CHAPTER III

SETTLEMENT IN TRANSITION

Burns' settlement of Cachar was an interim measure. Therefore, a fresh survey was undertaken in 1842 by Lieu­tenant Thuillier which brought large areas under assessment and it comprised an area of 1,82,378 acres. The lands bordering the principal rivers and streams to which cultivation was then limited were actually measured and divided into 241 Mouzahs. The tea-grants for the most part were beyond the purview of Thuillier's survey and each grant when subsequently surveyed was constituted as an independent Mouzah. For effective survey Thuillier reduced the number of paraganas from 35 to 21 and formed them into well defined divisions.*1 He noticed that the paraganas of Cachar were situated in high places, the soil was productive in nature and extensive in area. Accordingly he made a classification of the paraganas on the basis of its quality as given in the next page.2

* See Appendix No. III
2. Ibid.
Aval or 1st quality
Diem or 2nd quality
Siem or 3rd quality
2. Kalain 2. Libbar pottah 2. Rupairbali
4. Udharband 4. Barkhola
5. Saraspur 5. Barakpar
7. Phulbari 7. Banskandi
8. Jatrapur
9. Banraj
10. Sonapur

The instrument used by Thuillier for measurement of land was the standard null of 16 haths exactly 24 feet $\frac{7}{118}$ inches. He recommended for the introduction of rod in place of null. The local kealbah thus equalled to 23313 in square yards or 4 acres 3 rods 10 poles of British measurement. Only the Saraspur Pargana which belonged to the Sylhet district was measured by a null of 12 haths. The cost of the survey had been Rs. 13-12 annas and 9 pie per square mile.\(^3\)

The total area of measured land was estimated at 62497 acres of which 42524 were assessed at a jumma of Rs. 24974

\(3. \) Ibid.
per annum. The survey recorded 65509 acres of cultivated land alone besides fit for cultivation and patit i.e. the number of houses amounted to 32652 and of ploughs to 20008.

Golok Chandra's Fifteen Years' Settlement

On the basis of the data made available by Thuillier, a new settlement for a period of fifteen years was made by Rai Bahadur Golok Chandra Bole, the Deputy Collector of Sylhet. According to the new settlement the old holders of lands were resettled in their holdings if they wished and if they were unwilling or were not prepared to come to terms, the land was to be settled with any one else. The rates fixed by the old settlement were retained for all cultivated lands. It was also stipulated that if the Settlement Officer thought that the tenant was able to clear and cultivate the jungle part of his holding it might be settled with him. These lands (jungle lands) were to be assessed rent-free for the first five years, at 1-8 per hal, for the next five years and at full rates for the concluding five years. All bari and chara lands were assessed at rates varying from 3 to 2 per hal; but all Lakhirai lands granted during the Kachari rule were strictly respected.

5. C.R., 14 July, 1873; letter from Mac William, Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Cachar to the Commissioner of Revenue, Dacca Division.
The Rai Bahadur's settlement comprised an area of 97,904 acres, of which 30,043 were jungle lands. The revenue was stipulated at Rs. 43,146 during the first five years, at Rs. 50,831 for the second five years and at Rs. 58,187 for the third five years. The most important effect of this new settlement was that it brought more land for cultivation. The available figures indicate a rise in the area of cultivated land. There were 6,742 estates with an area of 20,325 hale of which 14,088 were under cultivation and 6,237 hale were jungles.

In 1849-50 i.e., at the time of the termination of the rent-free period when jungles were cleared it was noticed that the Mirasdars had acquired more jungle lands than they were able to cultivate. They were, however, ready to surrender such lands instead of paying Rs. 1-8 per Kulbah. In 1850-51 the Board of Revenue permitted them to relinquish portions of their holdings and to pay for the remaining portions at Rs. 3 per Kulbah. Though this measure had caused for the present a slight reduction in revenue, the subsequent additional settlements of jungle lands compensated the loss in revenue. The new estates thus added numbered 1,458, with an area of 38,288 acres, and a revenue of about Rs. 20,302. In all in 1854-55, there were 7,773 estates in the valley with a revenue return of Rs. 67,660.

