

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRADE OF THE VALLEY**

### **2.1 Internal and External Trade**

Internal trade or home trade is the exchange of domestic goods within the boundaries of a country. In other words, when buying and selling of goods and services take place within the geographical limits of a country, is called internal trade. This may be sub-divided into two categories, wholesale trade and retail trade. Wholesale trade refers to the trade in which goods are sold in large quantities. On the other hand retail trade refers to the business firms engaged in offering goods and services directly to consumers. In most but not at all cases, retail outlets are primarily concerned with selling merchandise. External trade is the exchange of capital, goods and services across international borders or territories. In most countries, such trade represents a significant share of gross domestic product. Such exchange is termed as external trade. It is also known as foreign trade or international trade. When buying and selling of goods take place across the national boundaries of different countries it is called external trade.

Both in internal and external trade, selling and buying take place but there are some differences between internal and external trade. Some of important differences are as follows:

- (1) In the case of internal trade, the produced commodities of a country are sold in different parts of that country. But in external trade, the produced goods of a country cross the boundaries of a country and are sold in another country and the produced commodities of foreign countries enter into our country.
- (2) The commodities which are sold and purchased in internal trade, do not find place in external trade. But the commodities which are produced inside a country may not be demanded by the people of foreign countries. So the commodities which are demanded in foreign countries find place in external trade.
- (3) The value of commodities are determined with the help of currency of that country in internal trade but in external trade value of commodities are determined with the help of exchange rate between the currencies of two countries.
- (4) In the case of internal trade, factors of production like land, labour, capital and organisation are mobile, to get higher income in any part of a

country. But it is not possible in the case of external trade. Labourers and capital of a country cannot move easily from one country to another country. So in external trade, there is less mobility of factors but it is more in internal trade.

Trade and Commerce, as a source of wealth and a means of providing the people with commodities that they do not themselves produce as well as exchanging the agricultural surplus for other products was an honourable means of livelihood in ancient Barak Valley. Though in modern times Barak Valley has lost much of its reputation in this field, the high antiquity of its inland and foreign trade is borne out by a large number of indigenous and foreign sources. These prove that many of the products of Barak Valley were known and admired in different parts of ancient India. Two factors seem to have facilitated the early development of trade and commerce in Barak Valley, firstly the qualitative and quantitative development of her small indigenous industries and secondly, the unrivalled facilities for easy movement of goods, afforded by the wonderful network of navigable river.

During the colonial period, Barak Valley is no doubt a rich region in regard to her natural resources in raw material, but her financial resources are poor and it is an oft-repeated complaint that her people are not suitable for expert labour. In fact, the large number of them are not willing to work as labourers of any kind on receipt of monthly wages in any factory or plantation. The largest and the most important industries of the province as Tea which was run mostly by European capitalists with labour almost entirely imported from the other parts of India. Except in a few localities there is not a rich landed class, while the middle class is composed entirely of professionals such as lawyers etc. and men in the service of Government or other employees.<sup>33</sup> The trade in the Barak Valley was almost entirely in the hands of the Marwaris and in the Surma Valley, the Sahas of East Bengal are the prominent traders. There is therefore, not much capital lying idle which can be drawn out. There is no doubt money-lending to some extent and in some places the rate of interest is too high, but we do not believe that the amount of money invested in money-lending is very large.

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<sup>33</sup> *Economic Report of Assam*, Government of Assam, 1941, P. 1.

The people were in the main by agriculturalists having certain cottage industries by way of subsidiary occupation and means of earning. The pressure on the soil though gradually increasing is not yet great. There is therefore hardly any prospect of building up an artizan population in the province. Capital and labours are therefore both wanting in Barak Valley. The Tea industry has attained almost phenomenal prosperity within recent years. Investment in this industry is now considered to be very sound but the purely indigenious tea concerns of decent proportions are yet very few indeed.<sup>34</sup> There is growing willingness on the part of the natives of the province to invest in this industry, but sufficient capital cannot always be collected. On the other hand, Indians not belonging to the province having capital at command are gradually acquiring existing tea properties and opening out new concerns even under unfavourable circumstances.

For establishment of such large new industries in the province as have distinct promise of success both capital and labour will therefore have to be obtained mainly from sources outside the province, and it is for this reason that special facilities and attractions such as favourable land tenures and special labour laws have to be provided to draw capitalists for few industrial undertakings in Barak Valley.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the cottage industries of the province such as rearing of silk worms and hand-loom weaving have been in existence from time immemorial. That they have not died out yet inspite of apathy and various other unfavourable circumstances is due mainly to the strong attachment for hereditary callings. I will discuss at some length the position of these industries and draw attention to some of the measures likely to give them an impetus and a new lease of life. These old unorganised industries are not less important for the economic advancement of the people than the larger industries that can be developed.<sup>36</sup>

Trade in the valley was conducted under two sections (1) internal and (2) external. The later is again subdivided into (a) overseas trade and (b) interstate trade of the different

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<sup>34</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Impact of Bengal Renaissance on Assam*, Calcutta, 1968, P. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Notes on some Industries of Assam*, from 1884-1895, Government of Assam, 1896, P. 17.

agricultural and industrial products of ancient Barak Valley, the major part would no doubt be required for direct or home consumption and were of course use up on the spot. The economic system gave prominence and preference to production for domestic use, as against production for exchange. But when a surplus over the domestic needs was left over, or when the production of any commodity was in excess of all home requirements, or was a particular speciality of the region, it may well have been utilised for export, just as well as any commodity which was not available in home production in sufficient quantity could and would be imported. This must have been the natural origin of trade in Barak Valley.

Compared with the information about foreign trade in ancient Barak Valley, the materials at our disposal for re-constructing conditions of internal trade in the same period are very few. This is due to the fact that record which form the most valuable and trustworthy source of our information concerning the early economic life of the people, do not and cannot by their nature be expected to deal primarily with trade. Whatever references to internal trade are found in them is purely accidental. Similarly, old records though giving us vivid and often exaggerated accounts of the foreign trade of Barak Valley refer hardly to conditions of buying and selling in home markets. The time when these works were composed, the foreign trade of Barak Valley was limited to a vague tradition in which facts and fictions were hopelessly blended. Yet this record seems to take pleasure in depicting that glorious tradition rather than to enumerate dry facts of internal buying and selling of goods. Nor do historians throw much light on this matter, for they had very little first-hand information. Most often, their visit was confined to one or two important towns and their chief interest naturally lay in the foreign trade of the country.<sup>37</sup> As a result, this source furnish very few facts on the different aspects and items of internal trade in ancient Barak as Valley.

In view of the mearge materials at our disposal, we have often been compelled to use materials belonging to later times, for it is well known that, the socio-economic structure of an area is rearly subject to sudden change, many of the conditions of internal buying and selling

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<sup>37</sup> Kamarunnasa Islam, *Op. Cit.* P. 134.

in markets, means of transportation etc. Now prevalent in Barak Valley must be regarded as a continuation of earlier period.

From the available sources, it is apparent that the internal trade had three distinct aspects, which also reveal the inter-relation between resources, the market and the conditions and nature of transport facilities.

1. The first was connected with trading activity embracing the movement and exchange of agricultural and industrial products between different parts of Barak Valley. Commodities such as rice, pulses, oil-seeds and other articles of local origin enter into this activity.

2. Another aspect of internal trade was linked up with the movement of raw-materials of agriculture or industrial origin, primarily meant for export of the region. Articles such as rice, oil-seeds, tea, timber, oranges, Agar etc. were collected and then carried to different ports or centres of trade, to be exported to different parts of the country and outside the country. Collection was main aspect of these transactions, while distribution only a minor role.

