" The region forms the gate way to Bhutan from India. In this paper I have selected some Jotedars for my study, those who have the creative role in spread of socio-cultural activities. They engaged to promote the cultural branches such as education, festivals, music, art, physical culture etc. they extended all sorts of assistances for the socio-cultural development of the area. There was dichotomy in their efforts but that was natural. They had been mostly silent in removing the superstitions of that time. General people were far from the effect of their welfare activities. Actually they moved within their limitation and remained faithful to their ideological and class character. In spite of these shortcomings, it should be mentioned that being the Jotedars they had done more in that period which left positive mark on the socio-cultural life of Western Dooars as well as Bengal.

KEYWORDS: Dooars, North Bengal, Jotedars, Culture.

Introduction: The Dooars or Duars are the floodplains and foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in North- East India around Bhutan. In English Dooar means "Door". The region forms the gate way to Bhutan from India. There are 18 passages or gateways through which the Bhutanese people can communicate with the people living in the plains. This region is divided by the Sankosh River into the Eastern and the Western. Dooars consisting of an area of 8800 Sq Km (3400 Sq Miles). The Western Dooars is known as the Bengal Dooars and the Eastern Dooars as the Assam Dooars.¹

The Dooars belonged to the Koch Kingdom and taking advantage of the weakness of the Koch Kingdom in subsequent times, Bhutan took possession of the Dooars. This region was controlled by the Kingdom of Bhutan. But British annexed it in 1865 AD (Treaty of Sinchula) after the Bhutan War under the command of Captain Hedayat Ali.² The area was divided into two parts; the Eastern part was merged with Goalpara District in Assam and the Western part was turned into a new District named Western Dooars. Again in the year of 1869, the name was changed to Jalpaiguri district. After the end of the British rule in India in 1947, the Dooars acceded into the dominion of India and it merged with the Union of India shortly afterwards in 1949.³

In this paper I would like to discuss on only 5 Dooars in the regions. They are Chamurchi, Lakhimpur, Balla, Buxa and Kumar Gram and the role of the selected Jotdars

of the region in spread of socio-cultural activities.

Jotdars class in the Western Dooars: A Jotdar is a person who holds lands directly under Government. His holding is called a Jote. Jotdar has a transferable and saleable right in the land but his rent is liable to be enhanced by Government whenever new settlement is made. There were many resident and non- resident Jotdars in the Western Dooars. Before the rule of the English there were many Jotdars in the region. The British tried to set up new people settlement in the full of jungle region of the Western Dooars. Many types of people came into the Western Dooars for their existing. Dooars region was non- regulated area. So more land came under some groups. Some Marwari businessmen invested money for buying and selling of lands. These groups became able to preserved huge jote land and they became known as Landed Gentry. Thus gradually a new class- Jotedars came in the scene of agricultural stage of the Western Dooars.⁴

After the acquisition of Dooars, the English Government settled land of this region in three ways. 1) Land of Tea- Garden 2) Reserved land and 3) Agricultural land. Total agricultural land had been divided into 5 Tehshils. 3 Tehshils were in the Western Dooars. These Tehshils were divided into small area. Land of his small area had been given Ijara. Those who took these lands as Ijara were called Ijaradars.⁵ Subsequently these Ijaradars were terminated as Jotedars. Jotdars of this region were Hindus, Muslims, and Tribes etc.⁶

Now we would like to highlight about the role of some selected Jotedars in spread of socio-cultural activities in the region.

Jotedar Rahimuddin: Rahimuddin was a Jotedar of Helapakri area. Area of his Jote land was approx 500 acres. He had been able to realize the importance of proper education. He donated Rs 10000/ and 7.5 acres of land for setting up a school in a marginal village like Helapakri. He had been immensely helped by Mokshanath Sen, Jogen Datta and local people. Now the name of this school is Padamoti Union Rahimuddin High School which was established in 1946.⁷ He developed the road communication by making a wooden bridge between Helapakri and Bhotpatti villages. Though he went to East Pakistan for livelihood but left the benevolent touch of socio-cultural activities of the region.⁸

