CHAPTER V

REVENUE FROM MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES

Salt wells

During the Dima rule in Cachar, revenue from lands having salt wells or brine-springs were also realised. Such wells were located in the Tilain ranges of the Barak valley.\footnote{Guha, U.C.; Cachar Etibritta, Gauhati, 1971, p. 123.} The British who were very much interested in the commercial possibilities of the North-East Frontier, tried to utilise the natural resources of Cachar in order to strengthen their economic base in their own interest.\footnote{Barpujari, H.K.; Assam In the Days of the Company, Gauhati, 1980 (2nd edition), p. 6.}

Of all the salt-wells found in Cachar the notable among these were in Sarespur and Bhuban Hills. Cachar was formerly supplied with salt entirely from these wells. The hill-tribes used to exchange salt in lieu of cotton, wax, ivory etc.\footnote{C.R., No. 184 of 1836; Bhattacharjee, J.B.; Cachar Under British Rule in North East India, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 168-169.} The salt-wells were leased out to the highest bidder, but the revenue from this source had begun to decrease gradually.\footnote{Hunter, W.J.; A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.II, 1879, p. 370.} The salt was prepared by the simple process of evaporation of the water by boiling and its quality was rather coarse and dirty. W.J. Allen in his report on the produce of the wells says:

The salt manufactured from the brine of the wells is of very inferior quality to that of Bengal, and is consumed chiefly by the poorer classes residing in the neighbourhood. For some years the wells have been getting very much out of repair, and the revenue derived from them has been gradually decreasing. A further decrease is to be expected, for the farmers having only short leases will not undertake the expense of opening and clearing out the wells, and the Government cannot be expected to incur any outlay for this purpose in as much as the Bengal salt yields proportionately a much larger revenue.5

Since the annexation of Cachar, the British authorities took great interest in these wells as it formed an important source of revenue during the Raja's regime. So, the salt-wells of lower Cachar were leased out for a period of three years to persons like Brij Ram Barman, Radha Krishna Aditya and Krishna Ram Deb at an yearly rent of Rs. 9006 and the settlement was confirmed by the Board of Revenue for three years from 1841-42 to 1843-44 respectively.7 Although hereditary rights were granted on these wells everything depended on the mercy of the 'hiradare'. If the hereditary proprietor refused to agree for future, the zamindars enjoyed the liberty to make

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their own arrangements for working these wells leaving the proprietor. However, the Haradars were not allowed to eject the hereditary proprietors unless they could show any satisfactory reason. Before establishing the proprietory right, the first thing was to determine whether the wells were situated in the Government land or in the lands of the proprietor.

Most of the salt-wells mentioned above were in a wretched condition. During rainy season, fresh water from outside poured into the brine spring and dilute the salt water. There were shafts of 20 to 50 feet covered with hollowed timbers of about 20 haths long to the surface of the spring. These shafts were sufficiently large to allow man to clear the dirty things. The question of reclaiming the salt-wells were referred to the Board of customs by the district authorities so as to improve production of salt from the wells.

There were about 63 wells in Cachar. Among these, the condition of 18 were irreparable, 39 were out of order and only 6 were in good condition. Any attempt of thorough repair would cost about Rs. 1481. There were 6 wells in Saraspar about 20 to 50 feet in depth and were in a good con-

8. C.R., No. 5, 3 July, 1835.
9. C.R., No. 17, 20 April, 1839.
10. C.R., No. 106, 4 August, 1850.
11. C.R., No. 955, 11 September, 1858.
The salt-wells in Saraspur Pargana in the Hailakandi subdivision were settled for three years in 1878-79 and terminated in 1880-81.¹³

The settlement given to the Saraspur salt-wells was confirmed by the Chief Commissioner of Assam on 3 June, 1885.

The memorandum of settlement was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name of mahal</th>
<th>Name of settlement holder</th>
<th>Period of settlement</th>
<th>Amount of annual lease</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Salt-wells in Pargana Saraspur</td>
<td>Jitania, Laskar and Fulma, Barbhuiya</td>
<td>3 years from 1st April, 1885</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mahal was sold at public auction. Translation of a vernacular form of Kabulyat for salt-well in the district of Cachar is given in the Appendix No. VII.

