

**SYNOPSIS**

**ON**

**SITUATING THE ZAMINDARI AND BUSINESS HOUSES OF  
COLONIAL HOOGHLY AND HOWRAH (MID 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO  
EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)**

For the fulfilment of the Doctor of Philosophy in Arts

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# SITUATING THE ZAMINDARI AND BUSINESS HOUSES OF COLONIAL HOOGLHY AND HOWRAH (MID 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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**Statement and Purpose of Research:** This research aims to investigate the transformation of Bengal from pre-colonial to colonial era under different colonial set-ups (French, Dutch and British), from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. As Eric Hobsbawm marked the 19<sup>th</sup> century as ‘the long nineteenth century’<sup>1</sup> in the global context, it was also known as an era of reconstruction, conversion and evolution for India. The influx of European powers into India profoundly altered the conventional course of its history, particularly in Bengal, which was one of the most significant provinces for both commercial and agricultural sectors during the colonial era. The first phase of European expansion in India saw these powers attempting to extend their control over the subcontinent; however, they faced significant challenges due to the unfamiliar conditions and administrative systems of the region. The initial years were marked by experimentation because colonial powers tried to transplant their institutions and Western economic and social philosophies into the Indian context. These efforts were fraught with failures as they struggled to adjust their systems to local realities.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the British, in particular, succeeded in consolidating their rule by introducing a more structured bureaucratic system. This allowed them to establish a more efficient and centralised administration, which had far-reaching implications for the local social and economic history. This transformation inevitably reshaped the socio-political and cultural fabric of Bengal and the whole nation

at large. However, the word ‘Transformation’ signifies a massive and convoluted meaning by itself, but in a historical context, none of the transformations can take place in one way or one medium. In understanding the ‘transformation’ and ‘shifts’ of history, we must examine it distinctively. Thus, focusing on the transformation of colonial Bengal, it is important to study its different colonial establishments, their elements and roles through the lens of various regional contemporary aspects and perspectives to portray an inclusive picture of colonial Bengal.

**Historiography:** This thesis will engage with both regional history and family history, two interrelated yet distinct historiographical approaches. By engaging with both regional and family history, this thesis aims to contribute to the broader historiographical discourse, shedding light on Bengal’s historical evolution through localized narratives while situating them within the larger historical framework. While regional history as an academic discipline has gained prominence in recent years, its significance extends to the global forum. Nonetheless, regional history and world history share a profound connection and impact; hence, it is being called ‘*Glocal*’ nowadays. The interplay between global and regional events underscores the importance of studying local histories, as they often provide unique perspectives on broader historical processes. However, not all regional histories gain global recognition despite their inherent connections to wider historical narratives.

Historians like Philip Riden<sup>2</sup>, Carol Kammen<sup>3</sup>, Erica Hunt<sup>4</sup>, M. Williams<sup>5</sup>, Francis Celoria<sup>6</sup>, Mark Bever<sup>7</sup>, David Hey<sup>8</sup>, etc, have massively enriched the research of regional studies. They focus on various historical perspectives by illuminating various scholarly arguments to understand the development of the subject. From global to home, scholars discuss the methods and media of the regional study, and how to write regional history. And what methods should be followed in the research of regional history writing, etc?

Recently, Prof. Amerigo Caruso dedicated an insightful examination of the post-revolutionary political landscape, emphasizing the role of reform-oriented aristocratic clans and their alliances with the bourgeoisie. By focusing on the Balbo family, a prominent aristocratic lineage in Sardinia-Piedmont, the study argues that stability and pragmatism were key drivers in the political and ideological shifts within the noble-bourgeois elites during the first age of global revolutions. Using family history as a methodological lens, the article reinterprets this period of profound social transformation, state expansion, and political modernization. It traces the Balbo family's evolution across multiple generations and genders, analyzing their role not only in the revolutionary and Napoleonic era but also in the decades following the Congress of Vienna. The study provides fresh perspectives on state-building, constitutional reforms, and the emergence of a new, composite elite that would shape European politics well into the late nineteenth century. This approach highlights how local aristocratic families like the *Balbos* adapted to changing political realities, balancing tradition with reform to maintain their influence. By examining their interactions with the expanding state and the evolving political order, the article contributes to a broader understanding of elite adaptation and continuity in an era of significant upheaval<sup>9</sup>.

