

CHAPTER THREE

IMPORTANT ITEMS OF IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

3.1 Composition of Export and Import

During the Colonial period, in Surma-Barak Valley, there was a simple domestic form of economic organization in the rural society. Population was sparse. 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 up-holding 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 truth in the statement of the British authorities that until the British developed communications and organized the trading, the commercial communities did not arise.⁷⁹ That was particularly true in Barak Valley. In Surma Valley, the commercial 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.

The original economic condition 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.⁸⁰ Not only this is true about the tea industry but also about the agricultural production and cottage industries.

⁷⁹ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 144-145.

⁸⁰ S. C. Roy Choudhury, *Social Cultural and Economic History of India*, New Delhi, 1987, P. 45.

In the Pre-British period, Surma-Barak Valley's internal and external trade was very much limited. Moreover the geographical barrier and political situation were not conducive to the external trade. Adverse diplomatic policies of the ruling kings of different kingdoms were one of the most fundamental factors for holding up the growth of such trade. In spite of these, some amount of external trade was on way with Bengal and neighbouring hill tribes during peace period. Prior to the Construction of the Assam-Bengal Railway, Communication with the outside world was kept up by the steamer through the Barak.⁸¹ The internal trade was carried out at the Bazars and market places, where hill tribes carried down their products to barter them for salt and iron tools.

With the British occupation in Surma-Barak Valley, gradual development of communication, both external and internal trade of the districts grew up and the volume of trade began to expand. W. W. Hunter, in his *Statistical Account of Assam* published in 1879, observes that the district trade was carried on in the markets, the principal ones being Janiganj suburb of the civil station of Silchar, Barkhala, Udarbond, Lakhipur, and Sonai. There were petty bazars in almost every tea garden for convenience of the imported tea garden labourers. Three bazars were established on the Dhaleswari river, Sonai river, and Tipai river where barter system was in vogue. The Bengali traders brought to these places commodities like rice, salt, tobacco, brass-ware, beads, clothes, etc. which were exchanged for caoutchouc, cotton, ivory, bee-wax etc. The most important produce of the hills was caoutchouc which was sold at Silchar.⁸² It has already been said that the external trade of the district was carried by water and passed through the district of Sylhet. The staple export was tea, the quantity of which was more than five million pounds annually. Next in importance were the caoutchouc, cotton clothes, brass wares brought down from the Southern hills and timber. The chief articles of import were rice from Bengal, cotton goods both European and native manufacture, salt, hardware and various articles of luxury mostly required by the European tea planters.

Transport and communications are the means by which agricultural and industrial commodities are moved for internal consumption and for export abroad. Transport and

⁸¹ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* P. 107.

⁸² W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. - II, Guwahati, 1998, Pp. 267-269.

organized markets are the Lynchpins of the infrastructural superstructure. The state of transport and communications had been sadly very poor in Barak Valley, particularly in Cachar. The mighty war machine of the English succeeded to a halt on the borders of Cachar on the eve of the First Anglo-Burmese war 1824-26, because of utterly lack of communications and it took a long year to clear of the oppressive Burmese from an area of 40 square miles only. There was no road which could be used for all the year round. The river Barak and its large tributaries were the only means of transport of the boats carrying goods. The tributaries of Barak were not at all navigable in the upstream and during the rainy season because of strong currents plying of loaded boats were extremely risky. The cost of transport of goods was very high. The price of the silken goods of the Lakhipur market was more than double at Katigorah (30 miles of west). The commerce in Cachar during the rule of the Rajas had never been encouraging but the company officials encouraged it, in 1839-40 Cachar exported goods worth Rs. 36,800/- The military officials of the East India Company recommended good roads for the army movement.⁸³

B. C. Allen, in his District Gazetteers of Cachar, observes:, the import trade is chiefly in the hands of foreign Shopkeepers, the most important articles brought into the district being rice, which is required for the large cooly population, flour, betel-nuts, salt, Sugar, ghi, cotton piece goods, Kerosene oil, coal, iron and steel. The only important articles of export are tea, which is shipped direct from the gardens, and timber and other forest produce. More than half of the total weight of the trade still (1903-04) enters or leaves the district by water. Manipur exports to Cachar timber and other forest produce, cattle, and Indian piece goods, and receives in return European piece-goods and twist, dried fish, and betel-nuts. Forest produce is floated down the rivers. Other articles are carried on men's backs or sometimes on pack bullocks.⁸⁴

The internal trade of the valley is carried on at markets which are held on certain specified days in the week, at the more important of which there are generally several permanent shops. After Silchar itself, where there are upwards of 470 shops, the principal business centres are Udharband on the Madhura river; Sonaimukh at the junction of the Sonai

⁸³ *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 43.

⁸⁴ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* P. 114.

and the Barak in the Sonapur Pargana, and Barkhala near the Jatinga river. Most of the shopkeepers are natives of Sylhet, Bengal or the United Provinces, and very few of the indigenous inhabitants of the district have attempted to appropriate any portion of the profits that accrue from retail trade. The number of Marwari merchants is also very small. The village shopkeeper usually deals in grain and pulse, ghi, oil, Sugar, molasses, salt, tobacco, spices, umbrellas, and piece goods. The villagers come to the bazars on market days, bringing with them rice or paddy, fruit, vegetables, goats and poultry. In addition to the weekly markets, a large fair is held every year in March on the north bank of the Barak opposite Badarpur. Upwards of 15,000 people are said to attend and there is a considerable amount of business done.⁸⁵

In Sylhet, the local trade is carried on chiefly by means of permanent markets. The Muhammadan festival of the Id at the time of the Muharram, is marked by a fair lasting for two days, when toys cheap ornaments and sweetmeats are sold. The principal markets and seats of commerce are Sylhet, Chhatak, Sonamganj, Shohganj, Ajmeriganj, Habiganj, Nabiganj, Bhadurpur, Balaganj, Karimganj and Jainta Bazar. The chief articles of export are rice, paddy, linseed, mustard seed, potatoes, dried fish etc.⁸⁶

Raw materials imported into the Surma-Barak Valley for various cottage industries. Some important imported raw materials for various industries are as follows: -

Raw Materials	Industries
Gold and Silver	Goldsmith's work. Manufacture of gold and silver ornaments and silverware
Iron and Steel	Blacksmith's work. Manufacture of tools and implements
Brass, Copper and bell-metal	Brazier's work. Manufacture of brass, copper and bell-metal utensils.
Indian and imported cotton yarn	Weaving of cotton fabrics.
Indian and imported Silk yarn	Weaving of Silk fabrics
Gold and Silver thread	Embroidery work on Silk and cotton.
Explosive substances	Manufacture of fireworks

Source: Economic Report of Assam, Pp. 3-4.

⁸⁵ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 114-115.

⁸⁶ *Assam District Gazetteer, Op. Cit.* Pp. 31-32.

Following are the important indigenous industries in Surma-Barak Valley, whose production were exported to the different part of the country.