Jotedar Abdul Gani Ahammed: Jotedar Abdul Gani Ahammed's father Akkali Ahammed was a Primary Teacher. He was associated with business also. From the share of his profit, he bought huge land. He had the mind of development of education. Abdul Gani Ahammed had been the owner of his father's land. He had 3500 acres of land. The name of his Jotes was jote of Kanar Bari, Jhanjur Bari, Dinger Bari and Madhor Bari etc. He received two things from his father. One is huge land and another is mind of benevolent activities. Even today, residents of Jore Pakri area remember him for his socio- cultural activities. In his active initiatives a school was established on 4th January in 1946. He gave Rs 10000/ and his own house for this School. He got assistance from Jotedar late Gurucharan Deb, Mahendranath Das, Motilal Roy, Rahimuddin Ahmed and others in this regard. For the establishment of this school many of his contemporary gave land. According to his great grandson, Manjil Rahman, Abdul Gani Ahmed helped many

of poor students.⁹

Residents of Bakali recognized him as a social worker of the region. He was munificent, pious and well wisher of the ryots. Every day in the morning after completion of his religious work he began to solve the problem of his ryots. He used to go to look after his jotes once in a week. He created three types of Granary (Gola). 1. Granary of Jotedar 2. Granary of the benevolent services. 3. Granary of the ryots. In his every Jotes both Hindus and Muslims were lived together. There existed communal harmony in the area.¹⁰

Jotedar Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim Prodhan: Jian Mohammad father of Jotedar Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim Prodhan. He was a rich peasant in the respective area. He spent his property not only for his personal interest but for the society. A Madrasha named Islamia Madrasha and a Mosque was built by his positive initiatives in 1883 at Bakali of Western Dooars. Jotedar Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim Prodhan was like his father. He was able to buy the Jotes pof the Bakali, Mallik Hat, kalir Hat, Rajar Hat, Kranti, Malbazar, Batabari, Rajganj, Sukani etc. Total lands of his Jotes were 500 Acres approximately. During the period of World War II, there was World Economic Depression. In this time British Govt. was in crisis. In this situation Abdul Karim gave 500 Man paddy and Rs 1 Lac to the British Army for their help. For benevolent touch Karim was awarded the title “Prodhan” and on 1st January, 1943 he was titled “Khan Bahadur” by the British Govt.¹¹

Jotedar Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim Prodhan had completed the unfinished socio-cultural works of his father such as Islamia Madrasha and a Mosque. He took initiatives for the construction of two wells for the people of the area. He gave away 50 Bighas of land as Wakaf for smooth running of the Masque and Madrasha. He left his mark of more consciousness about public health. By his positive initiatives a charitable dispensary was established in the whole Union of Dharampur. He contributed 10 Bighas of land for this. In 1899 a Bengali School was set up at Dharampur named Abdul Karim High School. In 1920 this school was converted as Middle English School. In 1945 this schools got rename Abdul Karim High School for his assistance.

Abdul Karim was so much acquainted with the Physical Culture of the region. He gave 10 acres of land for developing the play ground. Football championship was organized by his initiative. Bakali was advanced in the field of Literature and Culture because of Abdul Karim. Famous poet of the world of folksong, Abbasuddin Saheb would come to his house regularly. On 3rd June, 1922 he became a member of Jella Board. He was members of many social organizations. By his own initiatives a traditional socio-cultural atmosphere was existed in the areas of Bakali, Paharpur Nijambari, Kranti, Dhubguri, Dahagram, Pathgram, Nilkamari, Chilahati, Sukani. A healthy communal harmony was existed in the region.

But it was a matter of regret that in 1947 when India is being independent, this hero of social work gave his last breath. His family went to West Pakistan now Bangladesh. As a result this region lost its current of educational, socio-cultural and other related social works. Even today the people of the region remember him for his benevolent works.¹²

Jotedar Khan Saheb Abdul Karim Mian: Khan Saheb Abdul Karim Mian was a resident of present busy city of Dooars, Dhubguri. He was a famous Jotedar of the region. Total area of his jote land was 400 Bighas. Karim Mian was an enthusiastic about education or spread of education.

He took a great part for the establishment of Dhubguri High School. We have come to know that Dhubguri Middle School was converted to H.E. School in 1946 by the proper guidance of Karim Mian. He took a pivotal role for setting up Dhubguri Madrasha. He was associated with to any developmental works in the region. In the time of World War II he financially assisted to the British Govt. by giving Rs-50 thousand. He got the title “Khan Bahadur” in 1944 for this type of assistance and socio- cultural activities. In 1952, Karim Mian with his family went to East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). But he left the benevolent touch to the people of the area of Dhubguri.¹³