As a consequence of the settlement the total out-turn of revenue increased during the year 1890-91, when about 503 maunds of salt were produced from the Cachar wells and 413 from the Saraspur wells.¹⁴ Besides, a quantity of the salt water was sold at the wells at the rate of about two pies which was used by the people in lieu of salt. The farmers of the Cachar wells received Rs. 400 for the water and from

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¹³. C.R., No. 485, 5 June, 1885.
* See Appendix No. VII
¹⁴. C.R., No. 25 of 1851.
from Saraspur about Rs. 390. There was the possibility of transforming salt-trade into an important and flourishing trade if scientific management would have been utilised. But as soon as the foreign salt began to enter into the markets of Cachar, people could understand its better taste. As a result there was a gradual decline in the revenue, while in 1852 nine salt mahals were leased for Rs. 1030, in 1872 only one salt mahal was leased at Rs. 95. The fall in salt revenue for the twenty years between 1852 and 1872 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of mahals</th>
<th>Revenue in Rs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1852-53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857-58</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862-63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867-68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871-72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another valuable revenue resource of Cachar is the forests covered with evergreen useful trees. The whole of Cachar may be called a forest district covering the banks of rivers, and the low hills called *tilas*. The valuable timbers

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of the district nageswar, gamari, sundi, cham, rata, korte, haria, simul, odal, kathal, haritaki, satri, jarul, agar, chandan etc., all of which had great demand in Bengal. Among many other trees were the phuma, cham, telor, ihakia, nino, bathkur, jem, pizul etc. The India rubber tree was first discovered in Cachar in 1862 and a good amount was found suitable to be sold.

The forests of Cachar may be categorised under two broad heads—Reserve forests and unclassed forests. The Barail reserve was situated in the North Cachar Hills a little to the north of Maibong, and the Langting-Mupha forest lines to the north of Katigora. All other reserves were situated in the southern portion of the district and formed a compact block of 692 miles in area. The forests in the south were situated on the hilly country. The forests consisted of mixed and evergreen trees and in its midst bamboo scrubs were also to be noticed. The low swampy valleys were covered with canes and reeds.

The forests of Cachar were very much resourceful from the revenue point of view. Therefore special attention was given by the British authorities towards its exploitation since

17. Bhattacharjee, J.B., n 15, p. 163.
the occupation of the country. With the advent of the new settlers in Cachar there was great demand for land. Accordingly, Captain Verner, the Superintendent of Cachar made some jungle settlements for 15 years. Its rate varied from 4 annas to 3 Rs. per hal and most of the part was kept rent-free for three years; Rs. 1 per hal for the next 4 years. In this way the settled portion of the valley came to 972 mahals which covered 14,577 hal with a jumma of Rs. 37,123. Stewart, in his twenty years' settlement of 1859, settled waste-land producing thatching grass and reeds at the full rates similar to the rate fixed for cultivated lands, but the waste land which required clearing, was based at progressive rates with a revenue free term of 3 years and after which assessable at full rates. 20

In 1861, Assam Rules were substituted by Fee Simple Rules and several European planters applied for grants and as a result 179 grants were issued, covering 4,87,760 acres. In 1864, the Government of Bengal issued fresh orders laying the principles on which such leases were to be given. 21 Accordingly, Jangle-buri or waste land reclamation leases were granted under which the land was to remain revenue free for the first 3 years, during the next 15 years, the rates varied from 3 to 12 annas per acre and during the last 12 years, the rate of assessment

was to be Re. 1-8 per acre. In 1875, the Government of India ordered for the reclamation, of all these leases and terms for new leases were reduced to 20 years. In 1876 the new 30 years waste land leases were issued only for special cultivation in Cachar. Only fifteen such leases covering 4,904 acres were granted keeping 1,42,751 acres of land as fee-simple. However, the Jungalburi leases began to decline before the settlement of 1900 and the lands were resettled with the rest of the district.