3.2 Pressing of oil-seeds by steam power

There are now a few mills at work in the province and nearly all of them are owned by Marwaris. It is remarked in the Land Revenue Administration Report that these mills were not working well. My enquires lead me to think that this is not correct. Except perhaps two or three mills having inadequate or old machinery, all the others are doing well. We heard complaints in some of these mills that the Calcutta-mills greatly adulterate the oil by mixing cheap nuts with the oil-seeds and can therefore undersell the locally manufactured oil. Without enquiries in Calcutta, we could not ascertain the truth of this allegation, but we noticed that the Assam mills also adulterate the oil by mixing Sirguja with the mustard seeds. The profit lies chiefly in the sale of oil cakes, of which the tea gardens are the largest consumers. The existing oil mills cannot fully supply the needs of the province, nor can they utilize fully the available raw material. In the first part of the 20th century, the value of mustard oil imported amounted to 26 lacs while that of mustard seeds exported amounted to 33 lacs. There is thus room for more oil mills in the province.

During the Swadeshi agitation, some Bengali gentleman started oil mill in the valley. Paddy husking and cotton ginning were also done at the mill. The directions included some local pleaders who had no business experience. The actual working of the concern was, however, left to some dishonest persons. The business was mismanaged and eventually the mill stopped working. The same machinery and plant were sold to a Marwari who is now running the mill at a point.

3.3 Paddy-husking and rice-cleaning by steam power

There are only a few rice mills in the Surma-Barak Valley, during the colonial period. In some of the oil mills also-paddy-husking and rice-cleaning are done. In Sylhet, the engine of the private electric lighting installation is used by day to work a paddy husker. There is enough room for more rice mills in the province, as Assam imports husked rice of the value of

nearly a crore in value. For the tea gardens a large quantity of insufficiently cleaned rice is wanted annually and this demand is met mainly by imports. The import of husked Burma rice is also considerable.

3.3.1 Sawmill Industry

In Surma-Barak Valley, the sawyers are local men. There are some sawmills working in the province and the majority of them are engaged in the manufacture of Simul tea boxes. Except in very remote places, however, Simul wood is no longer available in sufficient quantities for the tea box industry and hence foreign made tea boxes have now to be largely imported. There is enough waste land in Surma-Barak Valley suitable for growing Simul on a large scale. A very large quantity of Sal wood from the Hills is floated down the river to Bengal in large logs. Much of it can be sewn into planks and scantlings of required sizes of Dalgoma. Recently a well financed sawmill concern in the valley has started.

3.3.2 Carpentry

Cabinet making: – A few years ago decent furniture from local wood could not be made in Suma-Barak Valley. Now there are large number private workshops in the valley turning out fairly good furniture, doors and windows. Of these the Joitara Wood works of Sylhet belonging to Babu Surendra Kumar Das and the workshop belonging to M. Foish & Co. of Jorhat deserve to be specially mentioned. Both of them are owned by local gentlemen of good family. One of them M. Foish received a training in the Sibpur Engineering College. The furniture manufactured at these two workshops are decidedly superior to the ordinary teak wood furniture imported from Calcutta in respect of finish. The local Europeans patronize these concerns. I think in order to encourage this industry all the school furniture required by the Education Department and the Local Boards may be obtained from the local workshops. Further, these workshops should get orders for doors and windows required for the public works department.

3.3.3 Boat building

Boat building in the Surma-Barak Valley is still almost in the primitive stage. In the Surma-Valley a superior kind of boats is manufactured. At Karimganj a workshop has been established to make boats of Bengali pattern for ferry mars. In the Surma-Barak Valley, boat building is mostly done in Cachar, Sylhet, Hailakandi and Karimganj. It would be useful if the boat builders of these places could be taught the art of building a boat without the nucleus of a dug-out. The cart wheel industry, which is fairly organised, is entirely in the hands of up-country carpenters. The timber used is local sal and sisoo.

3.3.4 Manufacture of cane and bamboo articles

Cane and bamboo furniture: – Bamboos, canes and rattans worth over 15 lacs of rupees were exported from the province during 1914-15. Very nice cane and bamboo furniture are manufactured in our jails and there is good demand for such articles, but except in Sylhet this important industry has not been taken up elsewhere. The Surma-Barak Valley, with her abundant supply of the raw material ought to be able to manufacture for the Indian markets cane and bamboo furniture and other useful articles that have now to be imported from Singapore, Japan and China.

Mat industry: – In the Surma Valley, the mat industry is fairly organized. The total value of the mats exported from Surma Valley in 1840-1900 amounted to nearly 30 lacs. Sital patis made from patidai (called murta in the Surma-Barak Valley) are largely manufactured in Sylhet. The manufacture of square and circular mats called merdhoras is nearly extinct. Even the Koth made of Kuhila cannot now a day's be readily obtained. In the Hailakandi, there are still some patiyas who can make sufficiently large squares of patis very suitable for matting rooms, but no one has attempted to run this industry there on a commercial scale. Mats from reeds and grasses are made in the Surma-Barak Valley. There is good demand for this in Calcutta. The imported Chinese and Japanese Mats are all made from grass. Particularly no use is made of the vast quantity of nal and grass growing in the Valley. It requires only enterprise to organized in Surma-Barak Valley a large industry in mats, baskets, cushions etc. of various fancy designs.

3.3.5 Pottery

Earthenware: – The trade returns do not show the quantity and value of country made earthenware imported into the province, but boat loads of this article are seen continually coming up the rivers from Bengal. In the Surma-Barak Valley, the poorer Muhammadans almost entirely use such wares. The local potters of the Valley make very inferior wares for local use. Up-country potters have however, settled in various centre of Cachar and are making much better pottery with local clay. It is expected that the local potters will gradually learn the methods of the Hindustani potters and make their wares more durable.

Roof Tiles: – Some years ago manufacture of roof tiles was started by one Manmohan Das, a native of Sylhet. The business was subsequently transferred to Dacca. The factory should be preferably on the line of communication by river in order that the tiles can be conveyed by country boats or steamers without serious loss by breakage in transit. The Dacca tiles are now used by the Public Works Department. Considering the difficulty of getting a suitable roof-material in Cachar and the present high price of corrugated iron sheets, this industry should be introduced in the Valley by offering special encouragement.

3.3.6 Dairy Industry

This industry is capable of much extension, in the Surma-Barak Valley, where on account of the vast tracts available for grazing large herds of buffaloes are owned by local men. The value of ghee imported into the province during the last part of the 19th century amounted to over 5 lacs. There is no reason why with such an abundance of buffalo milk Cachar should import ghee. In some places buffalo milk can be had at Rs. 2 - 8 to Rs. 3 - 8 per mound. Enterprising men with small capital can take up the manufacture of ghee and butter at suitable centres where a regular supply of milk is available. Sorbhog on the Eastern Bengal Railway is an ideal centre of milk supply. The Doiserias manufactured here annually can be estimated at Rs. 25,000. It is also possible to run dairy concerns in Surma-Barak Valley on co-operative lines.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 3-8.