7. Bhattacharjee, J.B.; Cachar under British Rule in North East India, Delhi, 1977, p. 79.
**Verner's settlement**

In 1855-56 Captain Verner who was in charge of Cachar made a settlement for fifteen years in some jungle tracts at rates varying from 4 annas to Rs. 3 per hal. Altogether Verner made a settlement of 972 mahals covering an area of 14,577 hale and an ultimate revenue of Rs. 37,123. Verner's settlement lasted till 31 March 1871, but some of the terms of this settlement continued till 1879. Rai Bahadur's settlement expired in 1857-58 and the total revenue of the district then was estimated at Rs. 81,676.9

**Stewart's Twenty Years' Settlement**

In 1859 a new settlement was made by Captain Stewart for twenty years based upon Thuillier's survey. For proper measurement of lands, a native surveyor locally known as Amin was engaged. Stewart divided all cultivated lands, according to their productive capacity and other advantages into (a) awal i.e., level lands easily irrigable and (b) doyam i.e. undulating lands, the irrigation of which was difficult. The rates of assessment varied from Rs. 3 to Rs. 2-8-0 and Rs. 2-8-0 to Rs.2-0-0 per hal according to the quality of land.10

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10. C.R., Letter from Mac William, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar to the Commissioner of Revenue, Dacca Division, dated 14 July, 1873.
It may be noticed here that the Cachar Cultivation Rules were introduced with the object of clearing the high grass jungles where the rate of assessment was Rs. 3 per half.\textsuperscript{11} In the aforesaid settlement the jungles producing thatching grass and reeds were settled at full rates. The forest jungles were settled for three years rent-free which gradually increased at a full rate on the expiry of twenty years.\textsuperscript{12} The leases were granted in such a way so as to cover the term of re-settlement. The nature of right of the pattah holders—that after the expiry of the period for which the pattah was granted, the lands would be subject to re-assessment and to such moderate assessment as may seem proper to the Government.\textsuperscript{13} In Cachar special cultivation leases were granted to both the Europeans and the natives under the Government of Bengal's orders in 1864. But this was modified by the Government of India in December 1874. The term granted under the special lease was that no lease was to cover an area of more than three thousand acres confined to waste lands for which no petition or appeal could be made.\textsuperscript{14} For the collection of revenue in the three

\textsuperscript{11} B.R.P., No. 20 of 14 May 1864, Letter from C.T. Buckland, Commissioner to the Secretary, Board of Revenue Lower Province.

\textsuperscript{12} C.R., Letter from Mac William Deputy Commissioner of Cachar to the Commissioner of Revenue, Dacca Division, the 14 July, 1973.

\textsuperscript{13} B.R.P., No. 20, 14 May, 1864.

The revenue collectors were appointed on a salary of Rs. 3 per month. The total number of collectors engaged for the purpose was 36 among whom 12 persons were remunerated by fees. Captain Stewart was in favour of increasing the number to 40 in order to ensure better collection.15

The colonial administrators were always bent upon to extract revenue from acquired land as far as possible to augment the Governmental resources, and Cachar was not an exception in this regard. In the matter of collection of revenue initially they were not so much determined, gradually their attitude with regard to collection of revenue changed. When an instalment of revenue became due weekly notice was served to the defaulters and they were asked to pay. The first notice was served free of charge while the second and third notices were accompanied with fines from 3 paise to 1 anna respectively.16

Immediately after the collection of revenue, the same was despatched to the Sudder Treasury with the help of 12 persons who were entrusted with the duties of a guard. The Board of Revenue had empowered the pattah holders who were paying more than Rs. 50 to pay the revenue direct into the treasury.17 Captain Stewart was content with the present settle-

15. C.R., No. 65, 20 February, 1865; letter from R.B., Chapman, Secretary, Board of Revenue Lower Provinces to the Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, Fort William.

16. Metcalfe, Thomas R.; Land, Landlords And the British Raj: Northern India In the Nineteenth Century, Delhi, 1979, p. 52.

