CHAPTER VI
PATTERN OF URBAN AND RURAL LIFE

The British rule in Cachar brought into existence changes in the pattern of urban and rural life. During the Heramba rule Khaspur was the only town that existed in the Barak valley which was referred to in Hamilton's Report of 1828.¹ Even during the initial stages of the colonial rule, there were no regular towns in Cachar, with the exception of Silchar which was the civil headquarters of the district. The population of Silchar town according to the census of 1872 stood at 4,925 and in 1901 was 9,256.² It is situated on the left bank of the Barak between 24°49’ North and 92°48’ East. It commands a charming view down the aforesaid river, which is dotted with soils of native craft and lined on both sides with the groves of areca plant, while a little north purpose hills of north Cachar sharply rising from the plains.³ The present town is surrounded by the Barak river, Rongpur Part IV, Dudpatil village on the north, Silchar Part II, Kanakpur Part I and II in the East, Ambikapur Part X, Uttar Krishnapur Part I in the south, Tarapur Part VIII, village Malini-beel, Ambicapur VIII on the west.⁴

In order to understand the basic features of the pattern of urban and rural life, it is essential to study the rate of assessment of three Tahsils of Silchar, Katigora and Hailakandi which came under the purview of the present study. Besides, the rapid developments of Barkhola, Udarband, Katlichora and Lakhipur into townships also should be taken into consideration. It may be mentioned here that, the district of Cachar in 1836, had been divided into three Tahsils Silchar, Katigora and Hailakandi for the smooth functioning of its fiscal administration.5

Originally, the only place which was categorised within the realm of the towns was the subdivisional headquarters and according to the Land Revenue Regulation only the 'Civil Stations' were termed as towns.6

Thus town land meant any land within an area declared or deemed to be declared a Municipality or a notified area under the Assam Municipal Act 1923 or any other land which the Provincial Government may declare in accordance with the provisions of sections 3 of the Land Revenue Reassessment Act to be town land.7 Again, according to Rule 2 of the Resettlement Rules "the class in which the bulk of the

5. Bhattacharjee, J.B.; Cachar under British Rule in North East India, Delhi, 1977, p. 80.
7. Ibid., p. 80.
rice lands of a village are placed shall ordinarily be con-
sidered to the class of a village.\textsuperscript{8}

**Silchar Group—Settlement**

The success and consolidation of colonial adminis-
tration was dependent on the availability of land and its
fertility. Naturally special attention was always given by
the colonial rulers towards land revenue.\textsuperscript{9} Here in Cachar
radical reforms in land revenue were initiated scraping the
traditional Khel system and grouping of all lands into
Parganas.\textsuperscript{10} The Silchar Group was the largest group in the
district. It consisted of nine Parganas and 412 villages. The
western Parganas were Barakpar, Rajnagar, Barkhola, Udharband,
Banskandi and Sonapur located within the Silchar Tahsil area.
The two eastern Parganas Lakhipur and Rupairbali were adminis-
tered by a Mouzadar with headquarters at Lakhipur.\textsuperscript{11} About
57 percent of the area of the Parganas were brought under
cultivation and their condition was better in comparison with
the other two Groups of Hailakandi and Katigora. The total
area undertaken in Silchar within the purview of survey was
402.09 square miles and assessed in the following order: \textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8} Banerjee, S.C.; Final Report on the Re-settlement of
the Cachar District, 1894-99, Shillong.

\textsuperscript{9} Bhattacharjee, J.B.; n 5, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Scott, W.L.; Assessment Report of the Silchar Group,
District of Cachar, Shillong, 1917.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
(a) Professionally traversed before the Cadastral Survey in 1695-97, 385.01 square miles.

(b) Professionally traversed since the Cadastral survey 15.03 square miles.

(c) Not professionally traversed 2.01 square miles.