Actually, dairy concerns using modern appliances are now at work in Shillong and Silchar. The Assam dairy of Silchar is in a moribund state. They cannot get their supply of milk from Mahur and Haflong, as the hill section railway is now close. Further their branch at Behali in the Assam Valley is not working well and another branch at Chuliakata had to be stopped. Business methods are wanting and too much reliance is placed on subordinates who are not strictly honest. At the beginning the managing director was a prominent lawyer, but he has now served his connection with the concern.

The important articles of commerce of Surma-Barak Valley had been (a) Elephant and Elephant Products (b) Fish and (c) Bamboo and Timber.

3.3.7 Elephant Kheda

Elephants were in great demand in the army commissariats. From the elephant hide the Dhals were made and the handles of the swords were made up of elephant bones. Moreover, ivory was a valuable article of commerce both in India and Europe. In those days elephants had been much sought after commodity as army vehicles. Talukdar Jaimangal had several Khedas in his taluk near the Damchara forest reserve on the boarder of Karimganj-Lushai Hills. From the Damchara Khedas alone about 100 elephants were captured during 26 years of Company's administration, 50% of the total elephants caught were sent to the Resident of Sylhet as present, value of each elephant was three hundred rupees. As elephants were costly and elephant trade was profitable, following the old tradition of the Nawab of Bengal, the authorities of Fort William instructed the military authorities of Bengal to devise ways and means to capture elephants on the borders of Sylhet-Lushai Hills and Sylhet and Cachar. Accordingly, the military department appointed two commissioned offers known as Superintendent of Elephant Kheda. Private Khedas were allowed but they were under complete control of the Superintendent.⁸⁸

Trading in elephant and elephant products were the important sources of income of the landed gentry in the upper, lower and south Assam. The kheda system was ultimately

⁸⁸ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* P. 43.

abolished by the British Government (1808) according to the suggestions of captain Verner, the Superintendent of Cachar to establish a friendly relation with the Mizos. It is extremely difficult to collect the dates of the monetary transactions involved in the Kheda system during the half a century of existence in South Assam and if possible it will throw an enormous light upon a vital sector of macro economy of this period of the area. However, we can safely infer that the elephant Khedas occupied an important place in the local economy of the first half of the nineteenth century. In Surma-Barak Valley, there were several Khedas, the biggest one was located in the Cachar-Sylhet border near Gumra in the foot hills of Borail range which was within the revenue jurisdiction of Bar Khel of the Mazumders of Kalain. The other Khedas were in the Cachar Mizo and Cachar Manipur frontiers. The Burmese took possession of these Khedas during the first Anglo-Burmese war 1824 -26, the Burmese collected a number of elephants and huge quantity of ivory from Cachar.⁸⁹

3.3.8 Fish Trade

Small lagoons or lakes locally called hawors in Surma-Barak Valley. The most important lagoon in the Chargola Valley known Sonbil near Karimganj was a vast sheet of water where lived a large number of fishermen. Like the Moamaris of upper Assam they were not so politically organized but lived on selling live and dry fish. The annual fishing right of those fisherman was derived from the Zamindar of Pratapgarh in return of a rental of two rupees per net. A boatman however, could fish in the lagoon for the whole year on a rental of 5 rupees only. Considering the price index of the time 5 rupees was considerable. According to the 10 years settlement of Thackeray the rent of a cultivatable agricultural land was lower than the fishing rent. Usually, the agricultural rent which the tillers paid to the treasury of each zamindar was one rupee per bigha. The fisherman also had to fish to the zamindars according to his capacity free of cost during the marriage ceremonies of the land lord's family or shradha ceremonies of land lord's relatives etc. Moreover, there was a protection money like the pocha system of the Ahoms to be paid of the kukis who lived in the hills surrounding the lagoons. The kukis had a special liking for the dry fish. The moot question is what was the actual quantity of fish caught per year from Sonbil and at what rate it was sold in the market? Sonbil

⁸⁹ *Notes on some Industries of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 59.

was under the revenue jurisdictions of several taluks and the catch varied from taluk to taluk depending upon the location of the lagoon and it was about one million quintals per annum. The average price per quintal of Indian carp was Rs. 5/-. Thus, according to Hunter the total income generation from the fish alone from Sonbil was 5 million rupees. Needless to point out that such a huge quantity of live fish could not be consumed by the local population so the fish traders dried the fish and sold in off seasons. Because of lack of transport facilities and method of preservation a huge quantity of fish were allowed to waste having its bearing upon the health of the local population. Chatla, Boali hawors and Malinbil in Cachar were small lagoons with great potential but fish harvesting in those water resources were not as planned or intensive as that of Sonbil. We do not have any data of total quantity of fish caught annually in those lagoons before the incorporation of Cachar into British dominion. In fact, we have very little idea of fish production in Cachar before 1881, when the first Indian census was introduced.

The fisherman of Sylhet had unrestricted fishing right in the river Barak and its tributaries. The fisherman of other parts of Bengal presidency paid a rent to the Government in return of their fishing right in the river Ganges including Padma and its tributaries. Because of shortage of revenue collectors. Dacca Revenue Board allowed that concession to the fisherman of Sylhet during the 10 years settlement and early part of nineteenth century during the continuance of permanent settlement. However, the fisherman of Sylhet although did not pay normal rent had to observe certain fishing norms in different seasons and in different locations of the rivers which had the direct bearing upon the production of fish and also on law and order. Those regulations had their application in Sylhet as well as Cachar even before its incorporation into the British dominion. Fish was definitely a delicacy of the local Bengalis and the Sanskrith pandits composed a verse a la the panchasati which runs,

“Ilisha, Khalisa, Gharghata, Rohita, Mudgarachaiba niramisa Pancha matsya”

3.3.9 Bamboo Timber

The forests were divided into several mahals known as jungle mahals and bamboo mahals. Those mahals were auctioned annually by the forest department and leased out on year to year basis to highest bidders. Cachar, before its formal annexation in 1832, had followed some rules of British Administration since 1799, when Kachari ruler Krishnachandra Narayan sought the British assistance against the mughal invader Muhammad Aga Khan.⁹⁰ In the plains of Cachar, there were also some forest mahals under the influential court noble, Janab Ghani Mazumder of Dudpatil on the right bank of river Barak, who was also the mirasdar of the Barakpar Pargana where the present Silchar town stands, Dudpatil was selected as the site of the residency of the Superintendent of Cachar after the annexation. Dudpatil also played a very vital role in the British army movement during the First Anglo-Burmese war 1824-26. Ghani Mazumder paid good amount of revenue to the royal treasury of Cachar each year. The exact amount he paid is not known but it was not less than five hundred sicca taka per annum. Later on during the British period the estate of Abdul Hazi Rehman Barlaskar of Malugram, Silchar succeeded the mahaldari of Ghani Mazumder and Naki Mian.