3. The third aspect was the handling of mainly imported articles, such as metals, salt, brass-ware, precious and semi-precious stones, clothes, horses etc. meant for internal distribution. The activity of internal trade was obviously marked by its distributional character.<sup>38</sup>

Actually, during the colonial period, Barak Valley had been predominantly an agricultural country. Even the village artisans were following agriculture as their subsidiary occupation. The most important economic unit was the village. The villages differed in size. In the plains average village was large and populous but in the hills it was a small one. The villages in Cachar plains were smaller than the villages in Karimganj. The reason was political instability, foreign aggression, famine, natural calamities and also the heavy taxation. It was

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<sup>38</sup> Kamarunnasa Islam, *Op. Cit.* P. 135.

found that land revenue often absorbed the whole rent of the land lord. The method of collection of rent by the officials had been oppressive. In Cachar the Raja's Moktars often harassed and tortured the ryots for the delay in payment, all these reversed the agricultural process. According to Lindsay the low lands were barren only the high lands produced crops.

## 2.2 Agriculture

In Cachar the condition was even worse. Plough cultivation in high lands in Karimganj was a far cry. Here the method was Jhumming. The yield was poor. The important crops grown were rice, (Sali, and aus) and minor-cereals as also commercial crops like cotton, mustard, sugar, cane, tobacco, poppy etc. The rotation of crops was of standard pattern without any variation.<sup>39</sup> Every year some strips of land were left fallow for regaining fertility. It was the open system of cultivation and there were hardly any enclosures around cultivable lands. The agricultural implements were primitive and simple-wooden plow, iron sickle and leather bag to draw water from well which was the main source of irrigating the agricultural lands. Only natural manure was used. Hardly any new crops was tried, nor were the cattle looked after in a scientific way. Old traditions governed agricultural practices in the villages.

Price of food grains often fluctuated from place to place because of lack of adequate transport and communications. The markets were local markets. Lakhipur Bazar on the Cachar. Manipur border had been a fairly large market with foreign connotations. Before the growth of tea industry Lakhipur had been the centre of silk and cotton trade, Timber, Woolen, Cane and bamboo were exported and imported through that market. Karimganj was also a flourishing market for exporting rice and jungle product. In 1765 excepting those two markets there were no markets worth the name. However, there were small bazaars at Udharband, Sialtek, Sonai, Tipaimukh and Jiri in Cachar and Ratabari, Patharkandi and Nilambazar in Karimganj area. The prices of the commodities fluctuated depending upon the local conditions. The flood of 1780 damaged the paddy crops in Sylhet resulting the fall of prices. Robert Lindsay granted exemption of the revenue for that year. Similarly the improved law

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<sup>39</sup> F. Hamilton, *Op. Cit.* P. 6.

and order in Cachar led to upswing of the land prices which jumped from Rs. 6/- to 40/- per hal during the administration of Lyons in 1840.<sup>40</sup>

The wage rates had been very low and governed local customs. During the harvesting season normally the wages were paid in kind. The low wage rate of the cotton weavers compelled the yugi community to give up their traditional occupation, weaving. G. Verner, the Superintendent of Cachar in his report to the Bengal Government mentioned about the prevailing wage rates in Cachar as follows.

The pressing out oil from mustard seeds by which each man might earn about 10 pie per day.

The beating out of Dhan	9 pie
The making of bamboo	5 pie
The making of mats	2 to 3 pie

The manufactory would require to be about 90 fit long and by 30 fit broad, the cost of making which if made of bamboos and grass is estimated at about Rs. 80.<sup>41</sup>

The rates of labour per day during the administration of T. Fisher (1833-35) had been 8 annas. This had been a high rate but very few volunteered to work. The daily wage rate of a labourer during the rule of Raja Gobinda Chandra had been one anna or one sixteenth of a rupee only. This low wage rate and lethargy of the local people were responsible for the near – dead circulation of currency among the common men. Circulation of money leading to capital formation and increased production had its start during the British administration. The one evil effect was, however, the rise of prices. Mention may also be made that the forced labour known as bandhan was in vogue in Cachar during the rule of Kachari Raj.<sup>42</sup> The people had to work in the royal house hold on specific occasions as compulsory duty. Bandhan was similar to that of the laloo of Manipur and Kiran of Sylhet Fauzdar. In Sylhet slavery was abolished

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<sup>40</sup> D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 126-127.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* P. 189.

<sup>42</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 141-142.

in 1840 so also in Cachar but the English did not abolish the forced labour in Barak Valley and Manipur. However, the English paid wages at market rate to such labourers.

In Barak Valley the village was the administrative and economic unit. Every big village had a numbers of artisans belonging to different occupations and they performed their duties hereditarily. They were paid the wages according to the village customs. The artisans were the servants of the village community often receiving rent free or low rent lands. This custom was more prevalent in Cachar than Karimganj. The artisan was sure of the sale of his commodities and he did not face any competition but all these adversely affected the quality of production. However, the villagers were self contented people and had very little economic want as the consumer durables did not make much head way in the rural life. For all practical purposes, the village in Barak Valley was a self sufficient one.

In autonomous and self sufficient villages, the caste system hereditary occupations, customary payments of rent and wages and institutions like joint family provided certain amount of social and economic security to practically everyone. But such a system also meant absence of competition and urge to improve one's economic condition by showing initiative and enterprise.<sup>43</sup> The consequence, therefore, of such a system was that the economic system in villages became stagnant and as time went on deterioration set in the handicrafts. Economic stagnancy was thus the main result of the isolation of the villages of Barak Valley.

In Surma-Barak Valley, there were many kinds of rural handicrafts. Cotton textile was most important. The weavers of Sylhet produced sufficient quantity of clothes. The Manipuris of Cachar were expert weavers and their cotton and silk products *endi* and *muga* were of excellent quality. Bhagyochandra the exiled Raja of Manipur stipulated in his agreement with the English to supply the company 10 mounds of silk balls at the rate of Rs. 5/- per seer. The fugitive prince was sure that he would collect the silk balls from Cachar and clandestine import from Manipur, his lost Kingdom. The Manipuri, Kachari and Dhean aristocracy were fond of silken clothes and Dhakai muslin. All those found their way to Surma-Barak Valley,

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<sup>43</sup> *Note on the Industrial condition and possibilities of Assam*, Government of Assam, 1934, P. 8.



through various trade routes.<sup>44</sup> However, the common people were poor and were satisfied with the coarse quality of cotton goods. Poverty and poor taste of the customer had their effect upon the quality of production. Baranga, at the outskirts of Silchar was well known for dyeing and designing. Cachar Muslims controlled the craft and the enterprise to boot.

The Pre-British craft guilds in towns were better organised than the village guilds yet the latter's organizations were effective and regulated by their own customs and laws. The crafts were mostly hereditary and caste based. In Cachar the village textile industry was completely free from the presence of middle men. However, in Karimganj there were middle men.

Actually, the economic organisations in the Pre-British Surma-Barak Valley had been similar to that of the other parts of the Indian continent. According to Abul Fazal, India's economy was divided broadly into two classes – rural and urban economies. In Surma-Barak Valley, there was no town. Thus, it was a simple domestic form of economic organization in the rural society. Population was sparse particularly in Cachar. The area available for cultivation per head was greater in the pre-British era, the people rarely attempted to producing more with the view to become wealthy. They were satisfied with the production to meet his requirements only. They were happy with the food and drink and clothes. Because of the predominance of Hindu philosophy in the people's mindset, Muslims not excluded, there had been apathy towards better life. Brahminical Hinduism instead of upholding the value of wealth downgraded it. That led to stagnation in agricultural production. The potential was, however, very great. Thus, when more people got settled into Karimganj and when restriction on immigration in Cachar was gradually lifted by the British authorities there was a sharp rise in the agricultural production. There is truth in the statement of the British authorities that until the British developed communications and organised the trading, the commercial communities did not arise. That was particularly true in Cachar. In Sylhet, the commercial

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<sup>44</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* P. 143.

community Sahujis were there but they had less interest in grain trading. Large scale grain trading began since the days of the Burmese war 1824-26.<sup>45</sup>

The economic picture of Surma-Barak Valley after the annexation had been characteristically different from the picture of the presidency of Bengal. The economy of Bengal declined after the British annexation. According to Bernier the kingdom of Bengal had a hundred gates open for entrance of wealth, but not one for departure. The English fleeced the economy of Bengal. But the economy of Surma-Barak Valley flourished. Not only this is true about the tea industry but also about the agricultural production and cottage industries.

