

## Zamindar's Land Management and Local Society

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In this paper I have made a tentative attempt at throwing light upon the relationship between landlordism and local society in colonial Bengal by examining certain aspects regarding the establishment for land management. Source materials have mainly been taken from the manuscript files about the Court of Wards' estates in the Dacca division.

It has been found that the *zamindar* of eastern Bengal gradually shifted the social base of his land management from the *mandal*, or the village headman, to the *tahsildar* who was generally recruited from what I called the *jotdar-haoladar* class comprising both *bhadraloks* and well-to-do *raiyats*. This shift was necessitated by the falling-off of the village autonomous system as well as by the initiative of the colonial state power in delegating central control of collection of the land surplus to the new landed class, i.e. *zamindars*. In this process the *zamindar's* land management system became more centralized in the sense that it came to absorb the functions hitherto carried out by the *mandal*. Secondly, it is notable that even at the turn of the nineteenth century quite an elaborate establishment—the *tahsil* establishment as I called it—was still required in eastern Bengal to exert on the *raiyats* various forms of extra-economic coercion: sheer physical force, litigation, and covert intimidation. In fact, about half of the *tahsil* establishment consisted of such muscle-men as peons, *peadas*, *mirdhas* and *jamadars*.

This paper is a revised and enlarged version of chapter 14 of my 'Agrarian Structure in the Dacca Division of Eastern Bengal 1870—1905' (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Calcutta, March 1985).