Besides, a large portion of the hilly tract was also added to the surveyed portion. In the Parganas of the south Rajnagar, Rupairbali, half of Jainapar, Barakpar and Sonapur areas are very much productive in quality. Being situated in the banks of the rivers Jatinga, Madhura and Jiri respectively, Barkhola, Udharband and Lakhipur areas are also very much fertile.13

At the time of the resettlement of Silchar Group certain general principles were adopted. The land was divided into agricultural, residential and trade sites. In the earlier settlements agricultural lands were generally charged at an all round rate which was equal to that in the neighbouring villages. Similarly, residential and trade sites were divided into as many classes as was necessitated by circumstances.14

The system of assessment which was adopted came to be known as the 'Soil-Unit' system. This was based on:

1. The prior determination of the area to be assessed.

13. Ibid.
(2) the distribution of the new assessment so decided among
(a) the groups in the area (b) the villages in the group
and (c) the fields in the village. The first step to be
followed was to divide the area into a number of geographical
and homogenous groups. Then the land within the village was
to be fixed in accordance with its relative values and common
measure. This common measure came to be recognised as the
'Soil Unit'. The process of assessment per 'soil unit' or
'unit-rate' was fixed as per the condition of the village. 15
As has been mentioned earlier Sarat Chandra Banerjee in his
Resettlement Report of the Cachar District (1894) made the
following classification: 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Area in bighas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>23,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead I</td>
<td>14,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead III</td>
<td>9,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead IV</td>
<td>4,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52,365</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the above conditions, Silchar Group was classified
into (1) *Sailura* — land ordinarily growing broadcast winter
rice. (2) *Bari* — homestead land which yielded a profit owing
to its containing fruit trees. (3) *Bhit* — Homestead land
without fruit trees, deserted homestead and new homestead.

15. Scott, W.L.; *Final Report on the Resettlement of
Cachar for the year 1917-18*, Shillong, p. 28.
(4) Chura— a miscellaneous class including land growing paddy seedlings, thatching grass, mustard, chillies and garden crops within the limits of homestead also. It also included the land suitable for aus paddy, (5) Patit— waste land unfit for any cultivation and (6) Chaura— land under tea. The classifications were undertaken by the Patuarie themselves under the supervision of Kananoo and Assistant Settlement Officers who had to check a large proportion of land categories at that stage. A comparative study of the rates fixed for the Silchar Group may be understood from the table given in next page for the period 1900-1917 which is outside the purview of our period of study:

In comparison with the last Resettlement of Silchar Tahsil, the surveyed area had increased from 7,37,874 bighas to 7,78,449 bighas. The area on Mirasderi terms had increased from 4,83,890 bighas to 5,00,486 bighas. The area of bakhra land had been decreased, unsettled waste area open to settlement increased from 36,116 to 62,927 bighas due partly to the reservation of grazing ground and partly due to the survey of new villages. The sale value of the Silchar Group varied inversely from its distance to the river Barak and Sadar station. Thus in Barkhola the price of paddy land rose from

17. Scott, W.L., n 11.
Rs. 60 to Rs. 100, in Jainagar Rs. 60 to Rs. 80, in Rajnagar
Rs. 100, Barakpar Rs. 100, and values rose to Rs. 209 in Kanakpur
and Beranga near the town, Sonapur Rs. 60 Udarband and Bana-
kandi Rs. 60 to Rs. 140 and Rs. 40 to Rs. 100 respectively, Rupair-
bali Rs. 40 to Rs. 60 and Rs. 40 to Rs. 100 respectively. 20

Thus Silchar in its various aspect of assessment
and settlement of land showed patterns of urbanisation and
the Britishers had taken very much interest to raise it into
the status of a Sadar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of land</th>
<th>Rates fixed for 15 years</th>
<th>Types of land</th>
<th>Rates (20 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homestead</td>
<td>6 to 13 annas</td>
<td>Bari (good homestead)</td>
<td>8 to Rs. 1-3 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>4 to 11 annas</td>
<td>Bhit (good homestead)</td>
<td>5 to 11 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cultivation</td>
<td>4 to 8 annas</td>
<td>Sailura (land growing transplanted winter paddy)</td>
<td>6 to 15 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>1 to 2 annas</td>
<td>Asraura (land growing broadcast winter paddy)</td>
<td>5 to 12 annas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. Ibid.
Katigora Group Settlement