It has already been mentioned that there were Reserved forests and unclassed forests. The former were under the control of a forest officer assisted by adequate staff. In the unclassed state forests, the settlement holders were allowed to graze their cattle and remove any forest produce other than reserve tree free of charge provided that it was required for home consumption and not for sale. At first there was no definite duty or cess on timber in Cachar. Only transit duty was levied on the Sealtekh ghat. From the report of Stewart it appeared that Cachar forests were always opened to the public for timber since its annexation. The native merchants were

22. Allen, B.C., n 25, p. 129.
* See Appendix No. VIII.
found cutting the trees and carrying the same to the banks of some navigable stream wherefrom these were floated into the rivers. Besides, the jungles where jhum cultivation was practised by the hill tribes such as the Kookies, Nagas etc., a house tax was levied. Timber, bamboo, India Rubber and Ivory were the most important forest products of Cachar. On timber and bamboo usual duty (tax) was levied on Sealtekh ghat situated on the river Barak. The Board of Revenue had forbidden the collection of rubber by its letter of 25 November, 1863 and declared the trade in ivory as unlawful. But inspite of this prohibition rubber was tapped very often which resulted in heavy loss to Government revenue. So for the better management of forests and to preserve the forests from mischief makers and trespassers certain forests were declared to be Government Reserved forests under the provision of section 2, Act VII of 1865.

Under the provisions of the aforesaid Act, the boundaries of the Government Jiri Forest Reserve, Barak Forest Reserve, Sonai Forest Reserve, Katakhal Forest Reserve, Dhaleswari Forest Reserve and the Inner Line Forest Reserves were laid down. While declaring the area of the reserved forests, certain restrictions were imposed to safeguard against (1) the cutting of jhum or carrying of any other form of cultivation.

27. C.R., Draft Notification of the Cachar Forest Revenue, Section 2, Act VII of 1865.
(2) Setting fire to the crops, dry leaves or forests or kindling any fire without effectually preventing its spread,
(3) Burning lime or charcoal, (4) Tilling, grinding, cutting, tapping for oil, varnish or otherwise injuring trees, shrubs or bamboos, (5) cutting or removing grass, collecting and removing leaves, sunk wood oil, wax or any kind of forest produce, elephant tusks, skin, hides, stones or other natural produce, (6) entering or keeping through any portion of the forest except authorised roads and paths, (7) grazing cattle, (8) existing muds or pathways through a reserved forest shall deemed to be authorised until they are closed and new one substituted, (9) all rivers, casual streams and boats in the district shall until further order be kept open for the transport of timber and forest produce. It may be mentioned that during the year 1876-77, the toll station at Sealtekh was placed under direct Government management, consisting of 1 toll-collector, 3 watchers and 1 manjhi. 29

As soon as Assam came under the Chief Commissioner's administration certain modification was made for the protection, cultivation and regulation of forests in Assam as well as in Cachar. 30 In order to achieve the desired object the Chief Commissioner advocated certain devices. The practice of 'jhum' system of cultivation followed by the migratory hill-

28. Ibid.
30. C.R., 5 July, 1877 and 16 February, 1875.
tribes caused a great loss to the forest specially by the
use of fire for clearing jungles. The statement below will
show the nature of loss due to the jungle fires during the
first half of the year 1876: 31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of property</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thatching grass</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>215.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>340.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>450 mds</td>
<td>450.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees of various kinds</td>
<td>2516</td>
<td>11962.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to check migration, a double tax was proposed to be
levied from each individual or community on each occasion.
Whenever any family or village would change any site of
residence, the said family was to pay an additional tax of
Rs. 50 percent. 32 Again some special measures were adopted in
case of timber such as (a) for trees of four feet and more
in girth, with the measurement of four feet from the ground
full price according to the timber tax must be charged.
(b) Trees of two feet and more or less four feet in girth
half price was to be charged and no charge was to be made at