17. C.R., No. 65, 20 February, 1865.
ment that there was no arrear due at the close of the year and without any complaint from the inhabitants. Again the system of 'gentle invitation' was found best suited to the raiyats who were the native settlers of the valley. Besides, the cost of collection of the three Tahsils amounted to Rs. 2,376 per annum or Rs. 2-2-6 of the collected revenue.

Another noticeable feature in the land revenue administration of Cachar was the Talabhana or fine levied at the Tahsils with the help of employed puvadahs. The Dustak bearing the seal and signature of the Tahsil Mohurda was another striking instrument of the administration. It appeared from Stewart's twenty years settlement that the area assessed was 1,32,077 acres and the total revenue was Rs. 92,712. In 1862 there were 7447 estates in Cachar consisting of an area of 219,673 acres. Each was divided into mahals with an average area of 29 acres, 1 rod and 24 poles and all these were exclusive of the jungle areas.

* During the Dimasa Raj, at the time of collection of revenue the puvadah used to beat a drum and the revenue payers assembled to pay the revenue. This process was recorded in the British official files, as the 'gentle invitation'.

18. C.R., Letter from Captain Stewart to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 1664.
19. Ibid.
Boyd's fifteen years settlement

It may be recalled that when Assam was constituted into a separate province in 1874, the three districts of Cachar, Sylhet and Goalpara were transferred from Bengal to the new province. With this, new political developments were noticed in various aspects of administration including land revenue.

In Cachar, with the close of Major Stewart's settlement, another fresh arrangement was made in 1878-79 but the work was not completed till 1884. Major Boyd, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, made a settlement for 15 years. This settlement continued upto 31 March 1898.22 Under this settlement three fiscal divisions were created which were designated as Katigora Tehsil, Silchar Tehsil and Hailakandi Tehsil. In each Tehsil the soil was divided into four classes: (i) Home­stead and garden (ii) Cultivation including land under san­grass, (iii) Tea and (iv)waste.23 Each Tehsil was divided into four homogenous tracts called circles as in the adjoining Jayantia Parganas. These tracts or circles had differential rates of assessment for each class of land. The rates therefore, assessed on a given class of land in the circles of one Tehsil, did not necessarily correspond with those assessed on

22. Ibid.
the same class of land in the corresponding circles of another Tahsil. 24

As far as the constitution of the circle was concerned it appeared that it was divided into five categories in consideration of the productiveness of the soil, the facility of communication, the liability to inundation, exposure to the ravages of wild animals and the proximity to dense forests. 25

The rate fixed under this settlement varied from Rs. 4-12-0 to Rs. 8-4-0 per bigha for homestead land, from Rs. 3-12-0 to Rs. 7-2-0, for cultivation other than tea and from Rs. 6 to Rs. 7-2-0 for tea, with a uniform rate throughout of Rs. 1 per bigha for waste. The statement given in the table below shows the rate per bigha in more detail for ordinary cultivation and waste: 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of village</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead or garden</td>
<td>9 - 0</td>
<td>8 - 3</td>
<td>8 - 3</td>
<td>5 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>7 -10</td>
<td>6 - 7</td>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>4 - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>1 - 1</td>
<td>1 - 1</td>
<td>1 - 1</td>
<td>1 - 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
The settlement begun by Major Boyd was thoroughly scrutinised and completed by Babu Prakash Chandra Dutta, a Bengalee expert surveyor. At this settlement the total area assessed was 52,544 bigha (2,52,202 acres) with a revenue of Rs. 2,21,589. This meaningful settlement was professionally traversed by a survey party and the details of all village lands liable to re-assessment were filled in by Amina under the settlement party. The Jungleburi estates, grants for tea cultivation and most of the bakesha estates were not surveyed.  

Sarat Chandra Banerjee's fifteen years settlement

The last settlement which was made during the purview of our study was undertaken by Babu Sarat Chandra Banerjee* for a period of 15 years. This settlement was started in 1894 and it came into execution in 1900.

The main object of this settlement was to include all tea-gardens and waste-lands which were excluded by the previous settlements.  