Katigora Tehsil is composed of nine Parganas commonly known as the Katigora Group. It is bounded on the north by the North Cachar Hills and on the east by Barkhola Pargana. The river Surma separates it from Sylhet and Hailakandi sub-division to the west and south. The Parganas within this group are Katigora, Haritikar, Lebharputa, Jalalpur, Gumra, Kalain, Phulbari, Jatrapur and Bikrampur. At the time of the last settlement there were 186 villages within these Parganas. The population of this area was a bit less in comparison to that of other Tehsils. Of the total population, 3,04,035 were Hindus, 1,55,653 were Muhammadans, but the Hindus include 1,25,315 tea-garden labourers professing Hindu religion and 48,428 'Khattriyas' belonging to Hindu, Manipuri and Kacharis. The population of Katigora group in 1901, i.e. at the end of the last century was 55,016 including a tea garden population of 9,682.

Among 186 villages, six were tea garden grants under the rules of 1854 and 1862, eighteen others were composed of tea-gardens in periodic lease—generally expired Jungleburi grants of 1864 and 1875. The surveyed area of the group was

22. Ibid.
147 square miles in which two small gardens Narainchhera and Singertol had been traversed by the professional survey party mostly in 1893-94. Three villages viz., Durlav Chhera Part I and II had been traversed in course of present operation. Besides a mountainous tract also had been included in this group. 24

In so far as the measurement of land was concerned, the old local measurement of hal and Kiyar was followed instead of the recognised Government measurement of bigha. The measurement of Kiyar as was adopted was 1 bigha 4 kattas 4½ chattake or roughly $\frac{1}{5}$ bighas. Similarly in subletting the land the Paikaesth Kiyar* was adopted with variations from village to village. 25

As was approved by the Chief Commissioner of Assam, there were six classifications of land in the Katigora group such as Seilura, Asraura, Bari, Shit, Chara and Patit. 26 The work of classification was the duty of the Patwarie and Kanangos and Kecha-pattas were issued to the Miradaras. The rate of assessment in the Parganas ranged from Rs. 60 to Rs. 85. The unhealthy Pargana of Gumra had the lowest rate of Rs. 60.


* Paikaesth Kiyar : It's measurement was equal to about $\frac{1}{5}$ of an ordinary Kiyar 24 of a standard bigha.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.
It may be mentioned here that Bikrampur and Jatrapur were the healthy places of the group. The following table will prove the present higher rates of the group:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Class II</th>
<th>Class III</th>
<th>Class IV</th>
<th>Class IV(a)</th>
<th>Class V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Homestead</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other cultivation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Waste</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tea</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One significant feature of the Katigora group was that, there existed two types of tenants. Some used to live on the landholders' land and were known as Palkavastha, others who used to live on their own land although inadequate in quantity were ordinary tenants. The total surveyed area of the group was 147 square miles excluding small tea-gardens and some villages i.e., Narainchhara and Singertal which had been traversed by professional survey party.  

Gradually, with the consolidation of the British rule this Tahsil was abolished and the area was divided into three Mouzas viz., Bikrampur, Haritikar and Phulbari respectively.

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
Hailakandi Group Settlement

Hailakandi, a subdivision of the Cachar district lying between 24°12' and 20°53' N and 92°26' and 92°46' E was one of the three Tahsils of Cachar under the colonial rule. Its natural beauty is picturesque as it occupies the valley of the Dhaleswari, south of the Barak and is separated from Sylhet on the west by the Saraspur Hills. A small block of land in the north of the valley is low and swampy; the rest is well-drained, fertile and thickly populated. A line of tea-gardens occupies each side of the valley and the centre is covered with paddy land.