In India, several historians and scholars have emphasized the importance of regional history. For instance, Prof. V. D. Ghatе<sup>10</sup> illuminates the role of regional history in connecting individuals to their cultural environment, particularly in the context of childhood education. Prof. E. H. Carr<sup>11</sup> further reinforced this perspective, arguing that the study of history should begin with an understanding of 'history at our doors', emphasizing the relevance of local history in historical inquiry. In this regard, researcher Bhairabi Prasad Sahu put forward a nuanced historical understanding in her scholarly article about

the significance of regional history, which illuminates the journey of regional history in India from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era<sup>12</sup>.

In Bengal, the study of regional history remains relatively underexplored compared to other historiographical traditions. Nevertheless, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, regional history in Bengal gained significant momentum as eminent scholars and academicians took an interest in documenting the sociocultural and political developments of the region. Historians such as Satish Chandra Mitra, Rajnikant Gupta, Chandicharan Sen, Ambikacharan Gupta, and Sudhir Kumar Mitra played pivotal roles in writing the regional history of Bengal. They have offered valuable insights into Bengal's diverse historical and cultural discourses. Among them, James Long, in his article *On the Banks of Bhagirathi*, published in the *Calcutta Review*<sup>13</sup>, exemplifies how personal engagement with one's immediate surroundings can produce insightful historical narratives. Satish Chandra Mitra is best known for his monumental work *Jessore-Khulnar Itihas* (Vol. I and Vol. II),<sup>14</sup> and Sudhir Kumar Mitra provided a detailed historical account of the Hooghly district in his book *Hooghly Jelar Itihas*<sup>15</sup>. Both books combine archival research with folklore and oral traditions. Apart from these, several significant works have contributed to the methodological framework of regional history writing in Bengal. Such as, *Social History of Kamarupa* (Vol. I & II) by Nagendra Nath Vasu<sup>16</sup>, *Kolikatar Itibritto* by Prankrishna Dutta<sup>17</sup>, *Maharaja Krishnachandra o Tatkalin Bangasamaj* by Dr. Alok Kumar Chakrabarty<sup>18</sup> and *Kolikatar Kotha* by Pramath Nath Mallick<sup>19</sup>. These texts meticulously demonstrate the methods and approaches required to construct regional histories, offering detailed accounts of specific areas, their social structures, and cultural transformations.

In the field of Family history, while it has traditionally been viewed as a subset of social and economic history, recent scholars have demonstrated its broader significance in

understanding historical transformations. It has gained increasing recognition in mainstream historical studies, particularly as an interdisciplinary subject. Several notable works have contributed to this field, offering in-depth studies of influential families and their roles in shaping Bengal's colonial economy and society. Blair B. Kling's *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India*<sup>20</sup> exemplifies this approach, focusing on the life and economic influence of Dwarkanath Tagore, a key business figure in colonial Bengal. Through extensive research, Kling presents a comprehensive account of Tagore's rise, his engagement with British enterprise and his impact on Bengal's emerging capitalist economy. Similarly, Prof. Nilmoni Mukherjee's *A Bengal Zamindar: Jaykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and His Times (1808-1888)*<sup>21</sup> explores the life and influence of a prominent *zamindar*, shedding light on the intricate relationship between landed elites and colonial administration. Other significant contributions to family history include *Life and Times of Cantoobaboo - The Banian of Warren Hastings* (Vol. I & II) by Soumendhra Chandra Nandy<sup>22</sup>, *Maharaja Nava Krishna Deva Bahadoor* by Beepin Beharry Mitra<sup>23</sup>, and *Memoirs of Nubkissen Bahadur* by N.N. Ghosh<sup>24</sup>. These works collectively emphasize the role of key economic and political figures—*zamindars* and *banians*—who played pivotal roles in Bengal's transformation under British rule. They also explore how family histories are deeply intertwined with larger political, economic, and social forces, making them crucial to understanding Bengal's colonial experience.

