

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPORTANT TRADE ROUTES AND TRADE CENTRE OF THE VALLEY

Surma-Barak Valley was economically backward during the Mughal period. There are references of economy of Sylhet and Cachar in the Aini-i-Akbari. The above book records the revenue of Pratapgarh as Rs. 370,000.¹¹⁴ However, the records are contradictory. During the reign of Emperor Akbar, Todarmal divided the Bengal Suba for revenue collection into 8 mahals. Each mahals had its fixed revenue. The revenue demand of the Sylhet Sirkar had been Rs. 1,67,040. If the revenue demand for the whole of Sylhet Sirkar was Rs. 1,67,040/- how could Pratapgarh alone yield revenue of Rs. 3,70,000/- ? Aini-i- Akbari also states that the slaves and eunuchs were exported from Sylhet and Cachar to the harms of the emperor and nobility.¹¹⁵ From the forests elephant hides, ivory, and ivory products were also transported to Agra and Delhi. From other sources we come to know that there had been some rice exports through Chittagong port from Sylhet. Karimganj had been a trade mart before the coming of the English. Discommunication and chaotic law and order situation had been the primary cause of economic backwardness. The area had been the safe haven of the brigands. Law and order worsened after the death of Aurangzeb. Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan and Alibardi Khan were strict administrators but even they could not enforce order in Sylhet despite the administration's tough attitude towards the land lords who dodged the column.

Islam Khan, Nawab of Bengal defeated Yasonarayana, the ruler of the Kachari Kingdom and forced him to pay a tribute to the Emperor. Tributes were paid in ivory and the vassal allowed the Nawab to harness the forest products. However, the provincial headquarters at Dacca, later on Murshidabad, did not observe the rules rigidity in collecting the tribute and more often than not the Kachari rulers defaulted payment with impunity.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Achutcharan Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* P. 204.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* P. 60.

¹¹⁶ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 139-140.

The overall economic scenario of the principality of Cachar on the eve of annexation (1832) in the context of a comparative analysis had been grim. Political instability, civil wars, foreign aggression and brigandage battered its economy. Corruption and financial mismanagement was the order of the day. According to W. W. Hunter, Krishna Chandra's territory yielded revenue of Rs. 1,00,000/- annually but during the years preceding the Burmese invasion the income from revenue dropped to as low as Rs. 20,000/- per mensem. There had been further fall of revenue in the years 1826-1827.¹¹⁷

The collector of Sylhet reported that cultivation was making rapid progress and that the Raja would experience no difficulty in paying the tribute regularly, progress was however not so rapid as expected. The tribute fell into arrears as the Calcutta authorities apprehended, but this was not the fault of Govinda Chandra, Cachar had been one of the theatres of operation during the Anglo-Burmese war and the prolonged stay of the Burmese soldiers in that quarter had reduced the country side to such a state of wretchedness and poverty that even Tucker, collector of Sylhet, had to confess that "it would require years of peace and good management to place it in a condition capable of liquidating the tribute payable by the Raja". During the reign of Raja Krishnachandra, Cachar had yielded a revenue of one lac of rupees. After his death the amount fell off and the condition of the country began to deteriorate owing to prolonged incursions made by the rebel Tularam and the Manipuri Princess. The Burmese invasion completed the ruin of the country. All the lands east of Bikrampur and Panchgram were thrown out of cultivation and a large number of cultivators were either killed or carried into captivity. After the conclusion of the peace, a few parganas were reoccupied, but still most of the villages were nearly empty and no revenues were forthcoming from them. So, Raja Govindachandra applied to the British Government for remission of tribute for the years 1825-26 and 1826-27.¹¹⁸

David Scott supported the petition of Govindachandra and recommended that as the paramount power had failed to afford adequate protection to the people of Cachar, the necessary remission should be granted. The defaulting Raja was granted his request but in

¹¹⁷ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* P. 156.

¹¹⁸ *Report on the Revenue System of the District of Cachar*, 1853, P. 9.

return for the concession which the supreme Government termed a 'boon', he was required to construct a good road across his country facilitating easy communications between Sylhet and Manipur. At the same time, the Supreme Government again called the collector of Sylhet to ascertain from the Raja if he was willing to hand over his kingdom to the East India Company as "he was advanced in years bodily infirm and had no heir to succeed him".

The revenue collector of Sylhet Tucker had to resort to coercive means because the resorted monarch resorted to mindless torture to improve his finance. The Raja, however, was no sooner resorted to the throne than he commenced a series of unsparing exactions on his own people. He almost collapsed the trade between Manipur and Sylhet by imposing the heaviest transit dues on all articles of merchandise. He behaved most tyrannically towards the Manipuris who had settled in his territory. His tribute also fell into arrears. It would have been impossible to allow this state of things to go on indefinitely.¹¹⁹

The reports of Tucker and the views expressed by Edward Gait are a sad commentary upon the financial management of the last Kachari ruler. The Raja oppressed the tenants and his Moktars were leeches and for fear of life the peasants fled the country. Notwithstanding the withdrawal of the Burmese occupationary forces, the people who fled the country did not dare to come back Cachar as they had very little confidence in Gobinda Chandra. The Burmese war generated economic activities both in Sylhet and Cachar.¹²⁰ The businessmen of Sylhet seized the opportunity and jumped into the fray and accelerated the speed of economic development. But such activities were not visible in Cachar because of ruler's apathy. The foolish monarch failed to utilize the new economic situation. The case of Karimganj was totally different; the people there were enterprising and adventurous and lived under the protective umbrella of the civilized British rule.

In the pre-war period the universal wage rate in Cachar had been 1 anna per day per head. But that rate jumped to four annas per day during the war years. There had been steady demand for local supplies but the oppressed and indolent, people Cachar did not come

¹¹⁹ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 156-157.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 158.

forward to improve their lot. Only the Muslims and manipuris responded to the call of the war economy.

Slavery was the acknowledged practice in the social system in Cachar. A substantial section of the population was slaves. The slaves of Cachar were exported to Sylhet and also to Manipur and even to the eastern hills. The people were mostly drug addicts and suffered from diseases. Morality was low and the life expectancy was poor. There were practically no roads and the markets were in disorder, bargain in kinds was in vogue and very little circulation of money. Currencies were almost rare. A silver coin was an object of curiosity. The fortunate men who could get hold of a silver currency kept it wrapped in raw cotton and almost figuratively worshipped it. Notwithstanding the dark economic condition a perceptible change was visible. The migrants from east Bengal particularly from Sylhet began to pour it into the land and the markets of Cachar to bloat the trade and commerce. The Manipuris and Muslim also because of their fearless adventurous nature did their stint to improve the fledgling economy of Surma-Barak Valley.¹²¹

Coming back to the Raja's share in mismanaging the state's economy the collector of Sylhet, Tucker reported to the government that the Raja had put a spur upon the exporting rice to Sylhet, a principal importer of food grains from Cachar. Raja had the monopoly right over the rice trade in Cachar. In consequence of Raja's uneconomic measures the rice growers suffered heavy loss. These rice growers were 'proverbially poor', according to Tucker. Tucker further quoted the prevailing rate of paddy in Cachar as 16, 17 and mounds for a rupee where as the whole sale rate of paddy in Sylhet had been 3 mounds a rupee and 2.5 mounds a rupee in the Bazar. Tucker termed in Cachar rate as the "fabulously cheap" rate and accused the administration of the Raja as tyrannical. The collector of Sylhet further pointed out the general trade of Cachar had been under the restrictions of unjust royal orders. Because of Raja's imposed embargo upon the ivory, silk and cotton goods the brisk trade between Cachar and Manipur and Cachar and Sylhet and Manipur and Sylhet got sadly paralysed. The Raja compelled the incoming traders to dispose of the goods at a cheaper rate. Cachar was the

¹²¹ *Report on the work of the Indian Government Trade Commissioner*, Milan, 1936, Pp. 27-29.

reservoir of inexhaustible timber but the levied such a heavy tariff upon the timber that it made the entry of Sylhet timber merchants into Cachar almost impossible. Gobinda Chandra also imposed exorbitant duty upon the transactions on ivory, rubber and salt. The greedy Raja charged enormous custom duties upon transit of goods through his territories leading to heavy loss to the Bengali traders of Sylhet and also to the merchants of Manipur.