31. C.R., Govt. Circular No. 90, 29 November, 1876.
32. Ibid.
Banskandi to Badarpur centering the Barak and its tributaries like Jeerighat, Madhuraghat, Katakhal (Matijuri ghat) and Sealtekh ghat etc. The ghats were sold out to the farmers by annual auction and duties could be levied only from these ghats. 38

Sealtekh ghat is situated on the left of southern bank of the river Barak about 30 miles from Silchar. This ghat was well-known to the people of Cachar from commercial point of view. The Raja of Cachar used to collect duty on produce passing out of the district through this ghat. This duty was known as Sayer duty. In accordance with the Regulation XXVII of 1893, the ghat gradually transformed into a toll station. 39 This important toll station was practically in charge of an establishment consisting of a writer on 5. 10 per month and 4 Choukeedars who used to pass all produce and collect revenue. Later on, a Tahsildar was appointed who used to deposit the collected revenue to the treasury. 40

Mr. A.J.M. Mills, Judge of the Sudder Court had given a detailed list of materials together with the rate of tax imposed in the ferry ghats as given in next page. 41

38. B.R.P., Captain Fisher's Report, 11 April, 1833.
40. B.R.P., No. 13, 27 April, 1872.
granted to private individuals. Again, there was no fixed practice about levying toll in the Sealtekh ghat on timber grown in private estates. The Chief Commissioner in order to check loss of government revenue directed levying of tax on these articles passing through the ghat. The total out-turn from the forests of Cachar during the year 1870 was £ 1600 and the total receipt of the forest department during 1876-77 was £ 1025, against a total expenditure of £ 958, showing a surplus of £ 67. In the previous year, the surplus had been £ 1656. In addition, a forest revenue of £ 953 was realised by the Deputy Commissioner.

**Ferry ghat**

The river ghats played an important role in the revenue and commercial history of Cachar. In the early days of the British rule, these transit stations were leased out to the merchants from Bengal who received certain commission. Gradually, these ghats were brought under the direct control of the Government. From a report of Captain Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar, it appeared that the number of inland ghats were six situated in different places from

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* See Appendix No. X.
35. C.R., No. 273, 8 February, 1877 and No. 50, 8 June, 1877.
Banskandi to Badarpur centering the Barak and its tributaries like Jeerighat, Madhuraghat, Katakhali (Matijuri ghat) and Sealtekh ghat etc. The ghats were sold out to the farmers by annual auction and duties could be levied only from these ghats. 38

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38. B.R.P., Captain Fisher's Report, 11 April, 1833.
40. B.R.P., No. 13, 27 April, 1872.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of tax</th>
<th>Rate of tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>0 - 10 - 2 per maund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboos</td>
<td>0 - 8 - 6 per 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarool timber</td>
<td>0 - 7 - 0 per log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khori ditto</td>
<td>0 - 2 - 8 per log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>0 - 6 - 11 per log of 10 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>0 - 9 - 7 per log of 17 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>0 - 12 - 10 per log of 18 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>1 - 1 - 1 per 100 morah of 76 bates each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalee Bate</td>
<td>1 - 5 - 4 per 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundie Ditto</td>
<td>1 - 5 - 6 per 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass</td>
<td>0 - 3 - 9 per 1000 bundles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan posts</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 10 each post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sawn ditto</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 3 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khagra or reeds</td>
<td>0 - 5 - 4 per 100 bundles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafter (Muryat)</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 4 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deama Kher</td>
<td>0 - 0 - 10 ditto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was strange that in the list of articles mentioned in the report of Hills timber was not included. In addition to that no tax had been levied by the farmers of the ghat on India rubber collected by private parties. Sometimes they used to pay something to the lessees of the ghat to evade payment which
was nothing but a sort of bribe.\textsuperscript{42} The matter came to the notice of the authorities on several occasions and at last it was settled that passing of such materials would have to be accompanied by a pass and any fraud in this regard would thereby be detected immediately.\textsuperscript{43}