It is pertinent to point out in this connection that Kachari Kingdom was a big one including apart of the Brahmaputra Valley. However, the hold of Krishna Chandra over the hillmen and the people of Kapili valley was figurative. The total annual revenue of Kachari Raj Rs. 1,00,000/- was mainly derived from the land revenue. The successive political disorders including Burmese invasion made the plains of Cachar a waste land and the natural calamities like flood, earthquake and night raids by the herds of pachyderms made the situation worse. The total revenue shrank to 20,000/- per annum. That is the reason why Libsby Company of Sylhet, turned down the offer of the government to take the lease of Cachar on annual rental of Rs. 10,000/- on 1831-32.⁹¹

Bamboo had a great demand in Dacca and Bengal as bamboo was the staple material of house building, Fencing and making village embankments and fortresses. There were

⁹⁰ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 176-178..

⁹¹ U. C. Guha, *Op. Cit.* P. 168.

different kinds of bamboos depending on its durability as well as prettiness. The pretty brittle muli bamboo was extensively used in basket making, fencing and roof thatching but baruas, both jai and shil varieties, bethu and bakals were used as posts of the kachha houses and the stockades, had a great demand all over Eastern Bengal. W.W. Hunter writes that the price of one thousand bamboos was half a rupee in 1853 and Upendra Chandra Guha presumes the price of Bamboo during the reign of Krishna Chandra was much less. Guha is probably not correct as there was no inflation in that period; price index remained more or less steady. Of all the articles of exportable commerce in Cachar bamboo occupied a prominent place. Its internal market was also a wide one. As the royal revenue department levied Vanakar only on the exportable forest products the bamboo traders in internal market enjoyed the privilege of the exemption of forest tax and hence they could sell the forest bamboos at a cheapest rate. The contingency bill of P. Mainwarring, the Superintendent Cachar for the month of November 1835 gave a clear picture of the current rate of a bamboo and cane

Repairing jail Houses, 30 Bundles July Bate	Rs.	Anna
At one anna per Bundle -----	1	14
300 Moolee Bamboos at 4 annas		
And 4 pie per 100 -----		13
900 Tullah Bamboos at 1 Rupee and 4 annas per 1000 ---	1	2
10 Baruah Bamboos at anna each 120 wood posts at		
8 annas per score -----		10

There was no systematic method of keeping records of sale proceeds in the local trade marts at Cachar during the rule of Kachari princes so; we cannot even make a satisfactory fiscal presumption on that account. Cachar exported goods worth Rupees thirty six thousand eight hundred in 1839-40, of which the share of bamboo had been roughly Rupees eight thousand. In pre annexation period presumptive approximate on account of bamboo sale was Rupees five thousand. It is pertinent to point out in this connection that the other important forest product of Cachar, the elephant whose average price was Rupees three hundred per head. The price of Sylhet was slightly higher than the Cachar elephants. May be this was due

to the reduction in the cost of transport. On an average twenty elephants were exported each year from the Cachar in the pre annexation period. Annual export from the Khedas of Karimganj-Lushai Hills and Karimganj-Tripura borders had been on an average was about one hundred. If a comparative estimate is made it indicates that even in case of eastern Sylhet the income generation from bamboo was higher than the elephant.

The ownership of the forests developed from generation to generation upon the person of the king and the king felled the trees in the forests according to the exigencies of the military and other demands of the state. All the subjects except the nobles lived in thatched houses as the local artisans barring the Manipuris did not know the art of constructing wood houses and thus, the demand for the timber was not at all perceptible. There was practically very little domestic demand for timber in Cachar. Country boats were made up of jarul timber and they were not forest products. But in Sylhet and Eastern Bengal timber was a lucrative commodity. The Sylhet timber had a demand both in the district and outside. The Sylhet woods were transported to Comilla, Dacca and Narayanganj. The demand for the timber suddenly increased during the First Anglo-Burmese war 1824-26.⁹²

3.3.10 Lime Industry

This industry was once very flourishing in the Sunamganj Sub-division of the Sylhet district. The limestone quarries are all at the foot of the Khasi Hills. For merely the quarries used to be leased out for a number of years, but now the royalty system is in force. Under the old system the lessees used to take out as much stone as possible during the currency of the lease and hence the burners could get limestone cheaper and the price of the manufactured lime was considerably less. Since the introduction of the royalty system by which a fixed royalty is charged on a certain quantity of stone quarried, the output of stone has considerably shortened with the result that stones are dearer and the cost of manufacture of the ordinary slaked lime in native kilns has nearly doubled, so, that the locally manufactured lime is undersold in Calcutta by lime manufactured elsewhere. The Sylhet Lime Company which is a European concern with a large capital, have a large lime factory near Calcutta. The managing

⁹² Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 178-181.

Agents are Messrs. Killburn & Co. who are also the agents of the steamer companies. They can convey the stone from Chhatak in flats at convenient rates and as they employ up-to-date methods and appliances at their factory, the cost of the lime manufactured by them is comparatively less while the quality of their lime is undoubtedly superior. The local lime burners of Sunamganj are therefore in a pitiable condition. They can hardly be expected to face the unequal competition with the Sylhet Lime Company or the manufactures of Sutna and Katni lime. To save the native industry from extinction it seems necessary for the government to take urgent steps. As a beginning the rate of royalty charged may be reduced by half. Such a reduction will increase the output of the quarried stone and bring down prices to the advantage of the burners as well as the consumers. Further, some action may be taken to improve the waterways leading to the quarries so that the cost of conveyance of the stone by boat may appreciably reduced. Mr. Ewing of Chhatak strongly insisted that this should be done. The burners themselves must combine and change their old methods with a view to improve the quality of their lime. There are too many middlemen involved in the industry and the burners must combine to eliminate them to make the industry more paying.

The manufacture of crushed lime stone for manure is another important industry. There is a large factory in Sylhet worked by Messrs Kilburn & Co. The manure is largely used in the tea gardens to counteract the acidity of the soil. There are natural deposits of crude lime in the Cachar district. No enquiries have yet been made as to the value or the practicability of quarrying this lime for commercial use.⁹³

3.3.11 Gold and Silver Work

Ornaments of gold and silver prepared by the goldsmiths of Surma-Barak Valley are of an inferior kind. In the Surma Valley, the local goldsmiths appear to have been almost entirely ousted by Dacca goldsmiths, a number of whom can be found in any town or large village. This industry should be improved. Some young lads of the goldsmith class may be taught at Calcutta as apprentices in jewelers firms in polishing, gem-setting and other arts.

⁹³ *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 9.

3.3.12 Brass, Copper and Bell-metal Industry

Very few copper utensils are now a day's prepared. The brass and bell-metal utensils prepared in Surma-Barak Valley are fairly good, but the local artisans do not polish their wares so well. These artisans are now entirely within the clutches of the Marwaris. By introduction of Co-operative methods their economic position may perhaps be improved.