The Hailakandi Tahsil, together with two other Parganas of Saraspur and Venerpur known as the Hailakandi Group comprised of an area of 32,721 square miles. The table will show the area, population etc. of the group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pargana</th>
<th>No. of villages</th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Average size of fields in acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hailakandi Tahsil</td>
<td>134 265</td>
<td>1,45,580</td>
<td>269.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. Ibid.
The population of this Tahsil in 1891 was 99,869 and it had increased in 1901 to 1,12,897 giving a density of 272 persons per square mile as compared with 121 in the district as a whole. The increased tendency of general population including the tea-garden people in the next ten years which is outside the scope of our study i.e. from 1901-1911 will be clearly understood from the table given in appendix No. XIV.

In comparison with the Parganas of the other districts of Cachar the Hailakandi and Vernerpur Parganas gave ample scope of satisfactory tea crops. In 1894-95 Cadastral survey was made which covered an area of 540 sq. miles in the Sadar and Hailakandi Tahsil. A large portion of the valley although fertile for rice, tea plantation also made considerable headways. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were 31 gardens with 11,353 acres of land which in its turn provided employment to many Europeans and native inhabitants.

There was no tenancy law in the Cachar district and the relations of land-lord and tenant were governed by social contract. The tenants of the Hailakandi sub-division who were at the mercy of the land-lord has been aptly described in the following lines:

35. Scott, W.L., n 15, p. 29.
36. Land Revenue Administration Report, 1894-95.
The number of tenants in the district of Cachar is small. None but the specially unfortunate live as tenants. In other districts the raiyats have a right over their lands, but here no such right exists. If the raiyats do not obey the orders of the landholders they are turned out of their homes and their lands are forcibly taken away. The rent is fixed by the landholder at his will and there is no standard measurement of the *nol* with which the lands are measured. Some landholders use a six cubit *nol*, some a six-half cubit and some a seven cubit *nol*. If the raiyats raise any objection they are not attended to, rather a raiyat disputing the measurement is evicted. The rate of rent is Rs. 3 or Rs. 3-8-0 a paikasthi kiyar and is gradually went on the increase, but the yield per kiyar is not more than six or seven maunds. The productive power of the land is diminishing day by day, while the rent is increasing.

Thus in the Hailakandi Tahsil, the average price was higher than in the extreme north and south. So the prices vary from Rs. 80 to Rs. 250 a bigha.

**Creation of Sadar Station and Municipality**

Since annexation of Cachar in 1832, the British were interested in making Silchar their Sadar or headquarter station. For sometime, Cachar continued to be administered from Cherra-

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38. Scott, W.L., n 15, p.17.
punji which was the headquarter of the Agent to the Governor-General. It may be recalled that in the beginning of 1833, Captain Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar, started his headquarter at Dudpatil which however was before long shifted to Silchar for the sake of convenience. The present headquarter station of Cachar district i.e., Silchar was mainly based on the then Janiganj and Sadarghat areas. This had been under occupation by the Mirasdars of Dambicapur which was once the land of the Dimasa rulers which may be ascertained from the following extract of MacWilliam:

"The land on which the Janiganj Bazar is built, is part of some talooks settled by one of the Rajas of Cachar upon the Mirasdars by Raja Govinda Chunder sometimes before his death in 1830. After his death his state was annexed and formed into the district of Cachar, and in 1833 Captain Fisher who had then charge of the district, fixed upon this spot as the site of the Sudder station and commenced building upon the resumed land. Upon this the lessee who had been ejected by Govinda Chunder, applied for the twenty three hale resumed by Govinda Chunder, to use as much of this land as might be required for Government purposes, and to grant the remainder rent-free to persons selling here for trade or as Government servants."

39, Bhattacharjee, J.B., n 5, p. 172.
40, Dey, R., n 4, pp. 114-115.
During the early years of its rule, the East India Company made no effort to establish local Government institutions, as the Company was very much busy with the act of consolidation. When the sanitary conditions of the town of Silchar became alarmingly serious and many among the troops suffered death, the District Superintendent had constituted the Municipal branch in his administration. Its main business was to manage the affairs of the Municipal police in order to maintain peace and tranquility in the town.  

