THE SURMA VALLEY BRANCH, INDIAN TEA ASSOCIATION

Note on the Tea Industry in the Surma Valley.- The Surma Valley Branch Indian Tea Association, covers the two contiguous tea districts of Cachar and Sylhet and represents 90 percent of the area under tea in the Surma Valley.

The Tea District of Cachar.- This district is comprised of 177 plantations occupying a gross area of 283,501 acres, of which 56,965 acres are planted with tea, of the remainder a considerable portion has been taken up in small plots by the coolie for his own rice, sugarcane and other cultivation, the rest is either pasture land, or still unreclaimed jungle.

The Tea District of Sylhet.- This district is comprised of 157 plantations occupying a gross area of 315,495 acres, of which 89,723 acres are planted with tea, the rest being jungle, pasture and cultivated land, as in Cachar.

Labour- Immigrants from the tea garden recruiting areas pass through the debarkation depot at Goalundo (Bengal).

The total population living on tea garden land in the Surma Valley numbers 323,329 of which 178,445 are employees—the others being children and dependants.

The birth and death rate per mille in 1927-28 was 31.73 and 18.66 respectively.

Employees of the tea plantations cultivate for their own profit 49,887 acres of land 40,641 acres of which they hold as tenants of gardens at a very nominal rental, and the remainder they hold direct from government or other landholders. In addition to these figures, ex-tea garden coolies have opened out and cultivated 35,698 acres as settlement holders under Government, and 12,229 acres as sub-tenants.

The relation between employer and employees are of a cordial nature, and there has been no serious trouble for several years, although there have been a few petty and abortive strikes, but these can in no way be attributed to the management of the gardens.
Production of Tea- The average production of tea per acre in 1928 was:-

Cachar ... ... ... ... ... 478 lbs.
Sylhet ... ... ... ... ... 536 lbs.

The average outturn is considerable lower than in other tea producing districts, and the teas being of an inferior quality, realize lower prices; this is probably due to less favourable climatic and topographical conditions. These two factors of low pattern and low price undoubtedly cause the fluctuations of the market to be acutely left in the Surma Valley.

With regard to the schedule issued by you, this branch has been in collaboration with Calcutta and finds itself in entire agreement with the written statement which will be submitted to you by the Chairman, Indian tea Association, Calcutta and therefore it is considered any recapitulation by this branch is unnecessary.