The complains of the local authorities of Sylhet compelled the Governor General in council to give direction to David Scott, the Agent to institute an enquiry of the complains and report David Scott brushed aside the complaint and stated that the Raja was within his financial jurisdictions to restrict the trade for his personal benefit and it would be unwise to interfere into his profits.¹²² After all, Govinda Chandra had been paying regularly the tribute. Secondly he differed on the views expressed by Tucker that the people of Cachar had been 'proverbially poor', rather they were 'better off' than the men of the Sylhet district and it would inadvisable 'to plunder them' by the merchants of Sylhet. Scott also admitted of the Cachar's superior soil.

The report of David Scott throws a spanner on the economic condition of the Barak Valley. Undoubtedly, the people of Sylhet had been more enterprising and had among them a large number of traders with capital but the general condition of the people of Sylhet was worse than the common people of Cachar. It is no wonder that captain Verner, the Superintendent, Cachar in 1853 remarked that nearly 'everyone in Cachar was a Mirasdar'. Exaggeration apart, the Cachar commoner with warts and all had been comparatively better off than his counterpart in Sylhet and Manipur.¹²³ The principal economic features of Surma-Barak Valley were as follows:-

Though Cachar was incorporated into the East India Company's dominion in 1832, the principality of Cachar, however, came under the direct control of British administration since the beginning of the first Anglo-Burmese war. The economic jurisdiction of East-India Company was extended to Cachar long before the political control. British currency was in

¹²² Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 158-159.

¹²³ *Report on the Revenue System of the District of Cachar, Op. Cit.* Pp. 10-12.

vogue in Sylhet since the days of Dewani. The name of the currency was sicca taka. The rulers of Cachar also recognized the taka as the medium of exchange in their territory. For example, the land revenue of Cachar was fixed (before annexation) as 12 Kahana Cowri per hal of land. The price of 5 Kahana of cowri was one rupee. Moreover, the forest revenue if the principality was collected mostly in taka. The merchants normally exported the timber of the forest to the neighbouring populous district Sylhet in exchange for money.

There were certain salt wells at the Tyline hillock which met the demand of the local population but the import of refined salt from Sylhet during the last quarter of the 18th century caused the winding up of the indigenous salt production units. The local people purchased the salt from Sylhet with the help of taka. The kings of Cachar used to make payment to their officers in taka. Even the learned poet. Bhubaneswar Vachaspati demanded Rs. 100 (one hundred rupee) from the prince Suradarpa for his book. Gamber Singh was appointed the chief of the Kachari armed forces by the King Gobinda Chandra on a salary of Rs. 50/- (fifty rupees) per month. In the absence of a mint in the principality of Cachar, the rulers willingly accepted the British currency and all other monetary rules of trade transactions. The political sovereignty of the principality of Cachar had been weak and from the standpoint of finance, the rulers of Cachar were more or less like the zamindars in the neighbouring district. Sylhet dependent on British currency. The only difference had been that they did not pay the rent to the treasury at Sylhet.¹²⁴

The system of land measurement in Cachar was somewhat different from the prevailing system in West Bengal. In Cachar, land measurement with the help of a reed known as Nala was in vogue for a long time and it continued during the period of our study. Subsequently, the pipe reed was supplanted by a Muli Bamboo. The measuring units had been like: –

32 fingers	Equal to	1 cubit
17 cubits	Equal to	1 nala
10 X 12 nala	Equal to	1 kani
16 kani	Equal to	1 drona

¹²⁴ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* P. 160.

Unlike Karimganj, the land revenue system in Cachar even after the annexation was materially different as zamindari system was not extended to Cachar. The land revenue system in Cachar was akin to that of the Ahom kingdom where there was the paik or khel system. The khels were distributed amongst the high nobles. The paiks were under the rigid control of the owner of the khel. The Assamese name paik was not in vogue in the Kachari principality. The entire territory was divided into two Raj and the Raj was divided into some Khels. Each individual in the Khel was responsible for the revenue of his own cultivated land and kheldars or elected Moktars were collectively responsible for the entire revenue of the khel to the owner of the Raj. During the rule of Krishna Chandra the state treasury received the revenue for Cachar plains Rs. 69,000/-, North Cachar Hills Rs, 5,000/-, his subsequently annexed to Manipur Rs. 1,000/- Dharampur Rs. 25,000/-.¹²⁵

With the British annexation of Cachar the Government distributed the land directly to the individual on a specific rent. For all practical purpose the rayotwari system instead of zamindari system was introduced in Cachar according to the recommendations of Captain Fisher, the superintendent of Cachar. The new land system eliminated the defects of prevailing zamindari system and made the rayot and government connexion more direct and healthy. Thereby the ryots got greater opportunity to place their grievances to the government. In the zamindari system the ryot could reach the government only through the zamindars. Thus, the land owners in Cachar big or small were in a better position than the cultivators in Karimganj, Sylhet. In Sylhet, the bourgeois elements had been dominant but not in Cachar. The land tenure in Sylhet was responsible for the social cleavage but in Cachar the land tenure ensured social cohesion.¹²⁶

It is difficult to compile, anything like a comprehensive list of the raw materials for various industries available in Surma-Barak Valley as the vast resources of the country rich alike in mineral and vegetable products have not yet been fully investigated. The raw materials for the different industries in the province and as far as can be ascertained also those regarding which new industries may be possible are enumerated below: –

¹²⁵ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* P. 32.

¹²⁶ Suhas Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 161-162.

Raw materials available locally in respect of which industries have already been established in different part of countries.

Raw Materials	Industries
Oil seeds	Mustard oil pressing by steam, bullock and hand power manufacture of oil-cake
Paddy	Rice husking and cleaning by steam power
Sugarcane	Manufacture of unrefined sugar
Timber	Timber sawing by steam and hand power, cabinet making, boat-building, toy making, cart wheel industry
Cane, bamboo, nal and patidai	Manufacture of cane and bamboo furniture, basket, jhampies, mats and sital patis
Raw cotton	Cotton-ginning by steam power, hand ginning and spinning, weaving of cotton. Export of raw cotton.
Raw lac	Collection and export of raw lac. Manufacture of lac toys in Sylhet.
Milk	Manufacture of ghee, butter and other dairy produce
Potters clay	Manufacture of inferior Assamese pottery and of improved pottery by up –country potters settled in Assam. Manufacture of well rings.
Fish	Fish-catching, manufacture of dried fish, export of fresh and dried fish.
Ivory	Ivory-carving
Agar wood	Manufacture of essence from Agar wood

Source: Economic Report of Assam, P. 2.

Moreover, raw materials available locally in respect of which new industries may be possible.

1. Hides and skins for tannery and leather works. Value of the raw material exported amounted to 13 lakhs in the last part of the 19th century.
2. Limestone and clay for Portland cement.
3. Reeds, grasses, bamboos and soft woods for paper-making

4. Raw lac for manufacture of the various preparations of lac and lac dye.
5. Sand and lime for glass-making.
6. Bones and horns for buttons, combs, and bone manure.
7. Soft wood for match boxes.
8. Indian rubber.
9. Nali bamboos of Sylhet and the Hill areas of Cachar for cheap umbrellas.
10. Fruits such as the pine apple for preservation and tinning. Oranges for marmalade.
11. Fish for preservation, and canning of fish. Manufacture of fish oil and porpoise oil.
12. Dub grass for hay-making.
13. Resin from wood and turpentine.
14. Wax.
15. Indigenous dyeing material
16. Chaulmurgru Seeds.
17. Tea Seeds.

Sericulture is one of the oldest industries of the Surma-Barak Valley. Its present position is far from being satisfactory. The rearing of Pat or mulberry silk has seriously declined, while that of mejankuris, Ketkuris and Champa varieties is nearly extinct. The rearing of Pat is confined to a separate caste known as Jugis or Katonis. The causes that have contributed to the gradual discontinuance of the rearing of this worm are the following: -

1. Wholesale loss from disease and difficulty of obtaining disease-free seeds.
2. Destruction of food plants by insects.
3. Competition of imported mulberry silk which is under selling the local product.¹²⁷

During the colonial period, in Surma-Barak Valley, there are various hats. The imposition of oppressive duties and vexatious exactions effectively hindered the traffic with the highlands. Under Raja Purandar, at Borhat, of the articles brought to barter for salt, the Raja takes here one seventh or one fifth of that himself and another one fifth again is taken at the wells. Of the salt purchased, out of four lumps, he has to give the Raja one piece, and a

¹²⁷ *Economic Report of Assam*, Pp. 1-3.

half to the manager. Articles that cannot be divided are valued --- about 50% is taken on the trade upwards and nearly 40% on the trade downwards---. What was unfortunate that these duties, continued to exist even after the resumption of upper Assam. In the west Garos, who were invariably subjected to illegal exactions were also forced to bring their heavy but less costly hoads of cotton down of the hats, where to avoid harassments at the hands of the customs officials.¹²⁸ They had undersold their commodities though the mountaineers could dispose of their goods even at spots always accessible to customers from Bengal.