The Surma Valley is a flat plain about 125 miles long by 60 wide, shut in on three sides by ranges of hills. The river from which the Valley takes its name rises on the Southern slopes of the mountain ranges on the borders of the Naga Hills District, and flows south through the Manipur Hills. The western end of the Valley lies very low, and at Sylhet the low water level of the Surma is only 22.7 feet above the sea. The Banks of the rivers raised by deposits of silt above the level of the surrounding country and are lined with villages which in the rainy season appear to be standing in a huge lake. Further east the country rises and fields covered with sail transplanted winter rice take the place of swamps in which only the longest-stemmed varieties of paddy can be grown, but even here, there are numerous depressions or hoars as they are called in the lowest parts of which water remains during the dry season, and which can only be used for grazing or the growth of winter crops. In western Sylhet the houses of the villagers are crowded together, gardens and fruit trees are scarce and the scenery at all season of the year is tame and uninteresting. Cachar and eastern portion of Sylhet have, on the other hand, much to please the eye Blue hills bound the view on almost every side, the villagers are buried in groves of slender palms, feathery bamboos, and broad-leaved plantains and even in the dry season the country looks fresh and green. The level of the plain is broken up by low ranges and isolated hills and here and there beds of reeds and marshes lend variety

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<sup>45</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 144-145.

to the scene. Little or no forest exists in Sylhet, but there are extensive reserves in the south and east of the Cachar district.<sup>46</sup>

## **2.3 Important Items of Export from Sylhet**

The first mention of the trade of Sylhet is to be found in the memories of Mr. Lindsay, who was appointed collector of that District. The Principal export at that time were lime, elephants, iron, silk, coarse, muslins, ivory, honey, gums, drugs and oranges. For the Assam Valley records are fuller, thanks to Muhammadan invaders. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ahom rulers seem to have adopted a policy isolation and forbade people either to enter or leave their territories and trade was carried on by a caravan which proceeded once a year to Sylhet with gold, musk, agar, pepper and silk and exchanged these products for salt, saltpetre, sulphur and other articles. The most important manufacture of Sylhet after tea is lime, which is burnt on the banks of the Surma River. Other specialties of the District are mats made of bamboo and reeds, boxes and furniture made reeds, leaf umbrellas and bracelets of shall and lac, agar or attar, a perfume distilled from the resinous sap of the agar tree, children toys, fish oil, dried fish and boats. Iron work inlaid with brass, lac inlaid with feathers and tale, and ivory fans and chessmen used farmely to be manufactured, but these arts are now in a very languishing condition,<sup>47</sup>

### **2.3.1 Rice Cultivation**

The staple crops of the Surma-Barak plains are rice which in 1903-04 covered 66 percent of the total cropped area, tea 19 percent, oil seeds 5 percent, other food grains including pulse 1 percent, and sugarcane 2 percent. Wheat, barely graine and maize are only cultivated in small patches, generally by foreigners. The manner in which the staple crops are raised is described in the following paragraphs.

Rice falls into three main sub-divisions, sail or rice transplanted winter paddy, aman or long-stemmed paddy generally sown in marshy tracts and aus or summer rice. Sail usually

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<sup>46</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Sylhet, Op. Cit.* Pp. 1-5.

forms about 70 percent, of the rice crop of the plains, about 8 percent, and aus about 22 percent.

Sail on transplanted winter rice is, raised in the following way. The seeds, which are selected from the largest ears of the previous year's crop, are steeped in water in bamboo baskets, with a layer of straw spread over them, till they begin to germinate. They are then sown broad cast on the little beds near the homestead or on the higher parts of the rice fields. Those nursery beds which are known as hali charas are ploughed up five or six times, and watered till the soil is reduced nearly to a puddle.<sup>48</sup> They are then divided up into small patches with little drains which serve to tarry off the water if there is heavy rain.

The seed comes up a rich emerald green, and at the beginning of summer, these patches of the brightest green herbage are a striking feature in the rural landscape. In the meanwhile the fields are being got ready for the reception of the seedlings. The husbandman starts ploughing as soon as the soil is softened by the spring rain, and repeats the process from four to eight times till he has reduced the land to a rich puddle of mud. After the third ploughing the field is harrowed, the little embankments, a few inches high, intended to retain the water are repaired, and if the fields adjoin the road or the village site, they are fenced in with split bamboo. When the seedlings are about seven or eight weeks old, they are taken from the nursery bed and carried in large bundles to the fields. Hence, they are planted out in handfuls each of which contains two or three plants at the beginning of the season and four or five if transplantation is being carried on at the end of summer when there is little probability of the seedlings throwing out new roots.<sup>49</sup>

The distance at which the guchis are planted from one another depends upon the fertility of the soil and the time at which the work is done, but as a rule they are placed about eighteen inches apart. It is not unfrequently the practice to steep the young plants in water before they are planted, and if they seem too luxuriant, the tops are cut off before they are removed from the nursery. Transplanting goes on from the beginning of July to the middle of

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<sup>48</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 43-47.

<sup>49</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 63-65.

September, and is sometimes carried out by the women of the humble Hindu castes such as the Dom patnis malis and Namasudras. Muhammadans never allow their womankind to labour in the fields and pay the Hindu women from two to two and a half rupees for every acre planted out. The Dom patnis and Naths or Jugis have recently come to the conclusion that it is derogatory to employ their women in this way and no longer allow them to transplant the paddy. Such an innovation is not to be regretted as the work is of a most arduous description and involves stopping for hours in a field of a liquid mud, under the rays of a burning tropical sun. Sometimes the supply of seedings runs short, and the grain is then steeped in water till it germinates, and is shown broadcast on the field. Before the end of the rains the crop is fully grown though the ears are still empty, but about the beginning of October they begin to fill and the field turns to a rich yellow. From the middle of November to the middle of January, harvesting is going on except amongst the Manipuris, the reaping and carrying of the paddy is entirely done by men. A handful of stalks is seized and cut off about eighteen inches below the ear. Each of these handfuls is called Kachi taking its name from the sickle used by the reapers and twenty or thirty are piled together and then tied up to form a Muit or bundle. Two muits form the load which is carried across the shoulder by the men, on a sharp painted bamboo or pale cut from an areca tree called hooja. The enterprising raiyat in Cachar is, however gradually realizing that there are easier and Cheaper means of transporting burdens than men's shoulders, and the harvest is sometimes dragged home on a primitive wheel less sledge made of bamboo to which a bullock or a buffalo is harnessed.<sup>50</sup>

Aman is a long stemmed variety of paddy, which generally, yields a smaller out turn than sail, which the grain is not as a rule, such a fine variety. Asra which is a kind, is sown broadcast on low land which has been ploughed up five or six times, and is harvested at the same time as sail. The area under transplanted is not large and the system of cultivation is practically the same as that employed for sail. is generally, grown in the lower country such as the parganas near the foot of the North Cachar Hills, Banraj, the Chatla haor, and most of all, the Hailakandi pargana.

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<sup>50</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 65-66.

Aus is either sown on char land which is exposed to risk of flood, or upon fields from which a crop of soil subsequently taken, it is also sometimes grown in conjunction with a crop of aman. The char land the fields are ploughed three times and harrowed and a short interval is than allowed to give time for the weeds to rot. Another, ploughing follows, the seed is sown broadcast, and the ground is again ploughed and harrowed to ensure that the grains become thoroughly mixed with the soil. The crop is generally ready for the sickle in June or July. Aus is occasionally transplanted like sail, but ripens earlier than that form of rice. Aus is grown very largely in the Hailakandi subdivision, where there is nearly one acre of aus for every two of sail, whereas in the sadar thana the proportion is about one to six.<sup>51</sup> The two varieties of aus most generally grown are known murali and dumahi. The later, as its name suggests, is supposed to ripen in two months though it usually takes a little longer, while for murali at least three months are generally required.