3.3.13 Iron and Steel Industry

There are some very good blacksmiths in the Surma Valley. In the Barak Valley good local blacksmiths are very few; though in the old days the Bengali could manufacture large cannons and several kinds of smatter firing weapons which can be seen to this day.

Babu Surendra Kumar Das of Sylhet has been making tea Pruning Knives, which are used in some of the Indian gardens. He seems to be confident of success and in going to set up modern plant for the manufacture of such knives. His enterprise deserves support. The tea gardens annually import large quantities of tools and implements such as daos, kodalis and knives. If some of these could be manufactured locally a great advantage would be gained.

There are up-to-date motor car repairing workshops at Silchar and Sylhet. There are two cil engines in this workshop working a number of lathes and a saw bench various kinds of repairs to carriages motor cars, motor bicycles, etc. are done here. The workmen seemed to be very smart and efficient. This workshop practically serves the purpose of a demonstration factory for the benefit of the local people.⁹⁴

3.3.14 Manufacture of Agar essence

Agar trees are to be found in the forests of Surma-Barak Valley. It is the sachi tree the barks of which were cured and used for writing puthis in ancient times. The agar is really the product of the tree suffering from a particular disease. A healthy tree will not yield agar. The chips are boiled and a kind of essence is prepared by distillation in the Surma Valley. This

⁹⁴ *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 10.

essence is in demand in the Mohammedan countries but the trade has been affected by the war with Turkey.

Agar is obtained from a tree, the botanical name for which is *Aquilarea Agallocha* Roxb. It belongs to the family Thymelaiceac, which is noted for tough fibre. In Assam valley, the tree is called Sasi, but elsewhere it is known by the names Agar, Agru or Agarn from the Sanskrit name for the scented inner wood.

Agar occurs so irregularly in the trunk that it is impossible to separate chunks. This gives two broad ways of classifying the outturn. Chunks that are very nearly free of white wood are called Agar proper, and white wood with traces of Agar in it is called dhum or dum probably from the Hindustani word doyam. The Agar is sent out, in the form the pieces are scooped out, first to Bombay, whence they are said to be exported to China and Japan, and the dhum is generally boiled in ordinary stills for extracting the essential oil. In this province distillation is practiced only in the district of Sylhet and whole business of collection distillation and export is carried on by a limited number of men who live about Dacca-Dakshinbhag in Sylhet.

In the days of the Kachari Raja's of Cachar, the inner bark of this tree flattened out and treated with various sizing materials was used as substitute for parchment for religious and historical writings. With the introduction of paper this use is now very nearly obsolete. The hill people use strips of the bark as straps for carrying loads. Unlike other trees, the Agar tree does not suffer much from excortication.

Figure showing the total quantity of Agar exported from the valley each year are not available. But the average annual revenue realized during the last five years of 19th century was Rs. 9,662. The lowest figure, Rs. 6671, was in 1910-11 and highest, Rs. 12,898 in 1912-13.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 10-17.

3.3.15 Fish Canning industry

Fish is abundant in the Surma Valley and though a large quantity is cured and dried in the most primitive fashion, the possibility of canning selected fishes may be investigated.

3.3.16 Manufacture of cheap umbrellas

Thin bamboos called noli are exported from the Surma Valley to a considerable extent. These are used in making sticks for umbrellas meant for the poorer people. By importing cheap calico and the necessary iron fittings, such umbrellas can be manufactured locally.

3.3.17 Hay-making

In the low-lying haors of the Surma Valley long dub grass grows luxuriantly soon after the subsidence of flood. When cut and dried, excellent hay is likely to be obtained from this grass. It is interesting to note that Surma-Barak Valley imported from Calcutta hay, straw and grass worth nearly a lakh in 1947.⁹⁶

3.3.18 Preservation and tinning of fruits

The Jaldhup pine apple of Karimganj can be tinned, and marmalade can be made from oranges. This industry should be taken up preferably by a European, as tinned fruits and jellies are not relished by Indians. Generally, and consequently a foreign market will be required. Further, it is said that European consumers outside India have a prejudice against Indian-made tinned fruits and fruit jellies and that the prejudice extends even to Indian-made tinned butter.⁹⁷

3.3.19 Tea seed oil

It appears that the possibility of extracting oil from the tea seeds for commercial purposes has already engaged the attention of the Indian Tea Association. If the value of the oil as a commercial product can be established there can be no doubt that seed gardens on small areas will be more numerous and there will be a good opening for Indians, many of

⁹⁶ *Review of the Industrial Position and Prospects in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1908, P. 54.

⁹⁷ Economic Report of Assam, *Op. Cit.* Pp.10-11.

whom now own bars for growing tea seeds for the requirements of the tea industry. It is reported that Dr. Hope, the scientific officer of the Association, is going to make an experiment.⁹⁸

3.4 Conclusions

Thus above mentioned industries, we find there were large number of productions were exported from these industries like rice in husked, boat, furniture items for doors and windows, cane and bamboo furniture, sital patis, mats, tiles, ghee, elephants, buffalos, cows, fish dried and un dried, bamboos, timber, lime, tea purning knives, agar essence, noli or thin bamboos, tinned fruits and fruit jellies, tea seed oil, wood, jute raw, rice unhusked, raw cotton, lac, oranges etc. There were some raw materials were imported into the Surma-Barak Valley for various industries like gold, siver, hay, straw and grass, calico and iron fittings of manufacture umbrellas, materials for fish canning industry, brass, copper, bell-metal, iron, steel, lime etc.

With the annexation of Cachar 1832 and subsequent improvement of law and order, Cachar became a formidable potential rival of Sylhet trade. There had been vast influx of settlers and considerable increase in Cachar's population. E. R. Lyons, the Superintendent, Cachar reported (09-05-1846) to the Commissioner, Dacca, "The value of paddy purchased by Sylhet traders last year cannot be computed under one lakh and ten thousand Rupees, though formerly no more was grown in province than would suffice for consumption during the coming year". Moreover, as the people had a good taste of profits accruing from the cultivation of rice, the quantity available for exportation will become greater annually and it is universally allowed that the inhabitants were never in such easy circumstances before money circulates freely and traffic is no longer restricted. From the report of Lyons, we also get a fair idea of the current prices of the commodities of Cachar.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *Notes on some Industries of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 12.

⁹⁹ D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* P. 143.

The following table shows the destination of export of some important commodities of the Surma-Barak Valley during the colonial period are as follows: -

Name of Commodities	Places of Import
Cotton piece goods and yarn	Calcutta, Varanasi
Hosiery goods	Bangalore, Madras, etc.
Spices, Salt	Calcutta, Punjab, Delhi
Iron and Steel	Calcutta
Stationery	Calcutta
Coal	Cherrapunji, Ledo
Grains and Pulses	Bihar, Uttar Pradesh
Kerosene oil	Digboi, Guwahati
Medicine	Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi
Electrical goods	Calcutta, Bombay
Sugar, Wheat	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar
Rice	Calcutta

Source: Report on the condition and prospect of British Trade in India, P. 68.