The retention of these hats with their attendant evils, exactions, vexations and delays apart from restricting mutual intercourse between the dwellers of the hills and plains-served as the perennial source of friction with the British authorities and as such they very object for which these check posts were maintained was defeated. To this state of affairs commissioner of Assam, never failed to draw the attention of the rice sentiments of occasionally expressed by the supreme Government. The odious hats continued to exist even after the abolition of the customs chokies in the North-East Frontier. When the Board of revenue in June 1839 took serious view of the oppressive character of the Garo hats and held that the retention of these customs gates militated against the spirit of the act XIV of 1836. The Government of Bengal ultimately decided on their abolition. The Commissioner of Assam was, accordingly, authorised to allow the Garos and other hill-tribes to dispose of their articles free of duties at places most convenient of them on condition that if disturbances should occur in consequence of the withdrawal of these restrictions. The propriety of reimposing these and other restriction will become a matter for consideration. Consequences of the removal of these restrictions soon began to be left in the increased production and export of cotton from the Garo and Naga hills. Brodie reported in 1842, "Our intercourse with the Nagas is daily increasing and is carried on in a most satisfactory and peaceful manner. The hillmen are coming down in great numbers to Jaypur, an Assamese traders in salt are having a perfectly unrestricted access to the hills".¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *Assam District Gazetteers*, Sylhet, P. 32.

¹²⁹ H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*. *Op. Cit.* Pp. 274-275.

Through the Duars or the numerous passed across the mountains traffic was carried on into the heart of the territory of Bhutan and thence of Tibet. The Monbas and the Kampa Bhutias, it appears, were the middlemen in the Assam-Tibet trade. M'cosh, in his *Topography of Assam*, traces the existence of a route from Sadiya to Tibet across the Himalayas and parallel to the Brahmaputra. In all probability formally there had been cultural and commercial contacts between China and the valley of Brahmaputra and that traffic was carried on through the numerous routes across the offshoots of the eastern Himalayas. Of the several routes to the Kingdom of Ava the most commonly used, known as the Patkai route, starts from Jaypur, after passing through the territory of the Singphos and the patkai tribes it debouches into the Valley of the Hukwang and reaches Moon Kong Mogoung on the bank of the river Irrawadi where from travellers to Ava went downstream and those to China proceeded upstream for about 200 miles to the frontier of China.¹³⁰ Through this route the Muslims carried on their barter trade with the Kachins and the Chinese, and through this route again the Burmese repeatedly invaded Assam and dragged away thousands of ill-fated men and women as slaves to Ava and even to China. So vital was this route to the Burmese whether for controlling to border tribes or for embarking on a policy of expansion to the north that the king of Ava had to take special care for its maintenance.¹³¹

The following is a brief description of the more important local products of the loom. The than is a large, stout cloth made of white cotton thread and used in the cold weather as a worm wrap. The ordinary size is 9' by 4' 6", but it is sometimes 18' in length and is worn double. The price ranges from Rs. 8 to 3. The Fanek is a garment worn by a Manipuri women, It is made of green or dark blue thread with red and yellow strips, and the border is sometimes embroidered with flowers in cotton or silk. The price varies from Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 7. The Khesh is a thick cloth, either, plain or striped, used as a coverlet for a bed, as a wrapper by men, and as a petticoat by women. Kheshes are generally from 5' to 9' in length and 3' to 9' in breath, and cost from as: 8 to Rs. 3. The Manipuris also weave cheap mosquito curtains which are sold for from As. 8 to Rs. 1- 4 a set. The Kukis weave cloths called pal, which are not unlike the Khesh, and most of their clothing like that of the Mikirs and Nagas, is home made. A

¹³⁰ S. K. Chatterjee, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Delhi, 1965, Pp. 16-22.

¹³¹ H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*. *Op. Cit.* P. 275.

speciality of theirs is the pari, a kind of rug made of lumps of raw clean cotton woven into a course stout cloth and Knotted tightly between the weft. The ordinary pari is about 8' by 4' and costs some five rupees.¹³²

The Eri-Silk worm is reared by Kacharis both in the plains and in the hills, but the cloth produced is generally intended for home wear and very little comes to market. The worm derives its name from the eri or castor-oil plant on which it is usually fed. From five to six broods are hatched out in the year those which spin-their cocoons in November, February, and May yielding most silk. The females, when they emerge, tied to pieces of reed, and are visited by the males who are left at liberty. The eggs are hatched in the house and take from a week to fifteen days to mature. As soon as the worms appear they are placed on a tray, which is suspended in a place of safety and fed on the leaves of the castor-oil plant.

During the Colonial period, the earth used by potters is generally a glutinous clay, which is well moistened with water and freed from all extraneous substances. If it is too stiff, some clean, coarse has is worked up with it. A well kneaded lump of clay is then placed on the wheel, which is fixed horizontally, and made to rotate rapidly. As the wheel revolves, the potter works the clay with his fingers and gives it the desired shape. The vessel is then sun dried, place in a mould and beaten into final shape with a mallet, a smooth stone being held the while against the inner surface. It is then again sun dried, the surface is polished, and it is ready for the Kiln. The collection for the clay and firewood, the shaping of the utensils on the wheel and the stacking of them in the Kiln, form the men's portion of the work. The women do the polishing and the final shaping.¹³³

The instruments employed are wheel which is about three feet in diameter and rotates on a piece of hard pointed wood fixed firmly in the ground, the mould a hollow basin about 16 inches long by 3½ inches deep, the mallet (mala or piteni), and the polishers.

¹³² B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* P. 94.

¹³³ *Ibid.* Pp. 94-96.

The Kumars have abandoned their traditional occupation and taken to agriculture and only manufacture a few articles in their leisure hours.¹³⁴ The most important Kumar villages are Joynagar, Chatla, Banraj, and Kalin in the Sadar Subdivision and Rangauti, Matijuri, Bishnupur, and Sibuttar in Hailakandi. The Principal articles manufactured are cooking-pots water-jars, plates, cups, and lamps. The pottery is, however, much inferior to that imported from Bengal.

Apart from tea, the only factories in which European capital is invested are the Lakhipur Sawmills at Phulertal, and the Barak Mills at Sonaimukh. The former had an average labour force of 127 in 1904, the latter of 30. The outturn consists principally of tea boxes, boxes, for which there is a large local demand. Tea boxes are also constructed by native carpenters in Silchar.

The fishing industry is not of very great importance, and is largely in the hands of Mahimals and Dom Patnis from Sylhet. There is no trade in salt fish, and the outturn from the local fisheries has to be supplemented with dried and even fresh fish, brought from the haors and rivers of Sylhet.

The following are the nets most commonly in use: (1) The Peloin is a net in the form of the letter Y which is pushed through the water by the operator, as he walks along the bed of the fishery. Price as 6 to Re 1. (2) The Jhinti is a large variety of the Peloin which is worked from a boat. Price Rs. 2 to Rs. 8. (3) The Khuti is a square net, the opposite corners of which are fastened to the ends of two flexible bamboos which are crossed in the middle. These crossed bamboos are fixed to a stout handle by means of which the net is raised and towed. Price Rs. 4 to Rs. 10. (4) The Jhaki is a circular throw net weighted round the edge, and with a rope attached to the centre. It is thrown flat on the surface of the water, and the weights then sink and draw to the edges of the net together. Price Rs. 3 to Rs. 6 (5) The Hurajal is a drag net from 2 to 4 yards wide and 10 to 25 yards long. Price Rs. 20 to Rs. 80 (6) The Manipuri net is used both as a Khuti Jal and as a drag net, and costs from As 8 to Rs. 3. The traps used

¹³⁴ *Notes on Some Industries of Assam, Op. Cit.* P. 11.

are of two kinds. The Hogra is a triangular shaped basket filled with twigs and brushwood, which is sunk in the bed of a stream, the Doo is of various shapes and sizes and is worked on the principle of a lobster pot. The Polo is like a large wicker work wineglass which is dabbed on the mud by the person working it, any fish caught being removed through the stem.¹³⁵