### **2.3.2 Mustard Cultivation**

There are three different systems for raising mustard in the Valley, known by the following names (1) dhupi (2) hainna (3) haoria. Dhupi is generally sown on high land near the homesteads. The land is ploughed five or six times and then manured with cowdung. Three or four ploughings follow and the mustard seed is sown. The field is then again ploughed twice or thrice and carefully harrowed to ensure that the seed is mixed with the soil. Hainna mustard is sown on char land, the system followed being the same as in the case of dhupi, but manure is not required. The haoria mustard, as its name implies, is raised in haors. It is sown on the moist silt as soon as the water sinks and no ploughing is required. The land is fertilized by the ashes of the reeds growing in these marshes, which have to be cut and burned before the seed is sown. Mustard is ready to be pulled in February. The plants after they have been taken from the soil are generally left to dry for a few days. They are then tied up in bundles and carried to the homestead where the seed is threshed with bamboo sticks. Most of the mustard in the valley is grown in the Hailakandi Valley and in the parganas on either side of the Barak, such as Sonapur, Banraj, Rupairbali and Barakpar.

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<sup>51</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Sylhet, Op. Cit.* Pp. 66-67.

### 2.3.3 Jute Cultivation

Jute is grown in small patches as a garden crop. The plants are cut in August and September, stripped of their leaves, tied in bundles, and left to rot in pools of water for from seven to twelve days. When they are ready, they are taken from the water, and the outer fabric is neatly removed from the stem. There were only 86 acres under jute in the Cachar plains in 1903-04.

Small patches of rhea are grown in the gardens of the fishing castes where they are heavily manured. When the plants are ripe a handful of stems is taken up, broken in the middle and beaten to and fro in the water till the inner part drops out and only the fibre remains. The thread obtained is exceptionally strong and durable, but the difficulty of decortications has hitherto prevented the growth of rhea on a commercial scale.<sup>52</sup>

Very little sun generally falls upon the actual homestead of the villagers as it is buried in clumps of trees, and the grain is accordingly dried and threshed in an open space outside the bari called the chotal. The place selected is cleared of grass and jungle, plastered with cow dung, and surrounded with a small embankment. The grain is generally trodden out by bullocks and winnowed either by letting it fall to the ground from a sieve or kula or by fanning it as it is spread out over the ground. When dry it is stored in a small granary or bhoral.

The agricultural implements in use are of a very simple character. The plough is generally made of the jack fruit tree or some other hard wood and consists of three parts. (1) the handle and the body which are usually all in one piece (2) the pole, which joins the plough at the junction of the handle and the body and (3) the yoke which is merely a piece of bamboo fastened by rope at right angles to the pole, with pegs affixed to it to keep it from sliding from the necks of the bullocks. The front portion of the body is sharpened to a point which is shod with iron. The whole instrument is suited to the wretched class of animals required to draw it. It weighs, as a rule, about 20 lbs, and when cattle are used the yoke seldom stands as much as

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<sup>52</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Sylhet, Op. Cit.* Pp. 68-69.

three feet from the ground.<sup>53</sup> When buffaloes are employed the whole plough is constructed on a larger scale. It is obvious that such an instrument can only penetrate from three to four inches into the soil, but the wretched quality of the plough cattle prohibits the use of a more effective implement.

The harrow (moi) is a bamboo ladder about eight feet in length, on which a man stands as it is drawn across the field by cattle. It is used to crush the clods turned up by the plough, before mustard or summer rice is sown and to reduce the fields required for wet rice to puddle. Hoes are used to trim the embankments which help to retain the water. The head is bought in the bazaars and costs from Re. 1 to Re. 1-4 and is fitted with a shaft by the farmer himself. Sickles (kachi) with which the rice is reaped, have also to be purchased and cost from 2 to 4 annas.

### **2.3.4 Rice husking**

The ordinary instrument used for husking grain is the dheki, a long beam of wood with a pestle affixed of the end which is supported by two posts about two-thirds of the length from the head. The shorter end is depressed by the foot and the pestle is thus raised into the air small wooden mortar which is sunk in the ground. A large pestle sia and mortar gail are also sometimes used for husking grain.

### **2.3.5 Sugarcane**

Sugarcane is grown on high land near the village site where the soil has to be well manured with cow dung, on low hills or tilas, and along the banks of rivers. The crop is propagated from the tops of the best canes, which are cut off at harvest time and kept in a shady place. One of these tops fields on the average about fine canes and as they contain but little juice, the cultivator does not sacrifice much of the gross products of his fields in the cause of reproduction. Three varieties of sugarcane are recognised in Cachar, viz – Dhola Khagri, Lal Khagri and Bombay.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> H. K. Barpujari, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 281-304.

<sup>54</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 69-71.



The Bombay variety is large and more juice than the indigenous kinds but yields a smaller proportion of sugar. The land on which the cane is to be grown is hoed until it is reduced to a fine tilth and the tops planted in trenches between April and June. The patch is fenced with split bamboo and while the crop is growing, it is hoed and weeded several times constant watching is required to scare away jackals and other animals and an empty oil tin with a clapper is generally to be seen suspended over each field.

The total area under sugarcane in the plains in 1903 – 04 was 5,200 acres. The parganas in which it is most extensively cultivated are Vernerpur, Udharband, Chatla Haor, Lakhipur, Sonapur and Banraj. In the disforested tracts, in the south of the Hailakandi subdivision, no cultivation is required. The low hills are cleared of jungle, the earth turned up with a hoe and the tops inserted. Canes so planted will yield a crop for three years in succession, as after the stems have been cut the roots are burnt, and throw out new shoots themselves the following season. The pressing of the cone and the boiling of the juice goes on from December to March. The native mill is made of wood and consists of two rollers fixed side by side in a trough hollowed out of a heavy block of wood. The tops of the two rollers pass through a beam supported by uprights let through the lower block of wood into the ground, and are cut into the form of screws which fit into one another. Two the larger of the two is affixed a pole which is driven round and thus causes the two rollers to revolve. This form of mill is called hamrangi, but it has been largely superseded by the iron mill. The juice is stored in empty oil tins, and when a sufficient quantity has been collected is boiled in iron cauldrons. When the liquid has been reduced to the proper consistency, the cauldron is taken from the fire and the molasses stirred till they assume the consistency and hue of yellow mud.<sup>55</sup>

### **2.3.6 Jhum Cultivation**

In the valley bottoms the Kacharis sometimes grow wet rice, in the manner which has already been described. On the hill sides the people follow the shifting system of cultivation

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<sup>55</sup> U. Guha, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 161-163.

known as Jhum. The jungle is cut in February and March and fired as soon as it is dry. The ground is then held lightly over, and the rice which is of two varieties, red and white, sown. While the crop is growing, it has to be kept free from weeds and it is finally harvested in November. Other crops raised are cotton, chillies, and maize. Cotton is planted, if possible, in sandy soil, in May or June and is gathered about the beginning of November. The ordinary agricultural implements in the hills are daos or bilt-hooks, small axes, hoes in which the head is fitted at an acute angle to the shaft, and sickles.<sup>56</sup>

The fertility of the rice fields mainly depends upon the following five causes: - the water supply, the quality of the soil, and the liability to injure from flood, wild animals and shade. The first named factor is probably of most importance. The animals which do most injury to the crops are pigs, monkeys and birds. Serious damage is sometimes done by insects called lehari and Kharta. The Kharta is a small bug which injures the rice plant by feeding on the stems and sucking all the sap from the young grains. It is most prevalent in July and August and is particularly in evidence during a spell of hot dry weather. High wind and rain drive it back into the jungle and good results are obtained by lighting fires of vegetable refuse to windward. The best remedy of all is to collect the insects by smearing a winnowing fan with some glutinous substance and brushing it over the ears of grain when many of the bags will be found adhering to the fan. This remedy should be tried in the morning or late afternoon, as the insects do not feed in the heat of the day. The chara is a tiny beetle, which eats away the outer surface of the leaves and stalks and thus affects the out turn of the crops. It attacks the young plants in the nursery and can most easily be destroyed there by spraying.<sup>57</sup> Smoking the fields also produces good results but must be continued for some days or the beetles will return. Rain is wanted when sail rice is sown and is transplanted but is not needed for the sowing of dumahi and murali. During every stage of its growth the plant is benefited by moderate showers, but rain is absolutely essential at the time when the ears are first appearing. Hail storms in December sometimes lay the crop and add materially to the cost of reaping, but fortunately are very local in their action.