The economic evolution of Bengal from pre-colonial to colonial times played a fundamental role in shaping family histories. To contextualise these shifts, classic texts such as *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (Vol. I & II)<sup>25</sup> offer critical analyses of the economic transition from pre-colonial agrarian structures to colonial capitalism. These volumes examine the intricacies of economic policies, land revenue systems, and their

impact on indigenous elites. Additionally, Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*<sup>26</sup> provides a broader theoretical framework to understand Bengal's integration into the global capitalist economy. His work presents an innovative and panoramic reinterpretation of global economic history, positioning Bengal within the larger forces of capitalist expansion and European imperialism. Thus, by examining both regional and family history alongside economic transformations, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Bengal's colonial past. Through the lens of influential families and economic structures, it seeks to highlight the interconnectedness of local agencies and global economic forces in shaping historical narratives. As the economy played a key role in all historical dynamics, we cannot disregard the economic structure and its transformation in our research.

**Research Hypothesis:** India's vastness often leads to historical narratives dominated by selective regions, events, and a handful of influential individuals. However, to truly understand the history of such a diverse and complex country, it is essential to explore regional historical trajectories and the local forces that played a pivotal role in shaping India's rich and multifaceted past. Secondly, since the economy plays a significant role in every aspect of society, to explore the historical context of the epoch, we must understand that the Hooghly River was the primary waterway for trade and commerce in Bengal at that time, until the establishment of Calcutta Port in 1870, which massively impacted Bengal's history and all its regions, like Hooghly. As it was one of the most paramount regions of Bengal back then, in terms of both commercial and agricultural, which inevitably impacted the socio-political and cultural scenario of Bengal and paved the way for transformation. In the colonial era, while the British dominated much of India and Bengal, regions such as Chandannagar and Chinsurah experienced distinct forms of

colonial subjugation under other European powers, including the French and the Dutch. The political, socio-economic, and cultural conditions of these regions diverged significantly from the rest of the country, yet remained intrinsically connected to the larger currents of Indian history. Their heritage and legacy played a critical role in shaping societal dynamics, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of colonial impact. These pockets of non-British influence present a compelling dimension to regional history, which retains its unique charm within the mainstream historical narrative.

On the other side, during the late colonial period, the districts of Bengal that increasingly attracted colonial interest and strategic development were Howrah, Calcutta, and their adjoining regions. The historical significance of the Hooghly District and its surroundings was closely intertwined with the prominence of the Hooghly Port until the emergence of the Calcutta Port. Following that, the establishment of Calcutta Port, particularly by 1870, marked a pivotal shift that elevated the strategic and economic significance of Calcutta and its vicinity. This transition, actively promoted by colonial authorities, contributed to the gradual decline of the Hooghly Port. Consequently, Calcutta and its neighbouring areas emerged as the focal point of the subsequent decades of political, economic, and historical developments in Bengal. Owing to these facts, this dissertation will focus on both the complex dynamics of colonial rule of Bengal, the Hooghly and Howrah districts during the early nineteenth century, particularly the interaction between European powers (such as the French, Dutch and British) and the indigenous elites.