Jotedar Gajendra Nath Roy Basunia: Jotedar Gajendra Nath Roy Basunia was not a big Jotedar of Dooars but he was famous for his socio- cultural activities of the respective area. Total area of land of Gajendra Nath Roy Basunia was 100 acres. He donated 3 Bighas of land for setting up a school named Bhuska Danga No-1 BFP School. He gave financial assistance for this also. He inspired for the spread of adult education. He opened an adult education centre in his own house and took financial liability. He helped to the poor and those who were burdened with the responsibility of marrying off a daughter or arranging for marriage of one’s daughter.¹⁴

Jotedar Gajendra Nath Roy Basunia was more engaged to the cultural side. He was so much associated with the famous traditional song of Dooars “Chor Churni”. He was also a very good actor. He used to play many of musical instruments. He took keen interest to introduce “Nam Kirtan” (Devotional song of God Krishna) in the area of Maynaguri. He shared most of financial responsibility for this. He worshiped many Pujas such as Garam Puja, Laxmi Puja, Satya Narayan Puja etc.¹⁵He gave food to the poor.

Jotedar Jangeshwar Roy: Father of Jotedar Jangeshwar Roy was a powerful man. In 1320 B.S. Mohan Sing Roy, Father of Jotedar Jangeshwar Roy came to Rangali Bajna village of Madarihat Police Station for living. Jangeshwar Roy started his study by the inspiration of his uncle Dwaraka Nath Roy. He engaged himself as a social worker from his boyhood. At that time Rangali Bajna was a marginal village. In this type of village he tried his best to give light of education and on 2nd January 1948, he established a school named “Mohan Sing High School”. He donated 40 acres of land for this school.¹⁶ Another social worker; Hiralal Bhagat gave 38 Bighas of land for this school purpose. Jangeshwar Roy set up a shelter of boys in the name of his uncle “Dwaraka Shishu Sadan”. His first aim was to spread of education to the people of the respective area.¹⁷

Many academic institutions were established by his direct or indirect initiatives. These are:-

1. Falakata High School, 2. Jateswar High School, 3. Bhaukimari High School, 4. Jalpesh Laxmikant High School, 5. Madan Sing High School, 6. Helapakri High

School, 7. Rajamohan High School, 8. East Mallik para High School, etc.¹⁸

Jotedars Urua Das and Moniram Karji: Jotedars Urua Das and Moniram Karji took a great role in spread of education and culture of Shal Kumar Hat. Total land area of Urua Das was 125 acres. Maniram Karji had an Eliphant. In 1929, first Minor School was set up at Shal Kumar in spread of education. Urua Das donated land for this school. Maniram Karji gave a room of 45'× 15' for the school. Both of these two Jotedars gave the partial salary of the teachers of the school. Poor students were helped by them. Urua Das was a small Jotedar of the area but in mind he was a great man. He gave financial assistance to needy poor and those who were burneded for marriage of their own daughters. In the time of Durga Puja (Bangali's great Utsab –Sharadutsab) he gave cloths and food to the needy people.

In 1910, a hat (local market) was set up by his positive initiatives and he gave 44 Bighas of land for this. But recently the actual area of land of hat had been reduced because of residential crisis. He took initiatives for introducing many fairs and other socio- cultural works.¹⁹

Some Jotedars of Daukimari: Some important Jotedars of Daukimari were –Lalit Mohan Ray, Rajanikanta Ray Pramanik, Hari Mohan Ray, Rupkanta Ray, Gobinda Ray etc. These Jotedars played a significant role in the field of socio- cultural arena. Hira Mohan Ray established a school and donated 2 acres of land for the development of the school. Dinonath Ray took keen interest for setting up a school at Daukimari. Firstly the name of that school was Dinonath Middle English School.²⁰ Afterward this school became “Minor School” and then Junior High School.

Dinonath Ray showed his interest regarding the socio-cultural development in the area. He made a hostel for the student those came from faraway. He took all financial responsibility of that hostel. For spiritual development he arranged “Kirtan” for 4 dats in his area and took all financial liability. Family of Late Jotedar Hari Mohan Ray played a great role in spread of educational and socio-cultural activities. His two sons Lalit Mohan Ray and Gobinda Ray were owner of 150 acres of land. Lalit Mohan Ray was an undiputed dedicated social worker of the area. He arranged historical folk drama in his own premises. Another contribution of Lalit Mohan Ray was to donate 9 acres of land for a “Baruni Fair” in 1351 B.S.²¹ Gobinda Ray donated 2 acres of land for a Health Centre at No-1 Jhar Alta Gram. Then it became Govt. Primary Health Centre. In the contemporary time many rich peasants kept the flow of socio-cultural activities in the area.²²