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<sup>56</sup> Achut charn Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 40-42.

<sup>57</sup> A. Harington, *Analysis of Finances of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1940, Pp. 227-228.

One of the most valuable of garden crops is the plantain. As many as ten main varieties of this tree are recognized, but the most important are those known as athia, sail, cheni, champa and sapri. The first two groups are again subdivided into a considerable number of different species. The sail is a somewhat smaller tree than the athia, the pulp of the fruit is white and slightly acid in taste and it is largely used in combination with soft rice and milk at village forests. The sapri and cheni champa are small trees, whose fruit is much appreciated by Europeans. The athia plantain is generally grown near the homestead where it can obtain a plentiful supply of manure, but the finer varieties are planted at a little distance to protect them from the earth worms, whose attacks they are hardly strong enough to resist. Sandy soil and heavy clay check the growth of the plant, and anything in the shape of water logging is most injurious. The trees are planted in holes about a foot wide and eighteen inches deep and are manure with ashes and sweepings. Young saplings taken from 18<sup>th</sup> months to two years to flower and the flowers take from three to six months to turn into fruit. The plantain tree plays many parts in addition to that of fruit purveyor. The flower is much esteemed as a vegetable, the leaves serve as plates, and the trunks are used for decorative purposes in occasions of ceremony, and as food for elephants.<sup>58</sup>

### **2.3.7 Trees and Vegetables**

The betel nut is grown almost as universally as the plantain, and with the bamboo, forms the great trinity of trees in which the houses of the villagers are usually embedded. The plantation is hoed up and kept clear of weeds and the trees are most liberally manured with cow dung. Tobacco is generally grown by Manipuris. The seedlings are raised in carefully manured beds in August and September. At the beginning of November they are transplanted into ground which has been reduced to a fine tilth, watered for a few days and protected from the Sun by little sections of the plantain trunk. The bed is lightly hoed up two or three times and not more than ten or twelve leaves are allowed to grow on each plant, the remainder being picked off as they appear. The leaves are gathered in February and March. If required for chewing they are either dried under a shed, or else pressed into a hollow bamboo and allowed to ferment. When the tobacco is destined for the pipe, the leaves are piled in heaps till they

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<sup>58</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 59-62.

ferment, cut up and mixed with molasses, and then are ready for the hookah. The commonest forms of vegetable grown are, spinach, pui, lai, a species of brassica, different kinds of arums, different kinds of yams and gourds, the country bean vri, the radish mula, the sorrel chukka say and the brinjal or begun.

The outturn of different crops varies according to the character of the season and also to a great extent according to the character and level of the soil on which they are grown. The statement in the margin shows the normal yield per acre laid down by the Agricultural Department after a long series of experiments. These figures only represent a general mean and even in a normal year there are many fields whose outturn varies largely from the average. The yield of rice, it may be promised, is expressed in terms of husked grain. Like the outturn the cash value of the crop can only be approximately ascertained. The prices obtained by the raiyats vary to some extent in different parts of the district, but probably average about Re. 1-4 per maund of unhusked grain. Assuming that unhusked paddy yields 62 percent of clean rice, it would appear that the value of the harvest from an acre of sail is Rs. 24, from one of Rs. 21, and from one of aus Rs. 20. For mustard the villagers generally get about Rs. 2-14 a maund, so that the yield from one acre is worth about Rs. 17. Molasses fetch about Rs. 5 per maund so that the yield from one acre is worth some Rs. 185.

### **2.3.8 Animal husbandry**

Buffaloes are often used to drag the plough in Barak Valley is breeds. The Manipuri buffalo is a fine upstanding animal, with wide spreading horns and is larger and stronger than the bangar whose horns curve downwards and inwards. A Manipuri bull costs from Rs. 30 to 80, whereas the price of the bangar ranges from Rs. 20 to Rs. 50. The price of Manipuri cow buffalo ranges from Rs. 40 Rs. 125, and one of the other breed from Rs. 25 to Rs. 70.<sup>59</sup>

The cattle are miserable little creatures, and are some of the sorriest specimens of their kind. No attention is paid to breeding, during a portion of the year they generally go short of food, and the policy of total indifference and neglect is attended by the usual results. The

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<sup>59</sup> D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 93-98.

Manipuri cattle, though small, are a fine and sturdy little breed and are much appreciated by the cultivators of the Surma Valley. The goats are not much more satisfactory than the cattle, and yield little milk. There is no indigenous breed of sheep, and those that are imported do not thrive. The county ponies too are wretched little beasts about 11 hands high, with neither pace, endurance, nor manners. The Manipuri pony, though small, is a very different little creature. It has astonishing endurance and considerable pace and Manipuri ponies, with ten stone up, have run the mile in two minutes and ten seconds. Unfortunately, good ponies are now extremely scarce even in their native valley and comparatively few of them find their way into Cachar. A census of the live stock was taken in 1902 disclosed the following results: Bulls and bullocks 35,000, cows 62,000, male buffalos 19,000, cow buffalos 28,000, young stock, 83,000, sheep, 2,000 goats, 49,000, ponies, 1,100.<sup>60</sup> (See Appendix – 6)

During the rains, when the rice crop is on the ground and the haors or swamps are under water, there is often difficulty in obtaining grazing for the cattle. They are turned out on the high land between the fields, and on the jungle-covered hills to pick up what they can and rice straw is sometimes fed to them, but in every part of the plains there is a dearth of suitable fodder at this season of the year, and the condition of the cattle falls off very much. After the crop is cut they are allowed into the fields to browse upon the stubble or are driven to the swamps when the water falls. In the Katigora Tahsil there is a considerable area of low land that makes an excellent grazing ground in winter, the best known haors being the Thulang, the Talkar, the Rowar, the Dubria, and the Duba. In the hills, there is never any scarcity of grazing for the buffalos and mithun which are the only cattle kept by the hill men. In this portion of the district there are a considerable number of professional graziers, Nepalese by race, who were attracted there at the time when the railway was being made. In the plains, the buffalo-keeper who lives by selling milk and ghi is only found in the chatla haor and the Katigora Tahsil, and even there is by no means a common figure.

The most common forms of cattle disease prevalent in district are foot and mouth disease, rinderpest, a disease called Kachua, the principal symptoms of which are flatulence

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<sup>60</sup> *Provincial Gazetteer of Sylhet, Op. Cit.* Pp. 72-74.

and diarrhoea, cholera, matikhoa the first symptoms of which is, as the name implies, the eating of earth followed by dysentery and sukuna when the animal refuses to eat and dies after ten days or a fortnight.<sup>61</sup>

### **2.3.9 Tea**

The tea estates are in integral part of Cachar's socio-economic life. The tea was discovered growing wild in Cachar in 1855, and the first plantation was opened in mauza Barosangon in 1856. The gardens were at first laid out on the flat tops of the low spurs which project from the Barail towards the Barak. The area here available was unfortunately not large, and south of the river planters turned to undulating land and the low round-topped hills called Tilas, which are dotted about the surface of the plains. When these hills are cleared of jungle the soil is little inferior to that of the plateaux, which is of a chocolate colour, but the surface mould is washed away by the heavy rains, and the land in consequence loses much of its fertility. In 1875, the experiment was tried of planting out tea on a low marsh land which had been thoroughly drained and it was found that the rich soil yielded an exceptionally large return of leaf. The smaller drain are placed at intervals of about 30 feet apart and in pure peat considerable allowance has to be made for shrinkage of the soil when drained. In some cases bil land has sunk as much as four or five feet, and tea has been killed by water-logging, though in its uncleared state the site seemed suitable enough. Gardens of this kind are now found in every part of the district except the north and the north-west and furnish a considerable proportion of the total crop. The quality of the tea is not as good as that produced on other soils, but at present the difference in the market price is slight.<sup>62</sup>

### **2.3.10 Industries**

The industries of Surma-Barak Valley are of very small importance. They include weaving, the making of rough pottery, bell-metal utensils, iron hoes, daos, and simple agricultural implements and the expressing of mustard oil. The following statement shows the number of persons in the Cachar plains, who returned these various industries as their means

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<sup>61</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 73-76.