The agricultural boom in the market however, made nosedive in the next year during the administration of G. Verner despite large scale production of the grains. The cause of slump was the over production of rice in Sylhet and in the eastern districts of Bengal. The rice of Cachar could not be exported as expected leading to a sharp fall of price in the grain market. Verner lamented, "Rice is selling in the Bazar at about two and half mounds and dhan

at eight mounds the rupee”. (P – 146, D. Dutta). In 1851, the Cachar markets suffered from short supply of currency, especially the lowest one pyc.¹⁰⁰ (See Appendix – 4)

Commodities	Per mound	Rs.	As	P
Rice	„	0	8	4
Dal	„	1	6	11
Mustard oil	„	7	10	16
Salt	„	5	10	10
Masalaha	„	2	3	4
Wood	„	0	2	0
Turmeric	„	1	6	6
Chillies	„	7	2	2
Preferred tobacco	„	6	1	6

Source: Suhas Chatterjee, A Socio- Economic History of South Assam, P. 182.

U. Guha (P – 120) supplies a list of the communities with export-import prices of goods in 1853, the list is quoted below: -

Exported Commodities	Rate	Imported Commodities	Rate
Paddy	2 annas 10 paise per mound	Ghee	Rs. 16/- per mound
Rice	9 annas per mound	Mustard oil	Rs. 10/- per mound
Chan grass	12 annas per thousand units	Common salt	Rs. 4/- per mound
Bamboo	8 annas per thousand	Hasis (gunja)	Rs. 50/- per mound
Cow	Rs. 6/- each	Opium	Rs. 12/- per mound
Elephant	Rs. 300/- each	Gron	Rs. 10/- per mound

Source: Upendra Guha, Kacharer Ithibritta, P. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 181-182.

Guha has hinted that the prices were very much lower during the rule of Krishnachandra. Besides being an important economic document Guha's list gives a glimpse of the contemporary social picture to boot.¹⁰¹ The people of Cachar were by and large addict to opium and hasis which is an index of poor health, morality and living condition, it is no wonder that the first shop in Silchar (1834) town had been a liquor shop. The reports of Burns and Lyons are also indicative of the huge sale and purchase of hard drinks and sleazy stuff in the domestic markets and village marts. The socio-economic canvas of Cachar, however, was changed under the strict but persuasive administration of urbane John Edgar(1867-72). The economic demands of the immigrant urban elite were altogether different from the natives and their vibrant life style had its concomitant effect upon the hitherto closed mindset of claustrophobic people living under the moriband gerontocratic hard up society. Edgar not only set the wheel of Cachar's economy into motion by graduating it from the economic back waters but also provided the people of Cachar a new lease of life full of hopes and aspirations in Short, the geist.¹⁰² (See Appendix – 8)

In Surma-Barak Valley, tea is the most important article of export. The first tea garden was established in Cachar in 1856. In 1858 on the advice of Sanderman, the planter, the government agreed to the exportation of labour to the tea estates. Stewart had the vision of Cachar's plenty. He became aware of the potentiality of Cachar's tea industry and encouraged the tea planters to the virgin land of south Cachar. At the beginning the tea planters had to face the hostility of the Lushai Kukis and they manage their own security. The industry also had to face the temporary recession because of stock market crunch in Calcutta. But Stewart's bid to win over the Lushai chief, Sukpilal and Stewart's diplomatic measures to keep the other Lushai Chiefs in good humour were intended with the aim of protecting the interest of the tea industry. The tea planters had trust in Stewart and in return he also reciprocated them to overcome their difficulties relating to infrastructure and the problem of defence. Stewart was appointed the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar in 1867 when the status of the district was raised mainly due to Stewart's personal effort. In November 1867 when he handed over the charge

¹⁰¹ Upendra Guha, *Op. Cit.* P. 120.

¹⁰² Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 182-183.

to Edgar the tea industry in Cachar shrugged off its seething troubles, stood erect to face the challenges of new economy. There was also a steady increase of the revenue and the law and order situation of the new district was fine. Thus, when Stewart left Cachar for Calcutta with his characteristic smile John Edgar stepped into his shoes with greater determination and resolves to transform the newly annexed territory into a tea-planter's paradise.¹⁰³

In the early sixties tea-planting was regarded rather as a speculation than a solid industry. A saying then vogue in Cachar was that it was very doubtful whether it would ever pay to make tea, but there was no doubt that it would pay to make gardens were described as being made to sell but not to pay. "*Scarcely anyone interested,*" says Mr. Edgar, who was Deputy Commissioner at the time, "looked forward to obtaining his return from the produce for his tea cultivation, everyone looked forward to becoming suddenly and immensely rich by getting a piece of land, planting it out with tea and then selling it for a vastly greater sum than he had expended on it." Gardens were sold for 700 or 800 percent more than they had cost to make, and in some cases the plantations, when they changed hands existed only on paper. This unhealthy state of affairs soon produced its own remedy. The crash came in 1866 when many concerns collapsed, and the period of depression continued till 1869. It was then found that people who had worked steadily were making a substantial profit, and that many of the estates of the bubble companies were doing well under careful management. The area under cultivation in Cachar was said to be 24,151, acres which yielded 4,235,000 lbs of manufactured tea a quantity which exceeded that produced in the neighbouring district of Sylhet even as late as 1881. By 1882, the area under plant had risen to 48,873 acres and the yield to 12,721,000 lbs, which was considerably in excess of that returned from any other district in the Province. The industry continued to develop, though not as rapidly as elsewhere, and in 1898, the area under plant was 62,179 acres, and the outturn 20,898,000 lbs. Then ensued a series of favourable seasons, and though there was a decrease in the cultivated area, the yield in 1901 was 31,088,000 lbs.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Indian Tea Association, Surma Valley Branch*, Silchar, 1934, Pp. 266-269.

¹⁰⁴ H. K. Barpujari, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 245-246.

There is little local labour available for work on the plantations and most of the coolies have to be brought from other parts of India. The total number so imported during the ten years ending with 1890 was 52,894 and during the next decade it was 75,412. At the present moment the supply of labour in the recruiting districts is quite inadequate and the dearth of coolies is a source of inconvenience. Waste land suitable for the growth of rice is not, as a rule, to be found either on the grants themselves or in their neighbourhood, and coolies when they leave the gardens are compelled to settle in the remoter parts of the district, where their labour is lost to the industry. The cost of importation is considerable and few people would be willing to expend large sums of money in bringing up labourers to the district without some guarantee that for a time, at any rate, they would be able to retain their services. This guarantee is afforded by Act XIII of 1859, which empowers a magistrate to order a man who has taken an advance of money on account of work to be done by him, to complete his contract, and to punish him imprisonment if he declines to carry out this order. The number of cases in which the coolies is actually confined is, however, small.