The fisheries of Cachar are divided into two main class. The Barak, the Ghagra, the Sonai Rukni, the Chiri, and thirty six more of the larger and more important fisheries, are put up to auction and sold to the highest bidder. The remaining fisheries, of which there are no less than 305, are settled for a term of years with the persons who on equitable grounds appear to have the strongest claims to settlement. The revenue assessed varies from Re. 1 to Rs. 200 but in most cases is from Rs. 5 to Rs. 15. The purchaser or settlement holder of the fishery is allowed to charge the following rates on the nets or traps used. The higher rates quoted are for fisheries valued at more than Rs. 50 Per annum. Peloin, As 4 and As 2, Jhinti As 6 and As. 4, Khuti As 12 and As. 8., Jhaki As. 12, and As 8, jhaki As. 12, and As. 8, jhaki, As. 12 and As 8., hura, Rs. 5 and Rs. 4, hogra and doo, As. 4 and As. 2 caching boat, Rs. 3-8 and Rs. 2.¹³⁶

The following are the best eating fish found in the Surma-Barak Valley: - Rui (labco rohita), Chital (notopterus chitala), hilsa (clupea ilisha), Sol (ophiocaphlus striotus), magur (clarios magur), Kai (anabos scandens). Pufta (calli chorus bimaculatus), Vacha (eutropiichthys Vacha) etc.¹³⁷

The information about old time routes in the present Valley of Surma is scanty. Nevertheless, much of the foreign trades of the Valley in the past were carried on through water ways and still today the river Barak and Surma provides yeoman's service as the means of communication in the Valley. The land routes were vice Arakan range, Manipur and Patakai-pass. Besides, other rivers and tributaries were also used as communication route by the people of the valley with small country boats. During the rainy seasons, big steamers plied through the Surma to Silchar, but in cold weather, there was hardly three feet of water in the

¹³⁵ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 96-97.

¹³⁶ D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 41-42.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* P. 42.

channel and therefore at this season of the year the journey from Calcutta to Silchar took five days.¹³⁸

The road transport in Surma-Barak Valley till 1853, was quite backward in respect of road transport. In the said year, Mr. Mill reported that there was only one road in the district which had not been repaired for years together. In 1866, the Cachar district had six roads under the Ferry Fund Board. The total length of these roads was in between 80 and 96 Kilometers. But soon after the construction of the above roads in the district made rapid progress and it stood in advantageous position in respect of roads in Assam. This advantage owed to the tea planters who wanted good road communications between their gardens and the Barak River by which their tea was dispatched and all their supply were received. Foreign trade was entirely carried by water but internal traffic passed along the roads which were kept in good condition by the tea planters. Many of these roads were available for wheel traffic also.

The bulk of the tea and timber is carried to Calcutta make from the Surma-Barak Valley is steamer through Bangladesh territory. The main clearance of goods on Railway is also largely made through Badarpur, Lumding, and Hill section of North-East Frontier Railway. The following table furnishes information on imports of the Surma-Barak Valley are as follows, fish oil, cotton, clarified butter, molasses, wax, tea, bamboo, mats, rubber, oranges, honey, ivory, mustard oil etc. The principal imports are cloth, cinnamon, spices, copper, bell metal, brass, gold, silver, salt, sugar, tobacco etc. The manufactures of the District are scarcely sufficient to supply the local wants and are not exported. The number of Marwari, merchants is also very small. The village shopkeepers usually deals in grain and pulse, ghee, oil, sugar, molasses, salt, tobacco, spices, umbrellas, and piece goods. The villagers come to the bazars on the market days, bringing with them rice or paddy, fruit, vegetables, goats and poultry.¹³⁹

In Surma-Barak Valley, over and above the daily and weekly markets in the wholesale trade centres, a number of retail shops dealing in different consumer's goods run the retail

¹³⁸ *Report on the Existing Arts and Industries in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1890, P. 3.

¹³⁹ Kamarunnasa Islam, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 133-137.

business. The important retail markets are at Sealtek, Patharkandi, Hailakandi, Bhagabazar, Kalinganj, Nutanbazar, Lakhipur and Algapur. Numerous retail trade centres are now growing up in the rural areas due to location of some big industries, offices or factories. Consequently, some shops dealing with various items particularly groceries, stationeries etc. are also growing up in these centres. Each village has got at least one grocery shop which centres to the necessary of the people. The public bus services facilities mobilisation of the business in different part of the district. Moreover, every of the commodities of different use are imported to the valley.¹⁴⁰ The wholesale purchase of some commodities like Sugar, Pulses, mustard oil etc. is done at the production centres which are generally situated outside Assam. All the trade centres of the Valley are the distributing centres for goods both imported and locally purchased. The wholesale as well as retail business are generally carried on side by side in these centres. In almost all these centres daily and weekly markets are held for retail business. It is to be noted that the Karimganj bazar though situated in a sub-divisional headquarters is far better than the Silchar bazar. In Karimganj, Sylhet, Hailakandi, and Silchar, there is a fixed day in a week known as Principal market day.

Trade centres of wholesale business, Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, the sub divisional headquarters of the Cachar district, Patharkandi, Bhangabazar, Katigorah, Nilambazar, Badarpur, Kaliganj, Lakhipur, Algapur, Lala, Sonaibazar, Katlicherra, Durlabcherra, etc. are the main trade centres in the valley. Most of the business is transacted at the bazars. Almost all the bazars are situated on the banks of the rivers. From the local hats or markets, the Beparis collect the local products and store them in the trade centres as mentioned above. The wholesale as well as retail business are growing in these centres during recent years. The wholesale traders import goods from various trade markets outside the valley and purchase local goods for export. Guwahati is the most important trade centres in Assam where from many tea garden is an important centre of sales and purchases especially for the people of the garden.¹⁴¹ (See Appendix – 7)

The hats are also the important centres, where a great deal of retail business is carried on. These hats are held either weekly or bi-weekly on particular days. According to 1961

¹⁴⁰ *Report on the condition and prospect of British Trade in India*, Calcutta, 1939, P. 68.

¹⁴¹ *Note on the Province of Assam and the Industry Therein*, Guwahati, 1934, P. 17.

census, these were 89 weekly hats, 4 daily, and 113 bi-weekly markets in the valley. To these hats and Bazars, the villagers bring their surplus agricultural products such as vegetables, rice betelnuts, poultry, cattle, goats, homemade cloths, and handmade bamboo and cane products for sale. The sellers also include a section of petty traders who gathers these from towns and trade centres with their wares which consists of cotton goods, Sugar, Pulses, Spices, toys and various other titbits. The petty dealers hold licenses issued under the Assam Cotton Cloth and yarn Dealer's order. The important hats have rows of small temporary sheds mostly of bamboo and tatch.¹⁴²

The importance of the village hats cannot be undermined because they provide the villagers easy marketing facilities for their surplus agricultural produce including perishable goods which required rapid transactions. Moreover, the articles of daily use are made available to the villagers who can easily procure those from the local hats without going to the distant markets or trade centres. The most important markets are Silchar, Karimganj, Katlicherra, Durlabcherra, Sonaibazar and Bhangabazar in the district where rice, jute, gur, cotton, pine-apple, coconut are sold in wholesale and rice appears in the markets in large scale.

There are many fairs are held in different parts of the valley, most of which go on for some days and some people congregate there to enjoy the festivals. The fairs are season and held on particular religious festivals. Apart from the merriment which marks these fairs a good deal of buying and selling of different goods is also carried on there. The congregation is generally of villagers including men, women, boys, girls, and children, a section of whom also bring their produce for sale in these fairs which are visited by some petty traders from towns and trading centres with their wares. B. C. Allen mentions in his 'District Gazetteers of Cachar', about a considerable fair held at Katigorah on the occasion of Baruni festival.¹⁴³

The trade relations of the Sylhet province with outside were both by rail and river borne. Mainly with Calcutta and other parts of Bengal and transfrontier, is under a regular

¹⁴² *Note on the Province of Assam and the Industry Therein, Op. Cit.* P. 17.

¹⁴³ D. Dutta, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 123-126.

system of registration, and the Director of Industries publishes annual and triennial reports on the subjects, The condition of trade in the interior, however, formed a subject of special enquiry at the census and detailed reports covering 62 different markets or bazars widely scattered areas have been received.¹⁴⁴ District and sub-divisional headquarters markets, though frequently owned and managed by Municipalities are counted as rural in the following summary for they serve large rural populations as well as the towns people and their conditions very little except as to size and number of shops from the ordinary markets of the interior.