The practice of auction of the ghats annually was an old process. In 1872, proposals were made that the Forest Department should be given the charge of the ghat instead of being leased annually.\textsuperscript{44} But due to circumstances emanating from frequent Lushai invasions, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar was advised to keep the ghat under the \textit{khas} management for the time being. There was also a proposal to abandon the Tattijuri Toll Station, but this was not done in view of the fact that a large quantity of forest products passed through the Tattijuri Forest Revenue Station. The same was checked again in the Sealtekh Forest Revenue Station. The statement furnished in Appendix No. XI (page 165) gives a clear picture of the revenue collected from the Forest Revenue Stations during the year 1881-82.\textsuperscript{45} Thus the Sealtekh ghat yielded a revenue of Rs. 3,200 in 1882 which increased in 1872 to Rs. 10,244.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} B.R.P., No. 1748C, 19 April, 1868. \\
\textsuperscript{43} C.R., No. 699C, 10 February, 1968. \\
\textsuperscript{44} B.R.P., No. 3108, 17 July, 1872. \\
\textsuperscript{45} C.R., No. A/40, 10 June, 1882. \\
\textsuperscript{46} A.S.R., Revenue Papers, File No. 638 of 1872; Bhattacharjee, J.B., n 15, p. 169.
Fishery

Another important source of land revenue of Cachar since the Dimasa rule was from the fisheries and the Jalkar mahals. These fisheries were of two types: (1) the first class fisheries were important fisheries in the main rivers which were sold by auction from year to year or for a short term of years; (2) the second class fisheries were village fisheries which were leased out to the representatives of neighbouring villages at an annual rent fixed for the settlement period.

The only professional fishermen in Cachar were the Muslims called mawalas and some patnis who used to take direct lease from the Government. There were five fisheries in Cachar viz., the Barak, Chiri, Sonai (including Rukni) rivers, the lower portion of the Ghagra river and the Baitakhal river.

Originally, the fisheries were leased out to the neighbouring mirasdars or to the professional man. There are also instances of granting the fishery mahals as a reward to native mirasdars in Cachar. For example, Apamia (Asu mia) Choudhury and Hari Charan Tagore, the two mirasdars of Cachar.

47. Guha, U.C., n 1, p. 122.
48. The Assam Land Revenue Manual, n 20, p. CXIV.
rendered valuable services to the British against Lushai inroads and as a reward they were given fishery and Jalkat mahals in Cachar. 51

In the districts of Sylhet and Cachar, the system of open auction of the fisheries was not considered suitable. Here the fisheries were to be leased as land at a valuation made by the Settlement Officer either to the people of the village as a whole or to the fishing class collectively. 52

According to the Fishery Rule, the fisheries of Cachar were to be settled to the best advantage with any party who will undertake to collect the rates per net and basket hitherto in force. These rates were to be recorded, and it should be made a condition of the settlement that the holder of the mahal should not exact more. Another condition was that, he should allow the continuance of the right of fishing to all those who had been hitherto enjoying it, but should not permit its extension to outsiders. Leases of such fisheries were exempted from the payment of stamp duty. 53 To facilitate the operation, the fisheries where necessary were to be broken up into blocks of smaller size. As the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar in his letter of 7 February, 1885 desired that he had

proposed to settle three of the fisheries as land on the principle referred to the Rukni and Sonai rivers were not reported to be good fisheries they were settled with the adjacent mirasdars. The Sonai, Chiri and Baitakhal were settled with the mirasdars and the Deputy Commissioner also settled the Barak and Ghagra as first class fisheries. Thus the fisheries of the river Barak and other areas which exceeded the limits of a single mouza were entered on the fishery list and leased out by auction and the income from these were deposited under the head "Miscellaneous Revenue". However, some modification of fishery settlement in the Assam Valley Districts had been sanctioned by the Chief Commissioner by a Circular of the Revenue Department of 23 July, 1875 and this served as the basis for the settlement of fisheries in Cachar also."

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57. The Assam Land Revenue Manual, n 27, p. 229
* See Appendix No. XII.