Edgar provided necessary infrastructural facilities to the agro based tea industry in Cachar for its rapid development. The roads already mentioned which were constructed by the Government under the aegis of Edgar helped the goods movement. The planters were allowed to construct their own roads and maintain them as private property where there could be no unnecessary interference of the government. The planter paid low wages less than what the government paid its own labour force and working conditions of the labour was pathetic. Medical facilities were scarce. Edgar's policy of laissez faire put the labour into awful miseries and made them wage slaves. Edgar was an imperialist of proven loyalty and dedication, and believed in economic exploitation of the colonies for furtherance of financial prosperity of mother country. He had very little sympathy and possibly less concern for the oppressed coolies living in the dungeon of tea gardens in utter desperation. By the labour Act 1873 government was made the only authority to deal with runaway workers of the tea gardens but to please the planters Edgar rarely moved to help the labour in distress and often rundown the redressal provisions of the Act unjustly to twist the arm of law. It is no wonder, Sir Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1884 confessed that to help the tea migrates

often he had to bend the rules. The coolie according to Chamonlal was very precious to be sent out of the tea estates to police and jail custody.¹⁰⁵

In the early days of the industry the mortality amongst the imported coolies was extremely high, and the relations between the planters and their labour force were often far from satisfactory. The mortality in transit was very heavy. Between May 1863 and January 31st, 1868, 52,155 coolies were imported to Cachar, of whom 2,456 or 4.7 percent died during the voyage. As, even at that time, the journey occupied less than a month, the rate of mortality can only be characterised as appalling. This has, however, happily been changed, and 1902-03, the death-rate amongst adult coolies in Cachar was only 27 per mile. The statement in the margin shows the areas from which the labour force in 1901 had been recruited.

	Number	Percentage
Total	129,063	----
Assam	50,287	39 %
Chota Nagpur	21,347	16 %
Other parts of Bengal	27,962	22 %
United Provinces	13,725	11 %
Central Provinces	11,921	9 %

Source: Indian Tea Association, Surma Valley Branch, 1934, Silchar, P. 270.

Those born in Assam are, for the most part, children of immigrant coolies.¹⁰⁶

Four distinct varieties of wild tea are recognised. Assam indigenous, which has a leaf from 6 to 7½ inches in length by 2¾ to 2⅞ inches in width, Manipur or Burma indigenous with a larger, darker and coarser leaf than the preceding variety. Lushai or Cachar indigenous, whose mature leaf is from 12 to 14 inches long and from 6 to 7½ inches wide, and Naga indigenous which has along and arrow leaf. In addition to these four varieties there is the China plant, and different kinds of hybrids. The China tea is a squat and bushy shrub with

¹⁰⁵ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 168-169.

¹⁰⁶ Indian Tea Association, Surma Valley Branch, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 269-270.

small leaves, which gives a lower yield per acre than the other kinds. It is many years since China seed was planted out in new clearances, and considerable areas covered by this plant have been abandoned. In its natural state the indigenous plant attains to the dimensions of a tree, varying from 20 to 50 feet in height, though its girth seldom exceeds two feet. It has a vigorous growth and yields a large outturn of fine flavoured tea, but is delicate when young.¹⁰⁷ Of the hybrid variety there are many qualities ranging from nearly pure indigenous to nearly pure China. The Burmese plant, which has a smaller and darker leaf than the variety found in Cachar and the Lushai Hills, is the one which is most in favour with the planters of Cachar. It comes into bearing quickly, is fairly hardy, and yields a good outturn of tea per acre. The following gardens are noted for the excellence of the seed raised on them. Kalain, Jatinga, Kasipur, Alyne and Goabari. Owing to the period of depression through which the industry has recently been passing, the price of seed is much lower than it was and ranges from Rs. 20 to Rs. 40 per mound.

The yield per acre is higher in Cachar than in most of the district of Assam, and is on the average about 500 lbs of manufactured tea. This is, however, only a rough general average, and different gardens and different seasons vary largely from this mean. A good bil garden will sometimes give as much as 1,400 lbs per acre. Prices were considerably from year to year, but the development of the industry has not unnaturally been accompanied by a greater decline in the amount paid for the manufactured article. In 1868, it was said that tea would have to be sold at 2s a pound in London to cover the cost of manufacture and in 1882, the Deputy Commissioner complained that the average price had fallen to 1s. 2d. a pound, which was a serious matter as few gardens could produce their tea for less than a Shilling. Since that there has been a great reduction in the cost of production and in 1903, though the average price was only 6½d a pound the results of the season were considered far from unsatisfactory.¹⁰⁸

In the first part of the 20th century, an attempt has been made to introduce the manufacture of green tea in order to meet the demands of the American market. In 1902, the

¹⁰⁷ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* P. 85.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* P. 86.

Indian Tea Association offered a bounty of 1½ annas on every pound of green tea manufactured. The following year this bounty was reduced by half and nearly a million pounds of green tea were exported from Cachar. The principal difference between the manufacture of green and black tea is that the former article is not fermented. As soon as the leaf comes in it is steamed in a drum for about a half minute a process which turns it a bright green colour and effectually stops all fermentation. Excess moisture is then removed by a hydro-extractor or centrifugal machine, and it is then rolled, fired and sorted into the following different grades, pinhead gunpowder, gunpowder young hyson, hyson no, twanky and dust. The infused leaf should be of a bright green colour, and the liquor of a very pale yellow shade. Most of this tea is sent to North America, but a small quantity is sold in the Midlands. In 1934-35, the average price realized in the sale Room at the end of December, for the respective district was: -

	Assam	Dooars	Surma Valley
London Market	7.69	7.99	6.29d. per lb
Calcutta	-/4/8	-/4/6	-/4/2 as per lb

Source: Indian Tea Association, Surma Valley Branch, Silchar, 1934. P. 4.

The primary cause of the disastrous fall in price is, want of competition in the Sale Rooms coming in the wake of over-production and accumulated stocks and which if unarrested, must obviously result in the ruination of a great industry.¹⁰⁹

During the colonial period, the quantities and values of the principal articles imported into, and exported from the Surma-Barak Valley, during the last part of the 19th century are compared below with the figures of the preceding year.

¹⁰⁹ Indian Tea Association, Surma Valley Branch, *Op. Cit.* P. 4.

Total foreign trade: -

	1880-1887 Rs.	1887-1894 Rs.	1894-1902 Rs.
Imports	9,43,471	9,87,477	8,74,386
Exports	4,34,695	4,58,284	4,94,017

Source: Review of the Trade of Bengal, P. 30.