Excluding very petty and minor hats, a total number of 897 regular markets or bazars has been reported from the province (British territory only), but this excludes two subdivisions for which no numbers have been given, and a number of tea garden bazars which have been omitted in some district reports. Particularly, all of these are distributing centres for various kinds of imported goods as well as marts for rice and fresh food products of the neighbourhood.¹⁴⁵

Among the important meals held at present in the district are those held on the Baruni Tithi in the month of March at Sidheswar Siva temple near Badarpurghat, within the jurisdiction of Katigorah Thana and other Siva temples of Bhuban Hill and Malugram. It is a bathing festival attended by a large number of Hindu temples. These meals are familiarly known as Baruni meals which last for 15 days and so. Sivaratri or Sivachturdashi meals are also held at Siv temples at the Bhuban Hill Sivtilla, Malugram and at the temple of Dadhimata. These fairs remain jubilant continuously for several days. The other one, is not so big but fairly important, is the Ananda Mayee mela or Pausha Sankranti mela at Arunachal Kalibari. It has the connection with the movement of the sun and therefore held on Uttarayan Sankranti which generally falls in the month of January. Large number of people gathers at the foot of the Arunachal Ashram where the mela is held. The Mela continue for five days only. Another Mela known as Gandhi Mela is held in Silchar town during February and attended by large number of people of all sorts. On this occasion, an exhibition in industrial

¹⁴⁴ *Assam District Gazetteer, Sylhet, Op. Cit.* P. 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* P. 26.

arts, handicrafts etc. is held by different departments located in the districts. This mela lasts for about a fortnight. Mela's are also held on Rash Purnima and Maghi Purnima at Bharambaba temple.¹⁴⁶

A fair of some importance in the Sylhet district is the Pornatirtha mela, at the foot of the hills to the north of Sunamaganj. Here about 8,000 attend annually, but more than half of these are Hindu women who go to bath. There is a good deal of trade, but all the articles are such as may be had in the ordinary markets, although a certain number of the hillmen and local villagers lay in their annual requirements at the mela. In some tea-garden areas in South Sylhet, horse racing and circuses are features of the winter mela's.¹⁴⁷

Following are the some important hats or markets during the colonial period are as follows: -

List of Markets

Tehsil	Place of which market is held	Days of week when held
Katigorah	Behara	Monday and Friday
	Bhadari	Saturday and Wednesday
	Digabar	Tuesday
	Gumra	Sunday
	Haritkar	Saturday and Wednesday
	Jalalpur	Sunday and Thursday
	Kalian	Saturday and Wednesday
	Kalainchara	Wednesday
	Kalibari	Saturday and Wednesday
	Karkuri	Tuesday
	Katigora	Wednesday and Sunday

¹⁴⁶ U. Guha, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 159-163.

¹⁴⁷ N. K. Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, New Delhi, 2003, P. 281.

	Kauakhati	Friday
	Natwanpur	Wednesday
	Pechachara	Sunday and Thursday
	Sialtek	Tuesday and Friday
	Trikpakai	Tuesday
Silchar	Alni	Wednesday
	Banskandi	Monday and Friday
	Bara Jalinga	Sunday
	Bara Mamda	Monday
	Barkhala	Sunday and Thursday
	Binnakandi	Sunday
	Changduar	Thursday
	Derby	Sunday
	Dowarbond	Thursday
	Dhalai Bazar	Monday and Thursday
	Didarkhosh	Friday
	Jainagar	Wednesday and Saturday
	Jaipur or Rajbazar	Saturday and Tuesday
	Jirighat	Monday
	Kabarikona	Sunday
	Katal	Sunday
	Lakhipur	Sunday and Thursday
	Moniarkhal	Thursday
	Palaipunji	Sunday
	Panibhara	Wednesday
	Rani bazar	Monday and Thursday

	Rukni garden	Sunday
	Sahapur	Sunday
	Saint Catherine	Monday
	Salchapra	Wednesday and Saturday
	Silchar Town (Khas Bazar)	Daily
	Silchar Town (Ukil Bazar)	Sunday
	Sildubi	Wednesday
	Silkuri	Sunday
	Singarbond	Saturday and Tuesday
	Sonai	Saturday and Tuesday
	South Mohanpur	Monday
	Srikona II	Monday
	Tariniganj or Paylapul	Monday and Friday
	Telka	Tuesday
	Udharbond	Monday and Friday
Hailakandi	Ainarkhal	Sunday
	Baburbazar (Kalinagar)	Saturday and Wednesday
	Bandukmara garden	Sunday
	Chandipur garden	Sunday
	Chupalghat (Bhatirkupa)	Monday and Thursday
	Dhalai Bazar	Wednesday
	Dhalai Bazar garden	Friday
	Hailakandi Town	Saturday and Wednesday
	Hasiura garden	Sunday and Thursday
	Janki Bazar (North Hailakandi)	Saturday and Wednesday

	Joykrishnapur	Monday and Friday
	Kalachara (Sudarsanpur)	Sunday and Thursday
	Kalibari Bazar (Algapur)	Monday and Thursday
	Kaya garden	Sunday
	Kuchila garden	Tuesday and Friday
	Kukichara garden	Friday
	Lala Bazar	Saturday and Tuesday
	Lalachara garden	Sunday and Thursday
	Lotakandi garden	Thursday
	Monacherra bazar	Thursday
	Matijuri Bazar	Tuesday and Friday
	Mohanpur Bazar	Saturday
	Mohanpur garden	Sunday
	Pakhichara garden	Sunday
	Balakandi (Itarkandi)	Friday
	Robertaband grant	Sunday
	Rupachara garden	Sunday
	Saraspur garden	Friday
	Vernerpur garden	Saturday

Source: B. C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Cachar, Pp. 22-31.

Most of the headquarters markets sit daily for sale of fresh produce, such as fish and vegetables, when the attendance is not large perhaps 200 or 300. Weekly or bi-weekly however, there is a bazar day proper when trade is much brisker and the attendance becomes often 2,000 or 3,000. In the Barak Valley, there is a considerable number of Municipal Local Board and other publicly owned markets.¹⁴⁸ In Surma Valley all are privately owned. Of the

¹⁴⁸ B. C. Allen, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 22-31.

897 regular markets reported, 60 are under Municipal or local Board control and 119 under Government or other public ownership.

The following statement shows for certain districts the area and population served by rural markets of all classes.

District	Actual number of markets	Number of markets per 100000 population	Average number of square miles served by a market
Goalpara	No	19	36
Kamrup	41	5	94
Darrang	57	12	51
Nowgong	43	11	86
Cachar Plains	118	24	17
Sylhet	313	15	15
Khasi and Jaintia Hills	104	43	58

Source: Economic Report of South Assam, P. 28.

The Sylhet, total excludes Karimganj subdivision from which no report was received and some tea-garden hats have been omitted, but the figures serve for a rough comparison. It will be noticed that the Surma Valley markets serve a smaller area and population than do those of Brahmaputra Valley. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills have numbers of regular markets but in the other hill districts they hardly exist, as the families are generally self supporting and when any commodity runs short it can be borrowed from a neighbouring household until the next harvest. Thus there are only 3 markets reported from the Lushai Hills, four from North Cachar, and four in the Naga Hills, all at the larger centres and under public ownership. In Manipur these enquiries were not made.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ *Economic Report of South Assam*, Guwahati, 1939, Pp. 28-34.

There is seldom much business in the early morning, midday, and afternoon are often the busiest times, especially in tea garden areas where the coolies have a leave day every week, in ordinary rural areas the greatest throng often comes in the late afternoon or evening, when cultivators are able to attend after doing a day's work. In most areas the dry season brings the largest con course, but in areas with a good deal of water, the busiest time of year may be the rains. Prices of articles other than agricultural produce do not generally vary greatly at different seasons, but bad communications to distant centres may cause a rise of 20 or 30 percent. in the rains or just after. Some Markets are affected adversely by other a few miles away, or connected by railway, but as a rule the weekly or bi-weekly bazar days are fixed so as not to clash and so as to enable the same traders and purchasers to attend two or three different bazars in the same area. A certain number of new hats have been started to provide for new population. At most of the regular markets every necessity and a good many of the luxuries of life can be bought and sold. In or near hill, forest or frontier areas special products such as spears, raw cotton, lac and other forest produce are dealt in; days are sold (males for eating, females for breeding-price from Re 1 to Rs. 3) at Mokokchung in the Naga Hills and at Lakhipur bazar in Cachar; also at Damra in Goalpara, a market attended by the Garos.