The research will also examine how local elites adapted to the new changes under different colonial setups and navigated Bengal's history along with their regional strings. Aiming to explore the transformation and evolution, the dissertation will focus on three case studies. The renowned *zamindars* and business houses, such as Roquitte, Seal, and

Roy, along with the most important family members of those families, respectively Dourga Chorone Roquitte, Nilambar Seal, and Ram Charone Roy, will be the subject of the case study. Illuminating their extensive influence and impact on various spheres of contemporary society, this research will emphasize their financial emergence, role, and impact on society. Since the economy plays a significant role in every aspect of society. This theme will be emphasized in each chapter of this dissertation. These chapters will deal with the emergence and impact of those local business houses of colonial Bengal in three different colonial set-ups. Their role, history, cultural heritage, and influence within their locality, as well as in Bengal, will be discussed in these chapters. Focusing on that, as a case study, these three families will be part of the respective three chapters of the dissertation. The last chapter of the dissertation will hold a comparative discussion and a holistic interpretation. Similarities and disparities will be the key points of the discourse in this chapter. This chapter will emphasize how these three different colonial set-ups, their history, culture and heritage are separated from each other yet interconnected.

The primary objective of choosing these three elite houses under different colonial regimes is to analyse how the changes brought about by colonial rule impacted local elites and their socio-economic status. By examining these families' experiences, the thesis aims to understand:

- **The financial emergence of local elites:** How did these families navigate the political, economic, and social changes imposed by the colonial powers? What role did they play in local governance and commerce?
- **The political equation:** How did the colonial powers interact with and adjust to the power structures of local elites? What kind of cooperation or tension existed between these regional powers and the colonial authorities?

- **Social transformation:** How did the economic and political reshuffling affect the social structure of Bengal? How did it transform both local and regional power dynamics and the broader social fabric of the region?
- **Reconstruction of the cultural structure:** The thesis will also examine how these changes restructured the social hierarchy, impacting not only the elites but also other classes within society, such as peasants, artisans, traders, and laymen.

Thus, focusing on three different colonial regimes—French, Dutch, and British—and their interactions with regional elites, the thesis will provide a comprehensive view of Bengal's transformation during the colonial period. It sheds light on the adaptive strategies of local powers and the interplay between global colonial ambitions and regional socio-political structures. This analysis not only contributes to the understanding of Bengal's colonial history but also offers broader insights into the mechanisms of power, adaptation, and resistance in colonized societies. The journey of the Roquitte family, the Seal family, and the Roy family during the transition era of colonial Bengal will provide a nuanced understanding of how various colonial powers interacted with and shaped local business communities.

It will also explore how these interactions contributed to the transformation of Bengal's socio-economic structure and governance during the colonial era, offering a window into the broader processes of colonialism and its long-lasting effects on Indian society. Nevertheless, the term metamorphosis is vast and convoluted in itself. None of the transformations can take place in one way or one medium. In understanding the transformation and shifts of colonial Bengal, we have to examine it distinctively. This research examines the different colonial establishments, their elements and roles through the lens of various contemporary aspects and perspectives.

Moreover, the thesis aims to shed light on the diverse elements of regional economic transformations, with their socio-cultural impacts and various developments that often remained on the margins of mainstream historical discourse. This dissertation seeks to illuminate the significance of regional history in grasping the wide array of issues, themes, and conceptual frameworks associated with Bengal's local pasts to familiarise researchers with the wealth of regional and vernacular sources by emphasizing the requirement of integrating these issues into the broader national historical narrative.

**Methodology:** In the present study, an extensive range of primary and secondary sources has been consulted to examine Bengal's transformation from the pre-colonial to the colonial era under the French, Dutch, and British regimes, spanning from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The primary sources comprise archival documents, contemporary books, Gazetteers, letters, newspapers, and the financial records of the Roquitte, Seal, and Roy families, collected from various archives, libraries, and private repositories. Rare and valuable materials, such as books, maps, journals, and documents, were accessed from Nrittya Gopal Smriti Mandir, Chandannagar Pustakagar, Gondolpara Library, Biddharti Bhavan's historical bookstall in Chinsurah, the French Museum, and the Rashbihari Research Institute of Chandannagar. The secondary sources were obtained from the National Library, the University Library, the State Archives, the Asiatic Society, the Ramakrishna Mission Library, the Joykrishna Library of Uttarpara, and the Rammohan Library. In addition, several digital repositories and e-resources, including Oxford University Press, Cambridge Core, SAGE, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, E-Sodh Sindhu, E-Sodhganga, and Archive.org, have been extensively utilized for accessing relevant books and journals.