Silchar was created a Municipality in 1865 but in 1868, the municipality was abolished for its failure to achieve the desired end. However, in 1882, under Bengal Municipal Act (1876) which divided the urban areas into first class and second class Municipalities, stations and unions, Silchar was constituted into a Station Committee. The station committee in its meeting on 31 April, 1882, divided Silchar town into four wards which as Janiganj, Tarapur, Ambicapur and Malugram. In 1891 the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar recommended to the Government of Assam that Silchar station be converted into a second class Municipality which was accepted by the Government and this continued till the end of the colonial rule.

44. Ibid.
Silchar Town Reassessment

Town lands came under temporary settlement and most of them were fully revenue paying, lands sometimes settled under different terms and conditions, and in some areas periodic settlements were given. Silchar was settled under the Town Land Rules for 30 years only from 1st April, 1902.45

In the year 1883 Silchar town was surveyed cadastrally (scale 16" = 1 mile) and the town was divided into three Mouzas—Tarapur, Ambicapur and Dudpatil. Some modifications were made lateron when the boundary to the south-east, south and another portion of Tarapur and the whole of the village of Udhurbend were included. Moreover, some portion of land known as Ukilbazar which was originally a part of Tarapur was excluded due to the existence of a contaminant there.46

In 1892, the revised boundary of the Silchar town, was published as follows:

North : The Barak river
South : Rangirkhari Khal
West : The Barak river to the Itkhola Road
East : The eastern boundary of the Madhurband village.47

45. The Assam Land Revenue Manual, n 6, p. X-XI.
47. Assam Gazetteer notification No. 9642 G. dated 27 October, 1892.
This settlement included two kinds of land of the Silchar town (1) Khas bazar and Mirasdar land settled for fifteen years.

The primary division of land into agricultural, residential and trade had been followed in this settlement. The first objective of the settlement was to settle the lands newly attached to the town. The rates of Madhurband, Tarapur and Ambicapur were to be fixed according to its quality or class of land respectively. Besides, the agricultural area, the whole of the town had been divided into small portions of twenty two residential blocks. These blocks were categorised according to the divergent character of the soil.

**Bazar Land Assessment**

One of the important feature of the assessment of 1883, was the assessment of bazar lands—Fatak bazar (or Khas bazar) and Ukil bazar.

The area of Khas bazar still known as the Fatak bazar (Jail) was once the site of the Silchar Jail. Gradually, the jail was shifted and the land had been utilised for establishing the bazar and the name remained as before. The open space in the middle was also called Khas bazar where daily

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50. Ibid.
markets were held. The main entrance to the bazar was intersected by a small road. The area was categorised into three classes in respect of valuation where Class I varied from Rs. 80 to Rs. 125; Class II Rs. 70 to Rs. 120 and Class III which included the shops on either side of the main entrance and a few sites below Class II, while the rest of the eastern and southern side were classed as IV.51

The Ukil bazar and some portions of Tarapur, were under the purview of the old settlement. But these had been excluded in consequence of being separated from the rest of the town by the Silchar cantonment. The upper part of Ukil bazar was occupied by the residences of some renowned pleaders of the district. Another portion was under the occupation of the Assam-Bengal Railway. The remaining portion was rather low and swampy. The advent of the railway had enhanced the value of the land, and the shops began to emerge which raised the importance of the place.

The lease issued for town lands at the last settlement was in ordinary Mirasdari form. This does not differ materially from the old Mirasdari lease, and the town was more or less in a state of transition. In course of time, the British rule had brought into existence a few more administrative townships. With the opening of a court, jail and other

51. Ibid.
office buildings these townships were an urban outlook with a mixed population. However, urban population in the Cachar towns was exceptionally small in comparison with the total number of inhabitants which stayed mostly in the villages whose main occupation was agriculture.