Generally however, rice and other agricultural produce, fresh and dried fish, vegetables and fruits, salt and groceries, tobacco and betel, oil and gur, cloth and yarn, implements and utensils; fancy and miscellaneous articles are the things to be found in all markets. For immediate comfort parched or fried grain, sweetmeats and sometimes tea, milk and sugar may be had. In parts of the Khasi Hills tea shops are a speciality, at the Bara Bazar at Shillong, it has been calculated that there are 40 tea stalls, each serving an average of 48 cups of tea. The Khasi women and girls make a profit of only about 9 annas from each tea shop or stall on the market day.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ *Economic Report of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 46-51.

Wholesale prices of the principal Agricultural staples.

The average wholesale prices obtaining in Surma-Barak Valley during 1890-1909 for the principal agricultural staples are shown below: -

Names of Staples		Average wholesale price per moud during the year			
		1890 - 1900		1901 - 1909	
---		Rs.	A	Rs.	A
Cotton raw		16	4	14	10
Jute, raw		4	4	4	6
Grain and pulse	1. Wheat	2	14	4	0
	2. Rice not in the husk	3	2	4	6
	3. Rice in the husk	1	12	2	8
	4. Gram and pulse	2	10	3	6
	5. Others	1	12	1	12
Oilseeds	1. Linseed	4	4	4	4
	2. Mustard and rape	4	6	4	4
	3. Jinjli	4	6	4	2
	4. Castor	3	4	3	12
	5. Other kinds	2	14	2	14
Sugar	1. Refined	10	0	9	12
	2. Unrefined	4	8	4	2
Tea		39	8	37	0
Tobacco, Unmanufactured		9	8	6	8

Source: Report on the Rail and River - Borne Trade of the Province of Assam, P. 5.

Baskets and mats are sold at some but not at all markets and liver-stock, especially cattle, only at certain important ones. Where milk is sold, there is sometimes one price for pure and another for adulterated milk. For instance in Brahmaputra Valley 2½ annas a seer is paid for good milk, while some is so much watered that it fetches only 3 pice a seer. In some markets Napalese dairy men are able to sell their ghee for Rs. 3 a seer and also to get 2 annas a seer for skimmed and watered milk.

The attendance varies from 100 or even less to about 4,000, but it is rarely over 1,000 at rural hats. The traders are of different classes according to locality. Local agricultural produce is sold generally by the growers and forest produce by hillmen, although these things may be stocked by shopkeepers of other classes also. Cloth and other imported articles are sold in the Surma-Barak Valley by Marwaris, Dacca Bengalis, upcountry men and local Bengali people the share of trade being generally in order name. In the Surma Valley and the Hills local people have more of the retail trade in their hands.¹⁵¹

Very few new commodities have appeared lately Charkas, generally of local made, are sold in many markets as a result of the non-cooperation movement. Curious to relate the name of the movement's leader, among whose articles of faith are the eschewal of luxuries and of foreign goods, is used as an advertisement of the Gandhi brand of cigarettes and Gandhi matches. Japanese cloth and fancy goods have made great strides doubtless owing to cheapness.¹⁵²

The following statement shows the relative volume of trade in cloth at certain important markets, as calculated by the enquiring officers. Yarn is almost all imported or from Bombay. Cloth includes pice-goods and ready garments: -

¹⁵¹ *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp. 13-17.

¹⁵² Achut Charan Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* P. 83.

District	Name of Market	Percentage of kinds of cloth on sale at different markets, 1921					
		Foreign country	Manchester	Japanese	Indian Mills	Indian hand woven	Local hand woven
Cachar	Hailakandi		73	6	20		1
Cachar	Lakhipur		62	13	19		6
Sylhet	Kazi Bazar		83	12			5
Sylhet	Sibganj	59			40		1
Khasi and Jaintia Hills	Shillong		20	25	50	4	1

Source: Note on the Industrial Condition and Possibilities of Assam, Pp. 17-18.

There is no reason to doubt the figures as a general indication of conditions, though they may not be accurate in detail.¹⁵³ From the statement it will be seen that at the time of the enquiry, English cloth still held generally over half the trade and Bombay was a good second and Japan a fair third. Since the enquiry fiscal and political conditions have altered and it may be that the proportions have changed somewhat. The Indian hand woven cloth other than local, is generally represented by Dacca lungi and saris, sold by Dacca merchants. In regard to hand woven cloth, it should be noted that while weaving is almost universal among the Assamese, they rarely wave for sale and a great part of what is sold is silk.

Till 1853, the road transport condition was quite backward but by 1873, the Surma-Barak Valley improved considerably in respect of road communication and had several roads. There were two roads namely Sylhet-Silchar road which run along the Barak River competing the water traffic and the other Lakhipur Road which ran from Silchar eastward to Jiri River where it joined the main route to Manipur. These roads were maintained by the public works department. Besides these, there were another 15 roads under local management. The majority of them were constructed for accommodation of the tea gardens. By that year the Silchar Municipal Union had 12.8 K. M. of roads which were improved and extended later on. The other important roads were: -

¹⁵³ *Note on the Industrial Condition and Possibilities of Assam, Op. Cit.* Pp.17-21.

Name of the Road	Length in Kilometer	Name of the Places connected by the road
Barkhala	14.4	Tarapur, Nij Jayanagar, Barkhala with Silchar.
Durganagar road	20.0	Rangpur, Bahadurpur and Udharbond with Silchar.
Chatla Hamor road	29.6	Ambikapur, Meharpur and adjoining tea gardens with Silchar.
Nagdirgram road	20.0	Sonapur, Nagdirgram.
Moniarkhal Road	14.4	Maniarkhal tea gardens with Nondigram.
Tarapur Road	12.0	Tarapur, Labak tea gardens with Baskndi on the Lakhipur road.
Baladhana road	16.0	Kamranga and adjoining tea gardens with Lakhipur.
The Sonai Road	17.60	Hatikuri and Binnakandi tea gardens.
East Hailakandi road	19.2	Samarikuna, Matijuri with Hailakandi.
Katakhal road	12.8	Goglachhara and Sudarsanpur tea gardens.
Kaya or Mona road	12.0	Gangpar and Dumkar with Rajyeshwarpur.
Hailakandi road	20.8	Panchgram, Kasinagar and Rabinagar.
Masimpur road	35.2	Natwanpur and other tea gardens with Jaynagar.
Sylhet road		
Golapganj road	10¼	Sylhet to Golapganj.
Ramdha road	17¼	Sylhet to Ramdah.
Sheolamukh road	23	Sylhet to Sheolamukh.
Karimganj road	35	Sylhet to Karimganj.
Fenchuganj road	15	Sylhet to Fenchuganj.
Markuli road	111¾	Sylhet to Markuli.
Shealmukh road	26½	Sylhet to Sheolamukh.
Govindganj road	13½	Sylhet to Govindaganj.
Pagla road	29½	Sylhet to Pagla.
Sunamganj road	42½	Sylhet to Sunamganj.

Source: B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, Assam District Gazetteers, Cachar District, Pp. 209-210.

In 1873, the total length of roads under the local management of the Barak Valley came to 265.60 kilometers. But in 1875-76 there were 577.60 kilometers as waterways communication, 332.80 kilometers of second class roads and 480 kilometers of third class roads. In spite of the availability of roads within the district, roads from Cachar to the neighbouring districts of the state are mostly fair weather roads and the transport is seriously felt during the rainy season in particular.¹⁵⁴

In 1904, there were altogether 321.60 kilometers of road and out of this 308.80 kilometers of bridle Paths were in plains portion of Cachar district. All these roads were very good and useable by carts and in spite of the existence of these cart roads, goods were carried by human labourers and pack bullocks. At that time, the inhabitants of the Surma Valley showed a lack of initiative and enterprise in the matter of wheeled traffic. Only in 1902 there were 260 carts in Cachar as compared with upwards of 3,500 in the Darrang district. Carts were first sent to Manipur from Cachar in 1896.¹⁵⁵

The road position of the Cachar district in 1904 was as follows: the trunk road entered the district at Badarpur 81.60 kilometers from Sylhet and crossed the Manipur frontier at Jirighat 64 kilometers from Badarpur. The main places touching the roads were Badarpur, Salchapra, Silchar, Lakhipur, Jirighat and Banskandi. Another road led South from Silchar and then turned west and passed through Hailakandi and then finally ran to the north till it meet the trunk road a little to the east of Badarpur. The Burnimukh road took of north of Hailakandi to the east up to Salchapra railway Station. In the South of Hailakandi, two roads which ultimately merge in one and sink to the status of a bridle path led towards Mizoram state. This road has now developed into a black topped highway. Many roads and bridle paths touching off east and west from this road served the different tea gardens in the vicinity. East of Silchar Maniarkhal road run up to Sonaimukh. There were other roads namely, Damchara, Nematha, Shingarbond, Baladhan and their branches in the districts. From Maibong a bridle Path run to Baladhan, the total length of which was 89.6 Kilometers.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Cachar District, Pp. 209-210.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* P. 211.