<sup>62</sup> E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1973, Pp. 177-179.

of livelihood, at the census of 1891 and 1901. From this it is clear that they can be of but little importance in the economy of an area which in the latter year had a population of 414,781 souls.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Workers in and Sellers of bell-metal etc.</b>	<b>Workers in and Sellers of iron work</b>	<b>Pressers and Sellers of oil</b>	<b>Makers and Sellers of pots</b>
1891	76	479	181	1,003
1901	80	505	68	647

**Source:** Notes on some Industries of Assam, Pp. 24-25.

This statement would at first suggest that the oilmians and the potter's craft were falling into disrepute, but this not the case. Considerable more than half the persons, who practiced these industries in 1891, were at the same time tillers of the soil, but in the census tables all these semi-agriculturists were shown as oil - pressers or potters as the case might be. In 1901, persons whose principal occupation was cultivation were shown under that head, and the fact that in their leisure moments they made daos or earthen pots was disregarded. Bell-metal utensils are caste in moulds by manipuris but the total output is extremely small. Iron daos, axes, hoes, and Sickles are made by Kamars from lumps of metal which they purchase from the local shopkeepers. Most of these blacksmiths are native of Sylhet. Mustard oil is expressed by the ordinary bullock mill of upper India.<sup>63</sup> The industry has few followers outside the town of Silchar weaving and pottery are dealt with in the following:

Lac is only produced in the North Cachar Hills. It is generally reared on vrhar and a plant called kallibot. The method of propagation is as follows: pieces of stick lac containing living insects are placed in baskets and tied on the twings of the tree on which the next crop is to be grown. After a few days, the insects crawl on to the young branches and begin to feed and secrete the resin. They are left undisturbed for about six months, and the twings encrusted with the secretion are then picked off. Two crops are generally obtained in the year, the first being collected in May and June, the second in October and November. The first crop is

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<sup>63</sup> *Notes on Some Industries of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 24-27.

largely used for seed and it is the second which supplies the bulk of the exported lac. Ants and the caterpillars of a small moth sometimes do much damage to the insect, and a heavy storm at the time when they are spreading over the plant will destroy them altogether. The lac produced is exported in its crude state and is sold to the Kaiyas of the Assam Valley.

Weaving is not practiced as a home industry in the plains of Cachar as it is in the Assam Valley, and the great mass of the rural population are dressed in the cheap fabrics of Manchester, and not in homemade cloth. The yogi caste is strongly represented, but few of them now touch the loom, and such clothing as is produced is for the most part woven by manipuris, kukis, kacharis, nagas and mikirs. The whole question of weaving in this province has been dealt with at great length in a monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam, published at Calcutta by the Superintendent of Government printing in 1897. In the absence of elaborate plans and diagrams descriptions of mechanical process of this character are extremely difficult to follow, and those curious in the matter should refer to the monograph itself. Any person who really wishes to understand the way in which the work is done, would, however, be well advised to study the subject on person, and on the spot.<sup>64</sup>

### **2.3.11 Forests**

The forests of Barak Valley fall into two main classes, the reserves and the unclassed state forests. Unclassed state forest is, however, nothing more or less than waste land at the disposal of the Government, and does not of necessity possess any sylvan characteristics. In 1903-04, the area of the reserved forests was returned as 807 square miles. The alteration in the southern boundary of the district, which was carried out in 1904, transferred a portion of these reserves to the Lushai Hills, but they remain for departmental purposes under the forest officer stationed at Silchar. The area of unclassed state forest was 711 square miles, but this does not include the area of wasteland in the North-Cachar subdivision, the population of this sub-division has a density of about 12 to the square mile, but the Jhum system of cultivation, which from time immemorial has been practiced by the inhabitants, is very unfavourable to tree growth.

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<sup>64</sup> *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 2-7.



The following are the most valuable timber trees found in the district, and the uses to which they are generally put. House posts – Nagesvar, Jarul, Gomari, Sundi and Ramdala. Beams – cham, rata, kurta, jhalna tailo, ramdala, dewa, poma, sida etc. Furniture – rata, kurta, poma, gundroi, cahm, kathal and dewa. Agricultural purposes – gomari and jam. Tea boxes – tula, dhumbail, am, kadam, simul, sutrong, haris, odal, hortuki, satri, and sita. Railway sleepers – nagesvar and sida. Dug-out canoes – cham, poma and simul. Boats – nagesvar, jarul, cham and poma. Firewood – Chalita, sita and buara. Perfumes – agar.

The reserved forests are under the general control of a forest officer, assisted by a suitable staff. In unclassed state forests, settlement holders are allowed to graze their cattle, and to remove any forest produce other than reserved trees, free of charge, provided that it is required for home consumption and not for sale professional herdsman pay a fee of 8 annas for each buffalo and 4 annas per head of other horned cattle.

The first step to be taken by a timber trader is to apply for a permit for the trees he wishes to extract. The trees selected are marked by an officer of the department, and can then be felled. After felling they are cut up into logs, dragged to the nearest stream, made up into small rafts and floated out of the forest. Trees whose specific gravity is greater than that of water are buoyed with bamboos. Lower down the river the Khata is made up into larger rafts and taken to one of the revenue stations at Sonaimukh, Silchar, and Siyaltek. Royalty can be paid either at Silchar or Hailakandi or at Katigorah Tahsil office and on the production of the treasury voucher, a pass is issued and the produce can be removed. Timber may not be landed before it has reached a check station, except under the written authority of the forest officer. The rates of royalty on timber in the rough vary from one to four annas per cubic foot, according to the character of the tree. On bamboos there is a duty of Rs. 2-8 per thousand. The outturn of timber from the unclassed state forest is, however, generally larger than that from the reserves. In 1900-01, there was considerable revenue derived from rubber, but the trees seem to have been killed out by overlapping and since that year very little caoutchouc has

passed through Cachar. Bamboos and cane are the most valuable minor forest products in the district.<sup>65</sup>(See Appendix – 5)

### **2.3.12 Economy of the Hill Tribes**

In Surma-Barak Valley, the forests and the hills lined different tribal groups with different names. The Kachari, Nagas, Kukis, Hmars, Lushais and the Dimachas to name the few. They had then distinct identities but their economic life had been more or less same. In the centre of the tribal economy was Jhuming and Jhuming regulated the culture of the tribal people. Tribal's economic groups from the family to the tribal, areas are units of a single economic type. They have one thing in common with the modern economic man, the entrepreneurial functions of the leaders in industry or agriculture.<sup>66</sup> British annexation of the hills removed the political uncertainties and precipitated stabilization both political and economic socio-political units under the chieftom gradually transformed into economic units viable economic functions. Despite the differences in customs of different tribes there had been a common emergences of economic units throughout the entire hill areas in Surma-Barak Valley.

The whole exercise of the elders of the tribal communities had been geared up to meet the economic needs of the villagers. They were, in fact, the organizers of the economic entrepreneurs acting as bridges between one tribal area with another. The village chiefs were not merely the executive heads of the tribal administration but also the superintending managers of the tribal economic.<sup>67</sup>

The skill in the field of tribal entrepreneurship had been an important asset to the economic structure of Mizo-Kuki Naga gerontocracy in the nineteenth century. That skill was a source of inspiration not only to the chiefs of the chieftom but also to the individual freedom or slaves. As the skilled chief flourished in the chief's union so did the enterprising individual in the villages. It is true that the economic activities were largely controlled by the

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<sup>65</sup> B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 85-89.

