CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The discussions in the foregoing chapters are an attempt to project a critical analysis of Cachar or the valley of the Barak—its land, people and their history with particular reference to land revenue administration which underwent steady changes during a period of seventy years beginning from its annexation in 1832 by the British East India Company till the end of the nineteenth century. It may be stated in this connection that from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, Cachar was under the rule of the Tripuris. In the sixteenth century, the Dehana (Koches) under Chilarai, the brother of Maharaj Naranarayana of Koch Behar wrested the territory from the Tripuris and established a Dehan(Koch) principality with headquarters at Khaspur near present Silchar. Before long, the Koch Governor declared his independence and laid the foundation of an independent Kingdom at Khaspur.

Meanwhile, the Dimasas who belonged to the great Bodo race and ruled over an extensive territory, being driven out from their capital at Dimapur established themselves firmly at Maibong in the North Cachar Hills. The Dimasas gradually advanced towards the plains of Cachar by extending their rule southwards. As a result of the matrimonial alliance between the royal families of Khaspur and Maibong, Khaspur state was merged in the Dimasa state and Khaspur became its
capital. However, the Dimasaas attained their pristine glory when the Cachar plains were integrated into the Dimasa state in the seventeenth century.

Notwithstanding, the weakness of the Dimasa state became visible during the rule of Krishna Chandra (1776-1813) and his younger brother Govindachandra (1813-1830). The latter who was childless and also in advanced age succeeded his brother in 1813. The new Raja’s personal character and misrule brought in a series of disorders in the kingdom. One of his officers named Tularam proclaimed himself as an independent ruler in North Cachar and central plains. Before long, in the wake of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1816-24), Cachar became the arena of a political conflict between three rival princes for the throne of Manipur. When the Burmese occupied Manipur, Cachar and Assam, the British declared War against Burma. Meanwhile, by the treaty signed at Badarpur (1824) with Govindachandra, Cachar became a protected tributary state under the British.

At the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese War, in accordance with the terms of the treaty of Yandabo (February 1826) signed with Burma, the rule of Cachar was restored to Govindachandra who agreed to pay Rs. 10,000 annually to the British. But the Raja was not destined to rule peacefully due to the enmity of Tularam and the Manipuri prince Gambhir
Singh. Allured by the vast economic resources of Cachar, the British began to fish in the troubled waters of Cachar, the revenue of which was then calculated at three lakhs of rupees. The sudden assassination of Govindachandra in 1830 offered the golden opportunity to the British to annex Cachar into their territory in August 1832. After its annexation, the Supreme Government appointed Lieutenant Fisher as its Superintendent with headquarters at Dudpatil. However, in pursuance of the expressed desire of Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India, the valley of Cachar was placed under the control of the Commissioner of Dacca and the headquarters of the Superintendent was removed to Silchar in 1836.

The administrative system in Cachar under the East India Company was analogous to the Assam Act VI of 1835 which was in vogue in the Assam Valley under the Board of Revenue. Lieutenant Fisher was invested with the duties of a Magistrate, Collector and a Civil Judge. Fisher could well understand that the primary requisite of Cachar was to increase its inhabitants in the valley in order to augment the revenue resources which had been disturbed under the misrule of the Dimasa rulers and by the external and internal disorders before and after the Burmese invasions. In this connection, it may be mentioned that at the time of his assumption of
office he had anticipated a favourable revenue position in Cachar, but before long he found to his utter disappointment that the collection was far below his expectations. The fall in the estimated revenue was attributed to the scantiness of the population and unexplored cultivable lands in the valley.

From the very beginning, the colonial administrators were guided by their own economic interests in Cachar. Fisher was not in favour of increasing the revenue resources of Cachar by interfering with the Kbel system immediately. He continued the old system which was in existence at the time, but intended to bring under assessment all lands which were free of rent. At the same time he had also invited cultivators from the neighbouring districts of Sylhet and other parts of Bengal promising them all facilities to enjoy land on liberal terms.

Fisher by his rough survey of the cultivated lands assessed 20,663 acres at Sicca Rs. 20,101 or company's Rs. 21,441 excluding an area of 9000 acres revenue-free as Bakeha, Debottara etc. Fisher's survey and settlement suffered from inherent defects and hence need was felt for fresh survey and settlement during the time of his successor Major Burns who effected a new settlement for five years in 1838. The total area settled by Burns was 11,132 bales, of
which 7,563 were paying and the rest rent free. The total revenue return estimated rose to Rs. 24,974-41-9 pies per year. Burns like his predecessor also took measures to attract outsiders to Cachar. Though this settlement was made favourable to Mirasdars, it was also found defective as it was based on Fisher's defective survey.