Field research formed an integral part of the study. Visits to Bolpur, Varanasi, and the interior localities of the Howrah and Hooghly districts facilitated the collection of oral

testimonies and supplementary materials through personal interviews with the present members of the concerned families. Continuous academic interaction with Shri Kalyan Kumar Chakraborty, the owner of the Rashbihari Research Institute, proved immensely valuable, as his remarkable collection of rare documents and books significantly enriched the research. I am also profoundly indebted to Prof. Biswanath Bandyopadhyay, Shri Shyamal Bera, Prof. Md. Jahidoor Rahaman, and Prof. Sulagna Chakrabarty for their scholarly guidance and for generously sharing crucial materials and insights throughout the course of this research.

### **Chapter Scheme:**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 1: **Merchant and Zamindari Communities of Bengal on the Eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: An Overview**

Chapter 2: **The Roquitte Family of Chandannagar: Under the French Colonial Setup**

Chapter 3: **The Seal Family of Chinsurah: Under the Dutch Colonial Setup**

Chapter 4: **The Roy Family of Andul, Howrah: Under the British Colonial Setup**

Chapter 5: **Business and Zamindari Families of Chandannagar, Chinsurah & Andul: A Comparative Study**

#### **Conclusion**

### **Key Findings:**

**The First Chapter-** *Merchant and Zamindari Communities of Bengal on the Eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: An Overview*- The first chapter establishes the historical context by

analyzing the key transformations that marked Bengal's transition from the pre-colonial to the colonial era. It examines how the decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of British colonial rule reconfigured existing power structures, enabling some groups to prosper while others declined. This background provides a foundation for understanding the broader socioeconomic and political shifts that shaped Bengal's history. The chapter explores how local kingdoms and influential families adapted to or resisted the expanding influence of European powers—particularly the French, Dutch, and British—and how global and domestic forces reshaped economic and cultural frameworks. Two major transformations are identified: first, the land-based changes brought about by the Permanent Settlement, and second, the evolution of trade and commerce. By tracing these developments, the chapter highlights the multifaceted dynamics that defined Bengal's transformation, focusing on the experiences of three prominent families—the Roquittes of Chandannagar, the Seals of Chinsurah, and the Roys of Howrah—who operated under different colonial regimes. The decline of Mughal authority thus emerges as a pivotal factor that opened space for both regional elites and European powers to assert dominance, reshaping Bengal's socioeconomic landscape.

**The Second Chapter - *The Roquitte Family of Chandannagar: Under the French Colonial Setup***- During the colonial period, Chandannagar, under French administration, offered a distinct model of European governance in Bengal. Among its leading indigenous elites, the **Roquitte family**, belonging to the *Tantubai* caste (cotton weavers), played a crucial role in shaping the region's socio-economic landscape. This chapter examines how the **Roquitte** family navigated the French colonial framework, capitalizing on commercial opportunities while contributing to local philanthropy and education. The Roquittes were instrumental in advancing Bengal's renowned **cotton textile industry**, which had long been sustained by local business houses like theirs. Dourga Chorone's significant

contribution lay in redirecting Indian trade towards exports at a time when European merchants monopolized foreign commerce. His pioneering entry into the export sector marked a turning point, enabling indigenous products to reach global markets and inspiring other native traders to follow suit.