<sup>66</sup> *Review of the industrial position and prospects in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1908, P. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Achutcharan Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* P. 56

tribal community yet the owner of the household had enough scope of freedom in economic pursuits for his personal gain. The personalization of the tribal quom had been an integral part of the primitive economics.<sup>68</sup>

The economic choice was the most important financial activity of the village quom. However, the physical setting of the tribal belts of the trans-Manipur and Lushai Hills restricted the economic choice of a Mizo, Kuki or a Naga. The barriers were the barriers of Kinship and village groups. The chiefs and the village elders because of their economic privileges could command a greater resource and offer greater number of guests than their juniors i.e. the commoners. The will of the chief was thus, the most important factor in the economic choice of the village community. The rationale behind the chief will was his intention to preserve the status quo of the chieftom under his personal command. Thus, there was a clash of interest between the elders and the youth. Because of the elevated socio-political position of the elders the youth had to sacrifice their interest to a limited degree but with the coming of the English and introduction of western education and inflow of cash though the various trade marts established by the British administrators wrought a significant change in the attitude of the commoners who ultimately raised the standard of rebellion. But that was a late phenomenon.

One aspect of the economic choice needs mention here. The economic choice was the strong determinant of the market development in the primitive Naga-Mizo-Kuki-Dimacha societies. The Kukis of Cachar and Cachar borders and the Kukis of Manipur were more democratic and naturally in their quom the hold of the chief was not overbearing like the Mizo or Chin chiefs and that democratic social functioning helped the process of resources mobilization through the micro level economic choice which in turn produced a concomitant spin offs on the marketability of village goods in the trade centres in Cachar and Manipur. The process gradually percolated through the rigid Sailo society of the Mizo Hills.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> HNC Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes*, Guwahati, 1979, P. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Edgar, *Bengal Judicial Proceedings*, Calcutta, August, 1872, P. 39.

Like the plains land, the land in the hills also generated income. The land to Lushai, Kuki, Reang, Halam chief was ram. As the communities were migratory the land was under the chief so long he possessed it. The land was Jhum land.<sup>70</sup> Rarely the chiefs contested over the rights of one's - ram but with the rise of population and consequent scarcity of land and the political situation led them to feuding. However, they developed a loose union of the chiefs for the settlement of the boundary disputes. The British superintendent of Cachar very often acted as the mediator. The land of the Kacha Naga chief was materially different from the land of the zo chief. His land was stationary; each chief had his own perimeter of the lands. The chief was the absolute owner of the land in his perimeter. The subsequently adopted the principle of Naga perimeter system in the zo union of villages to avoid unwanted clashes. The Dimacha land owner was the subject of the King. The Dimacha had greater right over the use of land than the Naga or zo. However, the method of cultivation in all the cases of the tribal's was Jhumming.

The principal occupation of the zo had been agriculture and the method was Jhumming. The survey of the economics of agriculture is closely associated with the local conditions, however, varying from region to region and the typical division of labour prevalent among the hillmen. The agriculture of the high lands comes under the productive aspect of the tribal economy. The land tenure was the byproduct of the agricultural system of the hillmen. The ways and means by which the zo procured the raw products from the forests and the food stuffs from the slop of the hills were included within the scope of agriculture.

The word Jhum is the corrupt form of the Burmese word taunga. This type of cultivation is legacy of Mon Khmer culture. The culture of the hillmen of Cachar had been extension of the Mon Khmer culture. In America Jhumming is known Sweeden cultivation. The Jhumming was an agricultural cycle involving cutting and burring of the hill clearing of plots Sweeding of seeds, harnessing of the plants, harvesting and storage.

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<sup>70</sup> Suha Chatterjee, *The Status and Economy of the Chiefs in Mizo Chiefs and the Chiefdom*, Jaipur, 2004, Pp. 5-7.

In Jhumming the highlanders followed the pattern of rotation. They also followed the rules of the division of labour and had their voluntary association in labour. The association was very strong. According to HNC. Stevenson the association consisted of men related to each other by blood and also by friends and habitual companions. Even the youth courting the girl also helped the girl's family. The zo called the work force Seu.

Jhumming had been a slash and burn method resulting into soil erosion but when annual burning of forests were added to it as a means of helping process, the problem of soil erosion took its turn for the worse. That had an adverse effect upon the agricultural production, let alone the sparking off a chain reaction for the burning leading to the destruction of forest wealth. The zo became aware of those side effects of Jhumming gradually but not in the period of our survey.

The successful agricultural harvest led to the prosperity of the villages. They enjoyed the harvesting season with several festivals and each festival had the economic implications. The long and short of the story of Jhumming is that it is the story of the culture and civilization of the hill men Nagaas, Kukis, Lushais, Reangs, Dimachas.<sup>71</sup>

The hillmen of Surma-Barak Valley had a good conception of trade, both internal and external. They sold their surplus agricultural, forest and domestic products in the trade marts of Cachar during the days of Kachari Raj. Lakhipur, Jiri, Udharbond, Sialtek, Tipaimukh and Sonaimukh Bazars were known to the Nagas and the Kukis and the Dimachas. They purchased the necessaries from the Bengal and Manipuri traders. Bengal traders supplied them guns and gun powers and materials from making the gun. The tribals also purchased common salt, tobacco, agricultural field implements and utensils. The commerce of the hill men of Cachar border had never been a one way traffic. Thus, the hill trade was altogether different from the basket economy. The zo were migratory, the Dimachas were semi migratory gerontocratic community well conversant with the rules of trade. There had been steady

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<sup>71</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 203-204.

development of hill trade since 1826 (Treaty of yandabo).<sup>72</sup> There was political stability and free flow of consumer goods. The attitude of the British officials towards the poor hill men also had been sympathetic.

The hillmen acknowledged the British currency. However the ivory was also the hill currency dealing with the external trade. In domestic trade the principal currency was the mithun. The piglet, salt packets, iron bar, shawl or a basket of paddy also used as currency in the internal transactions. The volume of external trade of the Mizos of Cachar border alone was Rs. 800/- in 1879. The average tribal family consisted of 7 persons and its domestic surplus was about 30% of the total income. The valuable articles of hill commerce were ivory, India rubber, food grains, bamboo, timber, elephant hides, bess wax, honey ginger, fruits etc. The lure of trade brought the head hunting Lushai Kukis into the ambient of the civilization leading to a tension free border of British Cachar. The superintendent Cachar in 1850 informed the secretary, Bengal Government, before all dread of Luchyes will be at an end. The commerce also helped increasing the better understanding between the plains people and the hillmen.<sup>73</sup>

The hill commerce was dependent upon infrastructure. It was principally a riverine commerce. However, the British authorities and the authorities of tea estates improved the surface road to facilitate the commerce of both the people of the plains and hills. The impact of infrastructure upon the Cachar trade during the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been revolutionary. The hillmen did not lag behind to seize the opportunity. For the infrastructural development in Cachar the credit goes to Captain R. Stewart and especially to John Edgar.

Despite their heavy engagement those two officers did their stint to improve the economy of the hillmen living in Cachar and its immediate neighbourhood. Edgar set up hill markets in 1870 on the foothills to facilitate Luchai Commerce and encouraged the Lushai chiefs to sell their forest products in those markets. He also ensured the safety of the Bengal

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<sup>72</sup> D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* P. 135.

<sup>73</sup> HNC Stevenson, *Op. Cit.* Pp.62-64.

traders trading with the Lushais. Direct beneficiary of Edgar had been the powerful house of Sukpial, leader of the western Lushai clan.