In 1842 a fresh survey was undertaken by Lieutenant Thuillier. It brought large areas under assessment, but tea grants were excluded by this survey. However, on the basis of the data made available by Thuillier, a new settlement was made for fifteen years by Rai Bahadur Golok Chandra Bole. The rates fixed by the old settlement were retained and the existing settlement holders were recognised. Rai Bahadur's settlement comprised an area of 97,904 acres of which 30,043 acres were jungle-lands. The revenue was estimated at Rs. 43,146 during the first five years and at the end of the third five years at Rs. 58,518. The most redeeming feature of this settlement was that it brought more lands under cultivation. Rai Bahadur's settlement was followed in 1855-6 by another fifteen years settlement undertaken by Verner on certain tracts of jungle-lands. Some of the terms of this settlement continued till 1879. By this settlement an area of 70,216 acres was settled with a return of Rs. 37,213. By the time of the expiry of Rai Bahadur's settlement in 1857-8, the total revenue of the district amounted to Rs. 81,676.
In 1859 another new settlement was made by Captain Stewart for twenty years. It was also based on Thuillier's Survey. For purpose of assessment all cultivated lands were classified into two classes according to productivity. The area assessed was 1,32,077 acres and the revenue estimated was Rs. 92,712. The next settlement was started by Major Boyd and completed by Babu Prakash Chandra Dutta under Mr. Knox Weight in 1884. The area assessed was 2,52,202 acres and the revenue estimated was Rs. 2,21,589. This settlement was for fifteen years and continued till the end of March 1898. The last settlement which was made within our period of study was by Babu Sarat Chandra Banerjee also for a period of fifteen years. This settlement was made in 1894, but it came into execution only from 1900. The main object of this settlement was to include all tea-grants and waste-lands which were excluded by the previous surveys and settlements. Sarat Chandra's settlement was based as usual on traverse survey, Cadastral Survey and Revision Survey.

From our survey of the revenue settlements undertaken by the new rulers, one thing became apparent that from the very beginning, the administration was interested in increasing the revenue resources of Cachar by interfering with the Khel system and to bring more land under cultivation by reducing the quantum of waste-lands and jungles. The local officials always extended invitations to Bengalees.
cultivators of the Lower Provinces to come to Cachar and occupy lands offered to them by the Government on liberal terms. Consequently thousands of agriculturists immigrated from Sylhet, Mymensing, Comilla, Burdwan, Birbhum and other places.

Notwithstanding, for a long period, the land revenue administration remained disorganised and ineffective. In the beginning, the native system was allowed to continue and Fisher appointed the Mukhtar to collect the revenue. But in 1836, the Mukhtar system which proved to be "expensive and inefficient" was abolished and was replaced by the Tahsildar system when Cachar was divided into Silchar, Katigorah and Hailakandi Tahsils. But due to 'lack of acquaintance' of the Tahsildars with the Mirzadars, the system proved to be unproductive. As a result, the Mukhtar system was restored in 1837 which however was again replaced by the Tahsildari system in 1843. The frequent changes in the system proved that the local officials lacked detailed knowledge and the reliable staff needed to assess and collect the revenue. Such a state of affairs compelled the local administration to undertake short term policies based on the principle of expediency.

At the time of the annexation of Cachar in 1832, the settled area was 20,663 acres yielding a revenue of Rs. 21,411 and at the beginning of 1900, the area under assess-
ment went upto 3,77,464 acres with a revenue of Rs. 4,00,672. It should however, be borne in mind that the settled area did not include revenue-free, fee-simple or lands under other kinds of leases which had yet time to yield revenue returns. Since the middle of the last century, Cachar entered into a new phase towards economic and commercial prosperity due to the opening of tea-plantation. Allured by the prospect of tea industry, a large number of tea companies and individual planters applied for grants of waste-lands on 99 years' lease and on periodical tenures. It has already been stated that Babu Saratchandra's settlement included tea-grants and waste-lands which were excluded by previous settlements. All tea lands were assessed at the rate of 11 annas per bigha.

The progress of this industry was so much rapid that by the end of 1898, it was found that about 2,80,172 acres of land came under tea plantation in about 199 tea gardens. The revenue demand from tea gardens which was Rs. 1,53,346 in 1871-2 must have steadily increased despite ups and downs of this industry.