Jotedar Laxmikanta Sen: Jotedar Laxmikanta Sen was an influential man in the area of Jalpesh. His land was at 128 Taujis. His son Ghanashyam Sen donated Rs-10000/ for the memory of his father to the Jalpesh Temple. He helped in many ways to the L K M E School in 1944. Now that school became L K High School. Many rich peasants such as Damaynti Devi, Purna Sen, Bhabendra Nath Bhattacharya, Khagendra Nath Bhattacharya played important role in the development of socio-cultural field in the area of Jalpesh.²³

Jotedar Penda Mohammad: Total land of Penda Mohammad was 600 acres. He

gave his total land s “Wakaf”. His first son Nijamuddin became the owner of 450 acres of land. He followed his father and formed a society named “Nijamuddin Wakaf” vide E C No 11332. Now it is under taken by the Kathalguri Mosque. Nijamuddin set up a Madyamik School in the name of his father “Raja Danga Penda Mohammad” High School. And he donated 900 acres of land for this school. He exercised physical culture. He established a sub public health centre for the treatment of the people of the respective area. He gave 4 acres of land for the development of the health centre. In the time of famine in 1950, he helped to the affected people.²⁴

Jotedar Akimuddin Choudhury: Jotedar Akimuddin Choudhury had 500 acres of land. He donated 100 acres of land for the religious purpose. He took financial liability for smooth running of a Madrasha. He made a guest rest house in the side of the bank of river Chel for the passerby. Palton a Hindu worker look after this rest house. This was built for the social service. Basically he was worshiper of communal harmony. He constructed many of religious places for Hindus and Muslims. He gave financial assistance for this. He was associated to the socio-cultural activities also.²⁵

Jotedar Basan Singh Katham: Total land of Jotedar Basan Singh Katham was 1000 acres. He was a simple and humble man. He belonged to Mech community. Though he did not play a vital role in education but his engagement in spread of socio-cultural activities was remarkable. Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja and Kali Puja were observed by his positive initiatives. Here he arranged fooding, clothing and entertaining for the needy people. He established a primary school at Katham Bari.²⁶

Jotedar Mechhua Mahammad: Jotedar Mechhua Mohammad became a legendry Jotedar of Falakata area. His land property was about 3000 Bighas. His annual income was Rs 137376. Mechhua Mohammad wakafed all of his land before his death. He spent a large amount for the religious work. He built a Mosque per Jote and donated land for this. His constructed Mosques were Teli Para, Jogi Jhora, NaraSinghpur, Prodhan Para, Dhupguri etc. He donated 40 acres of land for the Mosque of Dhupguri. Now it was in 24 acres and ploughed by the local Ryots / Adhiars. To spread of education he built a primary .This school was converted into “Mechhua Mahammad Board School.”²⁷

Jotedar Dhyairya Narayan Ray Basunia: Total area of land of Jotedar Dhyairya Narayan Ray Basunia was 400 Hals. His father Tarakeshwar ray was a graduate at that time and arranged a teacher in his own house for teaching the children of his ryoits. He tried his best to spread the light of education among the adjacent area. His son Jotedar Dhyairya Narayan Ray Basunia was a social worker and lover of culture like his father. Khagendra Nath Ray Basunia, son of Jotedar Dhyairya Narayan Ray Basunia arranged “Dol” fair at Ful Bari area between the periods of 1930-1935 A. D. He patronized folk drama and song everyday in the fair. There was a rumour among the people about their house-

“Shirish Ghosher Dari

Dhyairya Narayaner Bari”

Explanation: Shirish Ghosh was a famous Merchant with long beard and the house of

Jotedar Dhyairya Narayan was the biggest one in the area. Total area of his house was on 12 Bighas of land.²⁸

Jotedar Raja Mohan Ray: Jotedar Raja Mohan Ray was 2nd son of Khelu Ram Ray and he got 500 acres of land from his ancestral source. He took an important role to spread of education in the area of Gonsair Hat. A Minor English School was set up on 15th January, 1952 by his initiatives. Sarala Bala Ray and Nani Bala Ray the two widow wives of Jotedar Raja Mohan Ray spreaded their helping hands to convert the M. E School into a Junior High School. They donated 5 acres of land to this school. Gradually this school became High School on 20th May 1982. Other land doners of Gonsair Hat High School were Patu Ram Ray, Rup Kanta Ray, Shashi Mohan Ray etc. Jotedar Raja Mohan Ray was deeply associated with socio-cultural activities in the area. He was the strong member of the managing committee of Dhupguri High School and was a secretary of Tista Torsha G Association. He got the title of “**Babu**” from the British. He first showed the uses of Camera, Motor Cycle, Gun, Irrigation etc. He observed Basanti Puja (original Durga Puja) in his premises. Kali Puja and Manasha Puja were observed very well by his initiatives. He patronized song Jatra and other recreations for this purposes. Of course he bore all financial expenditure for these cultural activities.²⁹