The Kukis of the Tripura-Sylhet borders had been less fortunate and had to be contented with the relief they received from the British authorities of Sylhet. The hill of Karimganj yielded good revenue because of the rich forest products and the Hillman like Halams, Tipras reaped the benefit from the forest trade.<sup>74</sup>

The Dimachas living in the North Cachar Hills had been comparatively backward in matters of trade and commerce. The principal reason behind this backwardness had been the political trouble as well as the lack of enterprise of the Dimacha quom. The volume of trade of the North Cachar Hills during the period had been Rs. 6,000/- this is comparatively less than the volume of North Lushai Hills.

The tribals attitude towards the agricultural implements to argument production also needs mentioning. The Mizos, especially the Kukis developed effort to increase production by improved methods. They had no direction as they could not invent new method but whenever they got some idea about it from the plainsmen they attempted to improve their implements.<sup>75</sup> The difference in the size and shape of the daos of the different clans is a pointer to that effect. Despite the difference of economic activities between the primitive tribal society and civilized society mutatis mutandis they are basically the same so for the aim of the economy is concerned. The tribal is as much a economic man as is the civilized plains man. The fundamentals of economic theory can safely be applied to the tribal economy with all the possibilities of forecast.

Despite the nomadic habit of the Mizo-Kukis the tribal community like the stationery community took pride in rearing domestic animals of various kinds, like mithuns, pigs, goats and fowls. The mithuns were domesticated wild bisons. Of all the varieties of livestock, the

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<sup>74</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 205-206.

<sup>75</sup> *Annual Administration Report of the Department of Industries, Bengal for the year 1850-1941, Op. Cit.* Pp. 48-49.

mithuns had a unique place in the economy and political hierarchy of the zo. Mithun acted as the medium of exchange, it was the unit in payment of fine or bride price in the marriage number of mithuns in his possession. The villagers used to take great care in its breeding and up keeping. However, with the spread of missionary enterprise and extension of money as the medium of exchange, mithun lost its earlier place in the Indo-Burma tribal society.

The mithuns were originally wild animals in the Trans-Burman jungle. They were tamed and crossed with the cattle. Thus, even the pure mithun was also a cross. The wild mithun or the bison became extinct by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In any case the tribals of the North-East bordering Myanmar took great care in selective breeding of mithun. Mithun was generally the property of the commune owned by the chief. The purchasing of a mithun by an individual was extremely rare i.e. on occasion of crisis only. The most powerful Lushai Chief Sukpial could boast of possessing only a scare of it. The tribes and clans on high altitude because of natural healthy climate had better mithuns than their counter parts in the lower altitude.

The pigs had a place in the Naga-Kuki society as they were meat eaters and pigs met a substantial need of the dietary of the tribes. Almost every household had a small piggery and poultry where cocks and hens were reared up. The meat of pig was very popular. In feasts offered by the chief to the village guests the pig's meat was served. The zo did not apply much care in the selective breeding of pig. They, however castrated the young boars to improve the quality, the operations were conducted by the experts.<sup>76</sup>

Imported cattle and ponies were sometimes used for transport and riding but no animal traction was employed. In the case of the indigenous varieties of stock the major uses were for sacrifice to the spirits and for food, though pigs and fowls had their sanitary value in tribal villages where a latrine meant simply a hole in the floor of the house. No cattle or goats were milked, the average animist zo regarded milk as unclean. However, to the Dimachas it was never a taboo.

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<sup>76</sup> N. E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, London, 1930, Pp. 20-21.



One occasionally comes across a dog with more than average intelligence in hunting but Stevenson saw no specially trained hunting dogs in the hills. Such of those animals as were used in beats rarely coursed the animal they put up for long and the only useful purpose they served was to help with excitement and thus added to the general disturbance. Apart from their value as sacrificial offerings, dogs were appreciated as guardians of the house and as cleansers of the posteriors of their owner's babies during the suckling stage. The Dimachas because of Hindu influence shunned rearing pigs and devouring dogs.

The Mizo-Kukis slaughtered large number of animals, mithuns, pigs, goats, dogs etc. every year but they wasted the huge quantity of hides. The zo had been ignorant of the potential source of considerable wealth. Lewin and Shaw the two authorities on Lushais and Kukis, however, say that certain Lushai-Kuki clans used the goat skins and rhino hides as dress materials. The skin of pigs was always divided up with the meat and eaten as orackling, and so was the hide of mithun killed for sacrifices with which an invocation was recited. Only in the case of animals killed in mortuary ceremonies or which died through accident was the hide removed and sun-dried for use as a sleeping mat.

For sacrifice, the drain on live stock was heavy but the effect was beneficial. So far as religious sacrifices were concerned, fowls and pigs had been the victims for most of the personal and household sacrifices, while pigs and mithun figured generally as communal offerings. From the stand point of economy the sacrifices the killing of animals maintained the steady cycle of supply to boost the production. The sacrifices also maintained the natural balance of the pigs, fowls, mithuns, goats etc. Otherwise over-breeding could cause animal disease which was beyond the tribal management. The noticeable feature in the animal husbandry of the zo had been the absence of milk despite the huge cattle wealth. They did not use milk because that was a taboo. The mithuns, geyals, goats had enough pastures and the cattle, because of the hill climate, were of good quality. Similarly, the zo were ignorant of the use of egg. That was another instance of faulty poultry management which was indicative of loss of potential wealth. With the spread of Christianity and seeing the plains people

consuming daily mild and egg as food the zo gave up their age old superstitions and milk and egg made their entry into the culinary practise in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>77</sup>

The zo love hunting and this is because of religious influence in the past Stenvenson states that the prerequisite of entry into the heaven in the holding of certain number of feasts of celebration of hunting success. Secondly, the zo's love for chose. The Lushai proverb is to a man: war, the hunting and the feast, to a woman: the work in the house and the field. The Lushai and the Chins continued their headhunting as late as 1869 with impunity. The Kukis however, abandoned it long ago, the noted Mizo characteristic tlawmngaihna found best expressions in hunting expeditions which were invariably fraught with unforeseen danger. The brave hunter with courage and endurance had the advantage of receiving the tlawmngaihna from others for his brawn and brains. The zo divided the animals in his jungles into five main categories; the large carnivore, big game animals, ill omened animals and the small creatures, reptiles and birds.<sup>78</sup> The nature of the return from the hunt, the splendour or moderation of the feast of Celebration, and the type of purification ritual performed after a hunt all depended on which category of animal was killed. In addition to animals, there were certain species of snake, bird and bee, the collection of which was essential to entry into paradise, and for those an aih was held.

During the Colonial period in Surma-Barak Valley with the gradual development of Communication, both internal and external trade of the valley grew up and the volume of trade began to expand. The valley's trade was carried on the markets, the principal markets were Silchar, Udharband, Barkhala, Lakhipur, Sonai, Sialteak, Badarpurghat, Raniferrighat, Hailakandi, Algapur, Karimganj, Lalabazar etc. and there were petty bazaars in almost every tea garden for convenience of the imported tea garden labourers. The important articles of imported into the valley were rice, salt, tobacco, brass-ware, beads, clothes, hardware's, sugar, ghee, cotton-piece, goods, keroshine, oil, coal, iron, steel, gold, silver, etc. The Bengali traders and foreign shopkeepers, especially the Marwari community brought to these articles into the valley. And the internal trade of the valley was carried on at markets which were held on

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<sup>77</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 191-193.

<sup>78</sup> HNC Stenvenson, *Op. Cit.* P. 78.

certain specified days in the week and the more important of which were generally sold at several permanent shops.

The principal export articles at that time were Tea, timber, elephants, iron, silk, coarse, muslins, ivory, honey, gums, drugs, oranges, cotton, rubber, bee-wax, lime, shell, lac, agar, children toys, fish oil, dried fish, boats, rice, iron work inlaid with brass, lac inlaid with feathers and tale, ivory fans, jute, ginger, pineapple, oil seeds, cane, bamboo, nal, patidai, raw cotton, raw lac, milk potters clay, vegetables and spices etc.

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