* Sarat Chandra Banerjee, M.A. a highly educated personality was appointed as Settlement Officer, Cachar. Under his able guidance the settlement party had surveyed the valley of Cachar. It was under Babu Sarat Chandra Banerjee's initiative for the first time that the system of record writing and assessment was made. In recognition of his services to the Government he was awarded the title of 'Rai Bahadur'.

tral survey covering a small area of 150 square miles; field operations were resumed in November 1893 and were not brought to a close until 1894. It was based as usual on Traverse survey, Cadastral survey and Revision survey. 29

Of the aforesaid surveys, the Traverse survey was carried on only in the district of Cachar where an area of 360 square miles was taken up. The Cadastral survey was only confined to a small area of 150.46 square miles in Cachar and was finished by the close of the year 1894. The main cause for the smallness of the area surveyed was due to the fact that no traverse work had been done in advance, so detailed survey could not be started and also partly due to the settlement which continued till April 1898. The Revision survey* appeared to be exceptionally tedious and complicated owing to numerous transfers of shares by sale, gift etc., which had taken place since the last settlement.

The content of the operations carried out may be seen in the table shown in next page: 30


* The Revision was fully carried in the Dayantia and Sylhet Parganas.

30. Ibid.
Sarat Chandra Banerjee had carried out a **Theodolite** traverse of the village boundaries with the help of a Professional Survey Party. This survey included ordinary Mirasbari tenures but not related to the numerous estates held under Jungleburi leases, or to the Fee-simple or revenue paying waste land grants. 31

The method of assessment adopted represented the first effort made in Assam to discriminate between different classes of the same kind of land within a village. The basis taken was that of the rice land. This was divided into classes, and the class of the majority of the rice land in any village was taken as the important class of that particular village; this determined the class of the other kinds of land, such as

homestead, land growing other cultivation than rice, tea and waste land. 32

A special low rate was assessed for rice land in certain flood affected villages which was 4 annas per bigha (12 annas per acre), and with regard to waste land it was laid down that no waste land was to be assessed less than which was assessed before. 33 Moreover, the most noteworthy phenomenon of this settlement was the introduction of Bengal Bigha for official use in Cachar. The measurements were recorded in terms of the Bigha, Katha etc., instead of hel and kiver. 34

The colonial administrators did not favour the continuance of the Khel system as it did not suit their interest. As the Government was anxious to increase revenue from their new acquisitions, attempts were made under periodical settlements to augment the land revenue at the earliest opportunity. To begin with, individual ownership of land was recognised on the basis of actual possession. The individuals were granted pattah and the new comers as well as members from the other Khals were recognised as Mirsadars. With the gradual opening up of Cachar, the creation of new administrative units, the growth of townships, the improvements of roads and creation of reserved forests the area of arrable land reduced in size.

32. Scott, n 27, p. 22.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
Gradually, the Miresdars entered into competition with their counterparts to increase the number of subtenants or raiyats which was considered important for their own prestige and status; these Miresdars were very much conscious of their feudal prestige. Thus Cachar came to experience the brunt of colonialism and feudalism with their concomitant impact in the nineteenth century. 35

**Increase of settled area**

The following table shows the area covered by different settlements and the initial revenue returns for a period of 70 years between 1830 and 1900:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement area — acres</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1838</th>
<th>1843</th>
<th>1859</th>
<th>1884</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20,663</td>
<td>36,430</td>
<td>97,904</td>
<td>1,32,542</td>
<td>2,52,645</td>
<td>3,75,464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue rupees</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1838</th>
<th>1843</th>
<th>1859</th>
<th>1884</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21,411</td>
<td>24,974</td>
<td>43,146</td>
<td>90,631</td>
<td>2,22,730</td>
<td>4,00,672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table only shows the land actually under resettlement at the time and excludes revenue free grants, fee-simple estates or under leases which had yet to show any return. Notwithstanding, it may be concluded that within the period of our study there was a steady increase in the settled area as well as in the amount of revenue return from lands. After

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the conclusion of the last settlement made in 1900, a special staff of revenue officials were appointed to keep proper land records under the supervision of the District Sub-Deputy Collectors. In fact, from this time onward a fairly accurate record of land revenue settlement was available for the valley of Cachar.36