¹⁵⁶ U. Guha, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 87-94.

There are some public and private bus and carrier service employees and employer's organisations in the district. These organisations ran the private bus services in the district smoothly and the grievances of the employees are meted out by the bus owners Associations. The names of some of these organisations are mentioned below: - (i) The Cachar Transport Vehicle Owners Associations, Silchar. (ii) Silchar-Kumbhirgram Bus Owners Associations, Rongpur. (iii) Patharkandi Transport Society, Patharkandi. (iv) Sub-divisional Motor Transport Union, Hailakandi, (v) Karimganj Motor Service Union, Karimganj, (vi) Karimganj-Hailakandi Motor Transport Union, Karimganj, etc.¹⁵⁷

The railway system of Surma-Barak Valley, during the Colonial period was a metre gauge system. After the formation of Assam-Bengal Railway in 1892, steps were taken to connect Assam with the rest of India. As a result this Valley had the first railway line from Chandura in Bengal to Badarpur. In 1897, railway communication from Chittagong to Cachar district was established. It entered the district at a point a little to the east of Badarpur junction then under Sylhet district and had a length of 403.20 Kms. Here the line divided and a branch line ran south of the Barak passing through Katakhal, Salchapra and ultimately reached Silchar. This line covered 28.80 kms only. The main line after leaving the Badarpur junction crossed the Barak River on a bridge, which was 415.1376 meters in length and had a foundations of its piers carried to a depth of 24.3840 metre below the bed of the river. It then went its way up the Jatinga Valley and so made its way through the North Cachar hills into Brahmaputra Valley. The followings were the stations in the N. C. Hills district. Hilara-Bihara, Damchara, Harangajao, Jatinga, Halflong, Mahur, Maibong, Langting and Hatikhali and linked the Guwahati branch at Lumding junction. The North-East Frontier Railway Hill Section from Lumding to Badarpur serves as a feeble railway link of Cachar with the rest of the country.¹⁵⁸ This section is quite unreliable during the rainy seasons when the railway service remains suspended for days together because of heavy landslide. There are further more a large number of tunnels to cross on this line which had to the difficulty of movement of large sized manufacturing plant and machinery.

¹⁵⁷ U. Guha, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 95-96.

¹⁵⁸ B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 211-217.

The names of a few railway stations including junctions, branch lines and total length of the Surma-Barak Valley are as follows: -

**Badarpur Junction-Haflong Hill-Lumding Junction
(Total length of 38 kms.)**

- (i) Badarpur Junction
- (ii) Hilara
- (iii) Bihara
- (iv) Chandranathpur
- (v) Damchara
- (vi) Bandarkhal

**Mahishason-Badarpur Junction-Katakhal Junction-Silchar
(Total length 61 kms.)**

- (i) Mahishasan
- (ii) Langai
- (iii) Karimganj Junction
- (iv) Chargola
- (v) Bhanga
- (vi) Ruposibari
- (vii) Badarpur Junction
- (viii) Badarpurghat
- (ix) Panchgram
- (x) Katakhal Junction
- (xi) Salchapra
- (xii) Aurnachal
- (xiv) Silchar

Katakhal Junction-Lalaghat (Total length 49 kms.)

- (i) Katakhal
- (ii) Algapur
- (iii) Hailakandi
- (iv) Monacherra
- (v) Lalabazar
- (vi) Lalaghat

Karimganj Junction-Dullabhchara-Kalkalighat

- (i) Karimganj Junction
- (ii) Suprakandi
- (iii) Nilambazar
- (iv) Kayosthagram
- (v) Baraigram Junction
- (vi) Eraligul
- (vii) Phakuagram
- (viii) Nagendra Nagar
- (ix) Ratabari
- (x) Anipur
- (xi) Durlabchara
- (xii) Kanai Bazar
- (xiii) Kalkalighat¹⁵⁹

The section wise length of the Railways in the Valley is as follows: -

Section	Length in K. M.
Badarpur – Lumding	185.0
Badarpur – Katakhal	19.0
Katakhal – Lalaghat	38.1
Katakhal – Silchar	20.0
Badarpur – Karimganj	21.0
Karimganj – Mahishasan	10.3
Karimganj – Durlabchara	59.8
Baraigram – Kalkalighat	12.3
Kalkalighat – Dharmanagar	32.3
Silchar – Hailakandi	23.0
Sylhet – Karimganj	65.0

Source: Report on the Trade carried by Rail and River in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Pp. 73-81.

¹⁵⁹ B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 217-222.

A number of railway stations of Surma-Barak Valley are situated near tea-gardens and rice fields and therefore tea, rice, raw jute, timber etc. are the main goods exported from these stations.¹⁶⁰ Following are the some important commodities which exported by the rail: -

Names of the Commodities	Destination of export
Pineapple	Lumding, Guwahati
Ginger	Tinsukia
Jute	Calcutta
Tea	Calcutta
Timber	Calcutta
Medicinal	Calcutta

Source: B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, Assam District Gazetteers, Cachar District, P. 194.

The principal commodities traded are tea, jute, bamboo, timber, food grains, raw materials, cotton and miscellaneous goods. Among inward goods, mention may be made of petrol and petroleum products, mustard oil, pulses, foodgrains, sugar, salt, wheat, flour, coal, other miscellaneous goods and garden stores.¹⁶¹

The most important produce which was exported to Sylhet by rail was rice. The rice crop is divided into three great classes-aes, Kataria and Aman. The annual production of rice in Sylhet is sufficient to leave a large surplus available for exportation. In the year 1876-77, the registered exports towards Bengal were 214,800 mounds of rice and 433,100 mounds of unhusked rice or paddy. Mustard was one of the most important article which was export from Sylhet. In 1876-77, the total registered export of oil seeds was 56.826 mounds. Bengal intercepts the external trade of Sylhet that passes in country boats along the Surma and Barak rivers, at frontier station of Bhairab Bazar. The returns for the steamer traffic are furnished by the steam company.

¹⁶⁰ *Report on the Trade carried by Rail and River in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Calcutta, 1907, Pp. 73-82.

¹⁶¹ B. B. Hazarika and S. B. Roy Choudhury, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 194-197.

References has been made earlier about the means of communication which was in vogue in the early part of the British occupation of the Surma-Barak Valley. In those days' its chief means of communication to the outside world was Barak River. In 1864, a regular commercial steamer service to Assam by the two rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Barak was opened but their services were not adequate and satisfactory. The Government of India helped these two companies with subsidies in order to open daily mail steamer service on the Brahmaputra and the Surma River and accordingly such services were established by these companies in the year of 1887 on the Barak-River. The river ports in the Barak through which the steamers plied are Badarpur, Sialtek, Jatingamukh, and Masimpur. In the rains, the feeder steamers went up the Barak from Silchar to Lakhipur, up the Madhura to Chandighat, up the Ghagra to Hattia rocks, and up the Katakhal to Kukichara.¹⁶²

The river Surma or Barak which gives of the two valleys which originally constituted the province. It rises on the southern slopes of the great mountain range which forms the northern boundary of Manipur. From there it flows for about 180 miles in a south-western direction till it reaches British territory at Tipaimukh. The upper part of its course, where it is known as the Barak, lies through narrow valleys shut in on either side by hills that rise steeply from the river and for a short distance it forms the boundary between the Naga Hills and Manipur. At Tipaimukh it turns sharply to the north and for some distance divides Cachar from Manipur in a line almost parallel to that taken by the river in its downward sweep. Near Lakhipur it turns west and enters the Cachar District through which it flows with an extremely tortuous course till Sylhet is reached at Badarpur. A few miles west of that place the river divides into two branches. One stream is known as the Surma and flows near the foot of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills past Sylhet, Chhatak and Sunamganj and then turns again towards the south. The second branch is known at first as the Kusiya, but after its confluence with the Manu it again divided into two branches. The northern arm is called the Bibiyana and afterwards the Kalni and rejoins the Surma on the borders of the District near Ajmiriganj. The lower branch, which is known as the Barak, resuming the name by which the river is known in Manipur and Cachar, passes Nabiganj and Habiganj and falls into the Surma a little to the

¹⁶² W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. - II, London, 1876, Pp. 557-561.

west of that place. The total length of the Surma, measured along the northern arm of the river from its source to its confluence with the old stream of the Brahmaputra near Bhairab Bazar, is about 560 miles.