Agricultural land was not the only source of earning of revenue by the colonial rulers. They also derived revenue from lands having forests, salt-wells, fisheries and ferries. The forests of Cachar were known for their valuable timber, bamboo, cane, agaru, lac, wax, ivory, silk, cotton and minerals. During the Dimasa rule, duties were levied on
products mentioned above at the important ghats of the Barak and its tributaries. The British also earned considerable revenue by levying transit duties on the merchandise passing through the river ghats. To prevent mischief like cutting of valuable timber measures were adopted by the Government. Toll stations and check-posts were established at strategic places. Salt-wells and Fisheries were also leased out to eligible bidders which fetched a considerable amount of revenue to the Government.

According to the statistics of 1901, there were 1,58,080 cultivating land holders, 2,109 non-cultivating land-holders and 80,256 cultivating tenants. The existence of a large proportion of cultivating population shows that Cachar was essentially a land of peasants and the land-lord class was numerically an insignificant one. The peasantry class had either Khas land or land holder under sub-tenancy. Unemployed agricultural labourers in the rural areas were conspicuous by their absence. The people were contented with what nature had given them and with little labour and with their limited wants they had no reason to be discontented. That the socio-economic condition of the people of Cachar was "fairly satisfactory" might be appreciated from the following extract from a letter of E.R. Lyons, Superintendent of Cachar:
The ryots are well clothed and have an abundance of food but from long habit and custom, the quality is not in proportion to their means, this is they are very frugal and content with simple food, and use less condiment with it than there is any absolute necessity for. There are salt-wells in Cachar and the poorer classes usually boil their fish or vegetable in the brine obtainable from the wells, and add a quantity of chillies and a little turmeric but I doubt if the ryots of many other districts get so good

Mendacity is not uncommon; there is scarcely a 'fuquier' in the district for I give them but little encouragement, and there is no class in a state of destitution, the extraordinary small amount of burglary and larceny affords the strongest evidence of this fact.

Slavery is common, but slaves can obtain their freedom in accordance with regulations in force, but petitions for emancipations are rarely presented owing to slaves being unusually well treated here...... their condition for the most part is that of servants.*

That the socio-economic position of the common people of Cachar was favourable was best supported by the fact that no villager would agree to act as a paid labourer. As a result the government as well as the management in the tea gardens were faced with the problem of the dearth of labourers. To

* Quoted in Bhattacharjee, J.B.; Cachar under British Rule in N.E. India, 1977, pp. 222-23.
meet such shortage, labourers had to be brought from neighbouring Sylhet, Bengal and other parts of India. Such immigration of a large number of men from outside brought many socio-economic problems. But the facilities offered by the colonial rulers to obtain land had been so much favourable that the bulk of the immigrants could become cultivators or peasant proprietors. It was not an exaggeration to say that in Cachar almost every man was a Mirasdar, being a landholder in his own right and paying revenue direct to the Government. Individual ownership of land was recognised on the basis of actual possession. The individuals were granted pattahs and the new settlers and the members from other Khels were recognised as Mirasdars. This class by virtue of their age-old status continued to occupy a social status and considerable influence in the valley; they formed the landed aristocracy in Cachar.

Evidently at the end of the nineteenth century, the society of Cachar was yet to react fully to the influence of modernisation brought about by the foreign rulers. But the increase of population, opening of tea-gardens, growth of towns, bazars and numerous homesteads had cut down the size of the arable land. This had turned a greater section of the cultivators into a landless peasantry. As the colonial rulers were interested in increasing the revenue, attempts were made under periodical settlements to augment it at the earliest
opportunity. The peasants who could not pay their revenue regularly had to go to zamindars, mouzadars or money-lenders for borrowing money to clear their arrears. It may be mentioned in this connection, that the people in Cachar had the practice of keeping themselves free from debt; they were accustomed to clear their dues to the Government with 'appreciable regularity'. They usually paid their revenue by selling their surplus paddy, vegetables, poultry or livestock.

Thus by the end of our period of study, the impact of colonial economy and exploitation tended to bring about a change in the lot of the people in Cachar. The Barak valley which was a surplus region was fast turning into a deficit one. Unrest amongst the peasantry became a common feature. Such discontent produced a great stir in the Brahmaputra valley in the last part of the nineteenth century. Basically enhancement in the rates of land revenue and imposition of obnoxious taxes by the unsympathetic and alien government resulted in agrarian uprising of the peasantry during 1893-4 in Assam which was described as "Assam Riots" by interested parties. In fact, this uprising was spearheaded by popular assemblies of the common people known as Rail-mels. In the Barak valley we do not come across with any such movement organised by the people for the purpose of resisting imposition of the enhanced rates of land revenue which touched the people's purse and tended to impoverish them.