The total value of the foreign trade during 1880-1902 was Rs. 41,92,330, namely, Rs. 13,78,166 in 1880-1887, Rs. 14,45,761 in 1887-1894, and Rs. 13,68,403 in 1894 -1902. In 1880-1887, there was a decrease of Rs. 2,83,923 in the value of the exports, but this was due to the fact that in the previous year treasure to the amount of Rs. 2,81,600 had been taken into the Manipur State, and since then there has been a small but steady increase in the export trade which averaged Rs. 4,62,332 during the last part of the 19th century. In 1880-1887, there was a considerable development in the caoutchouc and timber business, with the result that the total imports increased in value by 20 percent, and there was a further increase in the following year when there is a brisk trade in rice and spices. In 1894-1902, there was a considerable decrease in the value of the caoutchouc and forest produce into the province and the value of the imports fell to Rs. 8,74,386.¹¹⁰

There was an increase of 5 percent in the value of the imports and decrease of 9 percent in the value of the exports, the total value of the former being 423 and of the latter 574 lakhs of rupees. Large importations of rice which were brought into the province supplement the poor harvest of 1894 accounted for the increase in the value of the import trade, while for exports the decrease was most noticeable in the case of tea, unhusked rice and bamboos.¹¹¹

The quantities and values of the principal articles imported into Surma-Barak Valley during the year are shown below in thousands of mounds and lakhs of rupees.

¹¹⁰ *Review of the Trade of Bengal, Op. Cit.* Pp. 29-31.

¹¹¹ *Trade between Assam and the Adjoining Foreign Countries*, Guwahati, 1901, Pp. 1-3.

Imports	Quantity, Mds. (Thousands)	Value Rs. Lakhs	Percentage of value, on total value
Total imports	6,441	423.3	-----
Husked rice	2,040	86.2	20
Cotton piece-goods	141	82.8	19
Cotton twist and Yarn	21	6.9	1
Salt	700	22.2	5
Sugar, unrefined	314	18.3	4
Sugar refined	58	5.7	1
Mustard and rape oil	113	15.0	3
Kerosine oil	357	14.8	3
Gram and pulse	455	14.2	3
Other metals	115	13.0	3
Tobacco	142	9.6	2
Iron and Steel	172	9.4	2

Source: Trade between Assam and the Adjoining Foreign Countries, Guwahati, 1901, P. 3.

Husked rice: – The imports of husked rice were more than double those of the previous year, in consequence of the bad harvest of 1887, the increase being especially pronounced in the Surma Valley. The province, is however, an exporting as well as an importing province and in spite of the poor crop, the weight of rice exported was equal to about 60 percent of the rice brought into the province, and the net imports of rice was only eight lakhs of mounds, though the gross import was twenty.

Cotton Piece-goods: – There was an increase of 19,000, mounds in the quantity imported into the Surma Valley. Imports to the Barak Valley were much the same in weight as in the previous year, but there was a decrease of 14 lakhs in the reported value, due to a large proportion of the goods being packed in boles, which have a lower nominal value than goods in boxes.

Cotton twist and yarn: – The value of imports decreased by more than two lakhs of rupees.

Salt: – There was an increase of 8 percent in the quantity of salt imported. The large increase in the amount of salt carried to the Barak Valley shows that even in bad years the Bengalis are not compelled to reduce their expenditure on the necessities of life.

Sugar: – There was a decrease of 16,000 mounds in the imports of refined sugar into the Surma-Barak Valley. The imports of unrefined Sugar increased in the Valley both in quantity and value.

Kerosene Oil: – There was an increase of 26 percent over the value of the oil imported in the preceding year a fact which tends to show that the purchasing capacity of the people had not been seriously affected by the bad harvest.

Iron and Steel: – The value of the imports decreased by 45 percent, a fact for which the depressed condition of the tea industry and the gradual completion of the Assam-Bengal Railway are probably large responsible.¹¹²

The quantities and values of the principal articles exported from Surma-Barak Valley during the last part of the 19th century were: –

Exports	Quantity Mds. (Thousands)	Value Rs. (Lakhs)	Percentage of value on total exports.
Total exports	10,662	573.5	---
Tea	1,529	417.9	73
Rice in the husk	1,321	26.0	5
Rice not in the husk	356	10.8	2
Oil-seeds	429	22.0	4
Wood	909	14.5	2
Jute, raw	262	10.7	2
Lime	1,546	4.6	1
Hides of Cattle	17	4.3	1
Raw Cotton	55	3.6	0.6
Lac	30	3.6	0.6
Oranges	74	2.8	0.5

Source: Trade between Assam and the Adjoining Foreign Countries, Guwahati, 1901, P. 4.

¹¹² Trade between Assam and the Adjoining Foreign Countries, Op. Cit. Pp. 3-4.

Tea: – The quantity of tea exported decreased by 59,000 mounds in weight and by 29 lakhs of rupees in value, in consequence of a short crop due to unfavourable weather and finer plucking. The price per pound obtained was slightly better than in the preceding year.

Rice in the husk: – There was a decrease in the quantity exported of 533,000 mounds but owing to the rise in the price of grain the decrease in value was only five lakhs of rupees. The export trade was affected by the bad harvest of 1887-1894 and always liable to strongly marked fluctuations.

Oil-Seeds: – The value of exports decreased by about 4 lakhs of rupees and the quantity by 76,000 mounds. Under rape and mustard alone there was a decrease of 82,000 mounds and the exports of mustard from the Assam Valley were the lowest recorded for many years. It is not altogether easy to account for the decline in the mustard trade. For the three years 1891-1894, the annual exports from the valley averaged 7 lakhs of mounds as compared with an average of 4 lakhs for the three years 1899-1902. It is true that the mustard country was seriously injured by the earthquake of 1897, but this cannot be the only explanation of the decline in the trade, as in 1895-96 the exports only amounted to 5½ lakhs.

Wood, bamboos, etc.: – Bamboos, timber and mats are exported from the Surma-Barak Valley and the exports of the articles, which are made of murta, nal, and bamboo, were valued at over eight lakhs rupees.

Lime: – The price of lime during the year was low, and there was in consequence a decrease of 21 percent in the weight of exports, but if stone, the great bulk of which is limestone, be included, there was an increase in weight of 9 percent. The Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills reports that the water Communication between the hills and the plains of Sylhet is uncertain and bad, and there is little prospect of any development of the lime trade till the Maolong-Dwara Tramway has been constructed.

Hides of Cattle: – There was a decrease both in quantity and value in the valley, which was probably due to the absence of cattle disease in an epidemic from over any considerable area in the province.

Raw Cotton: – There was an increase both in the quantity and value of the exports due to the good crop in the Garo Hills.

Lac: – There was an increase of 82 percent in the value of the lac exported, which consists entirely of stick lac.

Oranges: – The orange trade is confined both to the Surma-Barak Valley. The exports showed an increase during the year both in quantity and value, and now stand at a higher figure than they did in the years immediately preceding the earthquake.¹¹³

However, during the colonial period, in the Assam Valley, 98 percent of the weight of the trade is entirely carried by water, and the river will probably continue to monopolies the traffic till through communication has been established with Bengal, either via Haflong or Dhubri. In the Surma-Barak Valley 22 percent of the total trade went by rail, as compared with 11 percent in the preceding year. The railway carried 32 percent of the imports to Sylhet and 72 percent of the imports to Cachar, but exports still go chiefly by river.

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¹¹³ *Tables Related to the Trade of British India with British Possessions and Foreign countries*, Calcutta, 1906, Pp. 19-25.