His company, **Dourga Chorone Roquitte & Co.**, became a hub of international trade. The company exported a wide range of goods, agricultural products such as rice, pulses, sesame, and mustard, along with silk sarees, handkerchiefs, opium, indigo, and ghee, to destinations including France, Europe, Colombo, Rangoon, Saigon, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados. Simultaneously, it imported European commodities like metallic paints, medicines, iron goods, and French liquors, thus bridging Indian and global markets. His entrepreneurial zeal not only diversified Bengal's economy but also strengthened its global commercial ties. Dourga Chorone's business operations employed both European and Indian staff. The Frenchman **Si Bhumen**, a resident of Chandannagar, was among his highest-paid employees, while numerous Bengali clerks, cashiers, and *muhuris* formed the core workforce—reflecting his balanced and inclusive management approach. His international exposure also refined the region's cultural sensibilities and introduced global trends to local society.

Beyond commerce, the Roquitte family profoundly influenced **Chandannagar's educational and philanthropic** spheres. Dourga Chorone founded *Ecole Dourga*, later known as *Dourga Chorone Roquitte Banga Vidyalaya*—the town's first boys' high school. This initiative inspired other elites to establish institutions such as *Krishna Bhabini Nari Shiksha Mandir* and *Lal Bagan Balika Vidyalaya*, which marked the beginning of women's education in Chandannagar. Among these philanthropists, **Desasri Harihar Sett** (1878–1972) stood out for founding *Nritya Gopal Unpaid Primary School* (1922) and *Krishna Bhabini Nari Shiksha Mandir* (1926)<sup>27</sup>. Likewise, local businessmen like

**Bholanath Das, Kestakishor Das, and Prafulludhan Bhad** established *Lal Bagan Balika Vidyalaya* in 1926, demonstrating a growing civic spirit. However, unlike his contemporaries, Dourga Chorone did not promote women's education within his own family, revealing a conservative and patriarchal outlook despite his progressive commercial vision. Nevertheless, the family's broader contributions, such as constructing ponds, ghats, and rest houses, greatly benefited the local populace. In the **political domain**, although Dourga Chorone Roquitte himself refrained from direct involvement, his descendants continued his legacy of civic leadership. His younger son **Tulshi Chorone Roquitte** served as Mayor of Chandannagar in 1937; his grandson **Tarini Chorone Roquitte** became President of the local French council; and his son-in-law **Bholanath Das** (Mayor in 1899) and descendant **Dinendra Nath Das** (Mayor in 1883) held prominent offices. Other family members, including **Prafulla Chorone** and **Amulla Chorone Roquitte**, also played vital administrative roles, while **Debendra Nath Das**, his grandson, joined the **National Democratic Front (N.D.F.)**, engaging in revolutionary politics.

**The Third Chapter - *The Seal Family of Chinsurah: Under the Dutch Colonial Setup***- Chinsurah, under Dutch control, presented a distinctive model of European governance in Bengal. Within this framework, the **Seal family**, belonging to the **Subarnabanik community**, traditional traders of gold, rose to prominence as one of the region's most influential business families. This chapter examines their commercial dominance, economic strategies, and interactions with Dutch authorities, offering insight into how indigenous elites adapted to and thrived under a colonial regime that, though shorter in duration than the British or French, significantly shaped Bengal's local economy and society.

The **Seal family** maintained strong ties with the former **Subarnabanik Trading Association of Hooghly** and acted as a bridge to the emerging business community of

Calcutta. Their activities greatly contributed to the rise of the Subarnabanik community, which played a key role in the establishment and early prosperity of Calcutta. As noted by J.C. Sinha<sup>28</sup> and C. R. Wilson<sup>29</sup> after the foundation of the Calcutta port, numerous local merchants, Hindus, Muslims, and Armenians migrated there to trade under the protection of the British East India Company. This movement was driven both by Britain's ascendance in India following the decline of other European powers and by the steady migration of merchant families from the Hooghly region. Prominent families such as the **Bysacks, Subarnabaniks, Setts, and Tagores** shifted their commercial bases to Calcutta, which accelerated the economic decline of Hooghly while laying the foundation for the new colonial capital.

