

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT FOR THE PH. D TOPIC:

**Agrarian Life In Bengal under Three Regimes: Mughal, Nizamat and The
Early Colonial from 1580 to 1789 A.D.**

**Submitted and defended by: Gitanjali Dey to the University of Delhi
for the Award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Objective and purpose of the Research:

The research titled : **Agrarian Life in Bengal under Three Regimes: Mughal, Nizamat and the Early Colonial from: 1580 to 1789 A. D.** was basically undertaken to explore the ‘Agrarian Life’ of Bengal under the three regimes of Mughal, Nizamat and the early Colonial. The agrarian history of the subcontinent has been a very vibrant field of research for it provides useful insights into the histories of regions and is often a back bone of narratives and explorations seeking to understand ‘transitions’ and ‘metamorphosis’¹ at the politico socio economic levels. It opens up contour of ‘territorial spaces’ which conventionally seem locked into staticity and mundane political narratives. Bengal was one such region to have undergone the process of such a change not once but several times in its history. The medieval period of Bengal is indeed fascinating because it unravels the contours of such change. The period of sixteenth to the eighteenth century was a period which was witness to colossal level of transformation and metamorphosis seen in its politico-economic spheres leading to social transformation of the landscape.

Proposed Hypothesis and Central Question:

Moving away from the straight jacketed narratives of political discourse the research was taken with an endeavour to look into the period of sixteenth to the eighteenth century was a period which was witness to colossal level of transformation and metamorphosis seen in its politico-economic spheres leading to social transformation of the landscape. This transformation that came about involved a dense and huge magnitude operating through the mechanism of processes of production and methods of extraction of surplus; the issues of

¹ The phraseology of transition and metamorphosis is not a new concept and has been used by several scholars. They have made use of the same to understand the dynamism of historical changes happening across centuries cutting across landscapes. However, they made use of these terms in different senses and degrees. Thus, the idea here is to make use of these terms in the context of Bengal which was a witness to several changes at politico socio-economic levels from the time of Mughals to *Nizāmat* and Early Colonial Administration.

proprietary rights; revenue claims; the units of revenue administration; the various kinds of claims made on the peasants; the profile of the peasantry and the deployment of the same components by regimes. More often than not the subsequent entrenchment that happens is hinged upon very thin line of negotiations among various players involved in the process rather than on absolute control.

Bengal was an example of such a process involving ‘paradigmatic shifts’ which crisscrossed with the fate of the erstwhile Mughal power ebbing away and the distribution of authority to the *Nazims* and the ‘entrant’ East India Company beginning their career as mere ‘tenants’ of the Mughal Emperor protecting their trading rights in the territory held by ‘*nazims*’ finally emerging as the main power-brokers. The two centuries and three regimes actually was a very vibrant area of exploration for it would provide insight into the protracted processes of churns bringing about complete transformation of the agrarian landscape. Understanding the agrarian life of Bengal and appreciating the resultant transformation thus, could not have been carried on in isolation of smaller time span and required a *long durée* approach.

Research Methodology and Approach:

The entry into such a vibrant field was indeed fraught with problems which manifest at various levels right from existing historiography of the region to the huge gaps in the primary sources which hinder the weaving of a continuous narrative as well as absence of holistic cross comparative accounts. Given the long time span and variegated source material in the form of : Persian Accounts, European Sources, Local Archival records, Factory Records, Gazettes, Maps and Cartographic Sources; the research had to be utilise both the Quantitative and Qualitative approaches.

Initial Phase of Research Work

The first phase of research work involved the understanding and gathering information about the proposed work from several texts. For this the National Archives, New Delhi, Indian Council Historical Research library premises and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) were extensively made use of to gain an understanding of the available records. This period was used to develop an understanding of the current historiography, the problems of it as well as the possibilities and areas which need to be explored. The material collected was to be utilised to frame the basic frame line of chapters proposed in the research.

Field Work and Research

After gaining the preliminary insights into the topic and extensive discussion with the supervisor, an extensive field work was planned. The State Archives of West Bengal located in Kolkata (Writers Building Division)was visited. From here one collected primarily the Company Records Catalogues to substantiate the data collected from the National Archives, New Delhi. A trip was also undertaken to the District Collectorate of Burdwan, (since it was one of the biggest Zamindaris during the time of Nawabs as well as a very important centre during the Early Colonial Regime). The National Library Alipore Calcutta was also visited during the field work.

Final Stages of Research

In the final stages of the research the library of Centre for Advanced Studies of Aligarh Muslim University was undertaken to have access to rotographs of rare manuals and texts. At this stage, the final data compilation, mapping and graphical and statistical representations in the thesis were made. The colossal level of data

that was collected had to be categorised, tabulated and put in place in sync with the thesis. The rigour of data collection and writing of the thesis also required the fine tuning of the chapterisation to provide a logical framework for a *long durée* approach. There were many crucial records which were of great significance from the point of view the research, had to be put in the Appendices so that the work does not become too unwieldy in terms of content and treatment.

Concluding Remarks:

The research on agrarian life of Bengal is reflective of the understanding of issues pertaining to the processes of agrarian production and the mechanism of the collection and distribution of the Revenue mechanism by the three regimes : Mughal, Nawab-Nazims and Early Colonial Administration for two centuries i.e 1580-1789 A.D. It covers within its wider ambit the issues of landed proprietorship, the revenue mechanism and its deployment, the classes related to the extraction of revenue and the peasantry. The passage of centuries and the change of regimes altered the texture of all these components; with each regime deploying the revenue mechanism as per its own understanding and perception and leanings. Often such changes are known to have brought about a fundamental transformation in the agrarian landscape of a region.

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