Conclusion: There were more Jotedars in the Western Dooars but I am not in a position to discuss all the Jotedars so I have selected some of Jotedars in the regions. On the whole the Jotedars of Western Dooars played a positive role behind the spread of welfare activities and education during the colonial and post colonial period. They engaged to promote the cultural branches such as education, festivals, music, art, physical culture etc. they extended all sorts of assistances for the socio-cultural development of the area. There was dichotomy in their efforts but that was natural. They had been mostly silent in removing the superstitions of that time. General people were far from the effect of their welfare activities. Actually they moved within their limitation and remained faithful to their ideological and class character. In spite of these shortcomings, it should be mentioned that being the Jotedars they had done more in that period which left positive mark on the socio-cultural life of Western Dooars as well as Bengal.

References:

1. Sunder D.H.E. (Ed Roy D.C.)- *Final report on the survey and settlement of the Western Dooars in the district of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95* NLP-2013-PP-5-8.
2. Sanyal Charu Chandra and Others Ed- *Souvenir of Jalpaiguri District, Centenary vol. 1869-1968*.P-73
3. Grunning John F. - *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers-Jalpaiguri*. NLP-2008-PP-108-110.
4. Roy Anirudha Ed- *Itihas Anushandhan-18*.FKLM Pvt Ltd-Kol 2004- PP-326-330.
5. Ghose Dr. Ananda Gopal Ed-*Madhuparni-Jalpaiguri Jela Sankhya-1394B.S*.PP-221-222.
6. Sunder D.H.E. (Ed Roy D.C.)- Op.cit P-9.
7. Interview: Ahmed Afiruddin Age-81 Date 12/03/2012.Hela Pakri.
8. *Souvenir of Pada Moti Union Rahimuddin High School (50Years Celebration) 1946-1996*. P-56

9. Ibid-P-62
10. Interview: Manjil Rahaman . Age-71 Date 14/03/2012 Pakali Bajar.
11. Ibid.
12. Sharma Umesh- *Jalpaigurir Roy Bahadur- Khan Bahadur*. Grantatirtha- Kol -73, 2001 PP-41-46.
13. Ibid-PP-49-51.
14. Interview: Roy Basunia Manmatha-Age-69 Date-15/02/2012.Jalpesh More.
15. Roy Anirudha- Op.cit-PP- 320-325.
16. Uttar Banga Sambad-Date-01/01/2008-P-7.
17. Interview: Hari Mohan Barman, Age-83 Date-15/03/2012.Rangali Bajla.
18. Ibid.
19. Interview: Ray Lakshmikanta, Age- 59, Date-15/03/2012. Shalkumar Hat.
20. Kar Arabinda-Ed-*Jalpaiguri jela Sankalan*. 2nd Vol.Jal.PP-807-811.
21. Interview: Ray Nibaran, Age-58 Date-16/05/2012. Daukimari.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview: Chakraborty Prionath, Age- 64, Date-17/05/2012. Jalpesh.
24. Interview: Alam Bablu, Age -58 Date- 18/05/2012.Kathalguri.
25. Interview: Choudhury Rafiqul, Age-62 Date 19/05/2012.Rajadanga.
26. Interview: Ray Sushil , Age-71 Date-03/03/2013. Katham Bari.
27. Ghosh Dr Ananda Gopal, Ed-*Madhuparni-Jalpaiguri Sankhya 1394 B.S*.
28. Interview: Ray Basunia Bhupendra Nath, Age -76 Date-20/03/2013. Falakata.
29. *Souvenir of Gonsairhat High School, 2002*. PP-17-19.

N.B.-In preparing this paper I have been immensely helped by my teacher Prof. Aanada Gopal Ghosh and some books like 1.Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in Jalpaiguri District by Milligan J.A., 2.Land and Livelihood--- Jalpaiguri by Sutradhar Dr. Kartik Ch. 3.Jalpaigurir Raikat Bansher Rajarshi by Sharma Umesh, 4.The Dooars in Historical Transition by Debnath Dr.Sailen etc.