Beyond commerce, the **Seal family** also made notable contributions to Bengal's **cultural** and **literary** spheres. They produced several plays, including *Baralok* (Farce, 1274 Bangabdo/1867), *Chandravati* (1275/1868), *Dhruvacharitra* (Puranic drama, 1278/1871), *Hotat Babu* (a satire on Kshetranath Seal, 1872), and *Tirtha Mahima*. Many family members were involved in translating original works, thereby promoting literary engagement and performance culture in the region. Their patronage attracted eminent figures, including **Rabindranath Tagore**, and helped foster a vibrant cultural environment in Chinsurah. These endeavours reflected the Seals' **financial affluence, religious patronage, and commitment to cultural advancement**, which collectively elevated the social and intellectual life of their community. Their philanthropic initiatives and artistic pursuits left enduring landmarks in Bengal's historical landscape. Yet, while their influence in trade, culture, and society was profound, the family's legacy also invites critical reflection on their limited engagement with larger nationalist movements during pivotal moments in India's history.

**The Fourth Chapter:** *The Roy Family of Andul, Howrah: Under the British Colonial Setup-* By the 19th century, Howrah had come firmly under British control, shaping the fortunes of its landed elites. The **Permanent Settlement of 1793** fundamentally altered Bengal's landholding structure, paving the way for the rise of new zamindars who replaced older landholding families. Many British administrators strategically forged alliances with influential zamindars to safeguard colonial interests, resulting in a mutually beneficial partnership that redefined Bengal's socio-economic order. During this period, Bengal underwent sweeping transformations—economic, social, and political. As colonial rule penetrated deeper into Bengal's economy, zamindars increasingly adapted to these changes, balancing both opportunity and adversity. The **Hooghly port's strategic importance** and the prosperity of its surrounding areas spurred the emergence of several elite zamindari families. By the late 19th century, Howrah mirrored this pattern, witnessing the rise of prominent landholders such as the **Roy (later Andul Raj) family**, whose influence came to define the district's development.

The **Roy family of Andul** played a decisive role in reshaping Howrah's financial and infrastructural landscape. The construction of **Andul Raj Road** and **Raja Raj Narayan Street**<sup>30</sup>, both initiated by the family, linked Howrah to Calcutta, which became the principal economic hub following the establishment of the **Calcutta Port in 1870**. These roads greatly enhanced trade, facilitated communication, and connected smaller villages to the expanding urban centre. Improved transport networks stimulated commerce, attracted diverse settlers, and encouraged the growth of educational and social institutions, marking a turning point in Howrah's economic and cultural history. Parallel to these infrastructural advancements, Bengal's territorial and administrative boundaries also evolved. In **1795**, Hooghly and Howrah were separated from Burdwan to improve governance amid industrial expansion. Initially merged for administrative convenience, Howrah's rapid industrial growth, driven by its proximity to Calcutta, eventually

necessitated its separation. By **1937–38**, Howrah had emerged as an independent district and one of Bengal’s foremost industrial and urban centres.

Culturally, the Roy family profoundly influenced the region’s intellectual and artistic life. Through the establishment of several **Chatushpathis (Sanskrit schools)**, they transformed Andul into a renowned centre of learning, often referred to as the “*Navadwip of South Bengal*.” Scholars from Mithila and Varanasi, such as **Bhairava Chandra**, were invited to teach, enhancing the region’s reputation for Sanskrit scholarship and yoga. The family’s patronage extended to music and performing arts; their court hosted **majlis** gatherings featuring eminent artists from Delhi, Lucknow, and Gwalior, symbolizing the family’s refined cultural taste and commitment to traditional arts. Their engagement with the **Hindu Dharma Mahasabha** and the **Kayastha movement** further reflected their efforts to elevate their community’s social status. By reviving rituals like the *Upanayana Sanskar* and aligning them with Brahminical customs, despite opposition from figures like **Radhakanta Dev**, they sought to reform and dignify Kayastha identity. Their contributions to literature and heritage were documented in *Andul Raj-Prasasti* by **Pream Chand Tarkabagish**, which celebrated the family’s legacy and cultural patronage.