The Barak receives numerous tributaries, the most important being on the north the Jiri, Jatinga, Bogapani and Jadukata, and on the south the Sonai, Dhaleswari, Singla, Langai, Manu and Khowai. In the upper part of its source it flows in a very deep channel, and though rain in the hills often make the river rise many feet in a few hours, it seldom overflows its banks. Lower down, where the bed of the river is not so deep, its waters sometimes spread over the surrounding country, and the floods both of the Surma and of the Kusiya are said to do some damage. In a low lying District like Sylhet, which receives an enormous rainfall, it is particularly impossible to confine rivers within embankments and the only works of this nature constructed on the Surma are a small embankments along the north bank of the Kusiya from Fenchuganj to Manikkona, and a raised road from Noakhali to Sylhet along the south bank of the Surma. Prior to the construction of the Assam-Bengal Railway, the Surma, with its numerous branches, was practically the only means of Communication between Cachar and Sylhet and the outside world, and it still takes a large share in the carrying trade of the country. During the rainy season, large steamers proceed up the Kusiya to Silchar, while steamers of lighter draught ply between Silchar and Lakhimpur and from Markhali near the western border of Sylhet past Sunamganj and Chhatak to Sylhet town. In the cold weather the large steamers go to the Chhatak, and only small steamers can pass up to the Kusiya to Silchar, at that season of the year there is very little water in the river. The surface of all the numerous channels of this river is dotted over with native boats of various shapes and sizes at all seasons of the year, and in that part of its course where it flows through or in the neighbourhood of the hills, the scenery is extremely picturesque. Its importance as a trade route has caused many local marts to spring up on its banks. The most important of these are - on the river prior to its bifurcation, where it is known as the Barak-Lakhimpur, Silchar, Siyaltek and Badarpur, where it is spanned by a magnificent railway bridge. On the Surma or northern branch lie Kanairghat, Sylhet, Chhatak, Dwara Bazar and Sunamganj, while on the Kusiya are found Karimganj, Fenchuganj, Baliganj, Manumukh, and Ajmirganj. These are, however,

only the more important centres of local trade. Throughout the whole of its course in the plains the banks of the various branches of the river are lined with villages and there are numerous markets of less importance.¹⁶³

The river services played a vital role in maintaining communication between Assam and rest of India. The steamer services operated through two major routes in Assam viz, the Assam-Calcutta and Badarpur-Calcutta used to carry major goods, tea, jute, timber and other bulky products were exported by steamers to Calcutta.

Assam has internal waterways of more than 96,000 kms. of which 16,000 km. are navigable by steamers and big country boats. The remaining are useful only for small country boats. These water ways were used for years by country boats operators, public works department's ferries and various steamer companies for carrying cargo. But prior to 1957, there was no agency in Assam for dealing with matters of investigation, planning and designing of various projects on communication. As per recommendation of the Gokhale Committee, Government of Assam set up the Inland water Transport Directorate for development of Inland Water Transport of Assam. The Directorate was given an amount of Rs. 80 lakhs to build up a port at Pandu in Kamrup district under the guidance of the central organization. The directorate has further carried out hydrographic and traffic survey of some important rivers of both the Brahmaputra and the Barak Valley's and in the Mizoram state.

The Bhagawati Committee recommended Commercial river service on the Barak. The Scheme was included in the Fourth Five year plan as centrally sponsored scheme. But the Scheme has not made much head way up till now.¹⁶⁴

During the Colonial period, the Surma-Barak Valley's ferry services linking the road transport were under the management of the Public Works Department. The list below shows the navigable water-way and ferries in the Surma-Barak Valley: -

¹⁶³ Provincial Gazetteer of Assam, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 131-132.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 561-568.

Name of River	Navigable reach from	Distance in KM.	Period when navigable	Type of craft Plying	Remarks
Barak	Karimganj - Silchar	89.6	Throughout the year	The Steamers & country Boats	Feeder Steamer Service
Barak	Silchar - Fulertal	64.0	Throughout the year	Feeder Steamer Ply during June to October	Feeder Steamer Service
Langai	Damchhara	104.0	During rainy seasons	Country boats	Small dug outs ply throughout the year
katakhal	Lushai Hills - Katakhal	160.0	Whole Year	Country boats	Do
Sonai	Bhuban Hills - Sonaimukh	48.0	Whole Year	Country boats	Do
Augur	Binnakandi - Augurmukh	16.0	Rainy Season	Country boats	Do
Jatinga	Ditekchara - Jalingamukh	64.0	Rainy Season	Country boats	Do
Madhura	N. C. Hills - Madhuramukh	32.0	Rainy Season	Country boats	--
Dadri	Whole length	25.6	Rainy Season	Country boats	--
Chiri	Jaipur - Confleena with Barak	41.6	Rainy Season	Country boats	--
Jiri	Manipur Hills - Barak	64.0	Whole Year	Country boats	--
Surma	Karimganj - Sylhet	61½	Whole Year	Steamer	Feeder Steamer Service
Surma	Sylhet - Chhatak	34¾	Whole Year	Steamer - Country boats	Feeder Steamer Service
Surma	Sylhet - Chorekhai	23½	Rainy Season	Country boats	Small dug outs ply throughout the year
Surma	Sheolamukh - Karimganj	42½	Rainy Season	Country boats	Do
Surma	Sylhet - Karimganj	40.0	Rainy Season	Country boats	By the Surma-Kusiyara and Maulvi Khal Route open July to August. Takes ordinarily 24

					hours from Sylhet to Karimganj and 12 hours from Karimganj to Sylhet.
Surma-Kusiyara	Sylhet - Badarpur	76.	Rainy Season	Feeder Steamer Service	Takes about 12 hours
Surma	Sylhet - Chhatak	34 ³ / ₄	Whole of the Year	Steamer & boat Service	Post and telegraph service
Surma	Sylhet - Sunamaganj	64 ³ / ₄	Rainy Season	Steamer Service	Post and telegraph service
Surma	Sylhet - Therriaghat	24 ¹ / ₂	Rainy Season	Country boats	--
Surma	Sylhet - Chhatak	34 ³ / ₄	Whole Year	Steamer & Country boats	--
Surma	Sylhet - Companyganj	47 ³ / ₄	Whole Year	Boat Service	Sylhet to Companyganj 22 miles by river
Surma	Sylhet - Therriaghat	56 ³ / ₄	Rainy Season	Country boats	At Bholaganj 4 miles from Companyganj and 3 ¹ / ₂ miles from Therria. Large country boats can go up to Companyganj only and dug-outs up to Therria Bazar.

Source: Report on the Rail and River - Borne Trade of the Province of Assam, Pp. 40-46.

There are only a few bridges in the Barak Valley during the colonial period. Some of these are (1) Barak bridge at Badarpur (2) Sadarghat bridge at Silchar (3) Madhura bridge at Rangpur (4) Badarpur Gosainpur bridge (5) Kalachara Bridge (6) Ghagra bridge (7) Dhaleswari bridge etc.¹⁶⁵ Though before independence there were only a few number of

¹⁶⁵ *Report on the Rail and River - Borne Trade of the Province of Assam*, for the year 1904-07, Calcutta, 1907, Pp. 40-47.

bridges were constructed in Surma- Barak Valley. But after independence, a number of bridges were constructed in the Surma-Barak Valley.

Thus, by these trade routes transporting commercial goods, like tea, betel nuts and betel leaves and miscellaneous goods by railway, road, waterways. Such facilities of transporting goods like tea, betel nuts, oranges, gingers. Pineapple, tobacco and other commodities are also found in the Barak Valley.

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