In the educational sphere, the family established **Andul Academy**, which evolved into **Andul H.C. English School** and is now known as **Mahiyari Kundu Chowdhury Institution**. Emphasizing both Sanskrit and English education, the institution embodied a synthesis of tradition and modernity, nurturing intellectual and social progress across generations. Continuing this legacy, the family introduced the ‘**Andul Rajabda**’ calendar and constructed notable architectural landmarks such as the **Andul Rajbari**, **Nat Mandir**, and **Durga Mandir**, all of which stand as enduring symbols of their cultural sophistication and regional influence. Thus, under British colonial rule, the **Roy family of Andul** not only consolidated economic and political power but also spearheaded the district’s

educational and cultural renaissance, leaving an indelible mark on the socio-historical fabric of Howrah<sup>31</sup>.

**The Fifth Chapter-** *Business and Zamindari Families of Chandannagar, Chinsurah & Andul: A Comparative Study*- This chapter will attempt to bridge the individual stories of the families with a broader cultural and historical narrative. Focusing on the similarities and diversities between the families (Roquitte, Seal and Roy), the chapter will also elaborate on how their respective histories and social positions reflect the larger dynamics of Bengal's transition from the pre-colonial to the colonial era. By weaving these aspects together, the chapter will provide a layered portrayal of how different *zamindars* and business houses contributed to the cultural and political evolution of Bengal while remaining firmly grounded in the mainstream historical narrative of the time.

The idea of exploring their cultural intersection, with a blend of traditional values and the influence of colonial modernity, will offer a compelling reflection of the larger societal shifts. By examining the similarities and differences in their economic strategies, social positions, and adaptive mechanisms under French, Dutch, and British rule, this comparative study highlights the diverse ways in which local elites navigated shifting colonial landscapes. Beyond economic enterprises, the chapter will explore how these families balanced traditional values with the forces of colonial modernity, shaping their immediate communities and the evolving socio-political fabric of Bengal.

**Overall Observation:** The pioneering efforts of local zamindars and business houses should not be reduced simply to accounts of their eventual decline or celebrated only for their wealth. Rather, their capacity to establish themselves, adapt, and flourish within an increasingly competitive and colonial environment stands as a testament to their vision and resilience. By introducing new business practices and setting important

precedents for entrepreneurship within their communities, these families helped to shape the wider transformation of Bengal's socio-economic landscape. Their legacy lies not merely in the material fortunes they accumulated but also in the cultural and economic shifts they embodied, paving the way for subsequent generations of entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The calculative loyalty of Bengal's zamindari and merchant families ensured their survival at a time when many older lineages declined or faced reprisals for resisting colonial authority. These newly emergent families assumed an intermediary role during Bengal's transitional phase, rising as powerful zamindars or businessmen by skilfully navigating the turbulent circumstances of the colonial period. Their ascendancy not only fostered the development of their respective regions but also redirected the broader trajectory of Bengal's history. Through their networks and patronage, local economies and cultural practices were drawn into the larger framework of Bengal's transformation.

**Research Gap:** This research relies predominantly on indigenous documents, resulting in a notable lack of foreign sources and contemporary family records. Contradictory statements among family members and the absence of strong, verifiable documentation from other families further weaken the evidentiary base. Many valuable documents have been lost over time, and the few surviving sources are scattered and often inaccessible due to their fragile condition. Collecting reliable materials proved challenging, as the information is highly localized and preserved in limited repositories. Moreover, several family members were reluctant to participate in interviews, often refraining from sharing critical details or expressing anything that might cast their ancestors in a negative light. Consequently, obtaining honest testimonies remained a significant difficulty.

## Bibliography

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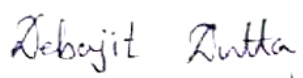
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