

Reading Room Copy.

Occasional Paper No. 24

IMPACT OF PLANTATIONS ON THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE  
OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

KEYA DEB

3/387

c-3



CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA

**PUBLICATIONS OF  
CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA**

**OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES :**

*Mimeographed Occasional Papers for limited circulation for scholarly comments and critical evaluation of first drafts are meant for publication later in journals or books: reference to subsequent publication of each of the following Occasional Papers are given in brackets :*

1. ASOK SEN : Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones (Calcutta, Ridchi-India, 1977)
2. BHABATOSH DATTA : Budget Deficit, Money Supply and Inflation (*The Contents of Economic Growth and Other Essays*, Calcutta, Research India Publications, 1977)
3. SUNIL MUNSI : Railway Network Growth in Eastern India, 1854-1910 (*International Geography*, Vol. VI, 1976)
4. DIPESH CHAKRABORTY : Sasipada Banerjee : A Study in the Nature of the First Contact of the Bengali Bhadrakok with the Working Classes of Bengal (*Indian Historical Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, January, 1976)
5. AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI : Reflections on Patterns of Regional Growth in India during the Period of British Rule (*Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XCV, Part 1, No. 180, January-June, 1976)
6. GAUTAM BHADRA : Social Groups and Social Relations in the Town of Murshidabad, 1765-1793 (*Indian Historical Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, January, 1976)
7. SOBHANLAL DATTA GUPTA : Contemporary Studies on the Indian Party System : An Evaluative Account (*Socialist Perspective*, Vol. VI, No. 3, December, 1978 and Vol. VI, No. 4, March 1979)
8. SHIBANI KINKAR CHAUBE : Studies in the Constitution and Government of India : A Methodological Survey (*Teaching Politics*, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-2, 1978)
9. NIRMALA BANERJEE : Demand for Electricity
10. SOBHANLAL DATTA GUPTA : Comintern and the Colonial Question : The Decolonisation Controversy (*Marxist Miscellany*, No. 8, 1977 and No. 11, 1978).

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO.24

IMPACT OF PLANTATIONS ON THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE OF  
THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

KEYA DEB

APRIL, 1979

CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA  
10, LAKE TERRACE  
CALCUTTA-700 029.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

587  
Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Ontario  
LIBRARY.

C-3

### Acknowledgements

The paper forms a part of my doctoral dissertation on 'Tea plantations in the Brahmaputra Valley ( 1839-1944 ): a case study in a colonial set-up'. I am greatly-indebted to Professor Moonis Raza under whose supervision this study was done.

- The major part of the work was carried on at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, where I was associated with the Geography Unit. I am deeply grateful to the Centre for providing the facilities which helped me to complete the work. I am particularly indebted to Professors Sunil Munsri, Barun De, Amiya Bagchi, Asok Sen and Amalendu Guha and to Dr. Arabinda Biswas who helped with valuable suggestions on an earlier draft of the paper. I am also grateful to the Cartographic Unit of the Centre for the maps.

Keya Deb

CONFIDENTIAL

The following information was obtained from the confidential source who has provided reliable information in the past. It is the policy of the Agency to disseminate information to the extent possible to all authorized personnel. This information is being provided to you for your information only. It is not to be disseminated to other personnel unless specifically authorized by the Agency. This information is being provided to you for your information only. It is not to be disseminated to other personnel unless specifically authorized by the Agency.

CONFIDENTIAL

## P R E F A C E

North-Eastern India in contemporary and historical perspective has been one of the major points of focus in the research of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. One of our latest pieces of work on this area has been Professor Amalendu Guha's Occasional Paper No. 19 entitled "Mediaeval North-East India . Polity, Society and Economy, 1200 - 1750 A.D.".

Smt. Keya Deb was in the Centre from 1973 to 1976, working whole time on a project on "Tea Plantations in the Economy of Assam". In 1976 she took up the position of Lecturer in the Post-Graduate Department of Geography, Burdwan University. Her thesis on this subject has just been submitted to the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for consideration of award of its D. Phil degree. Her first chapter is being presented prior to publication as our Occasional Paper No. 24 . Smt. Deb's Introduction will speak for the significance of the paper. In a forthcoming number of the Occasional Paper series we hope to publish another paper soon, by Professor Guha on "Property, Labour and Classes in Assamese Society, 1833-1893".

Barun De  
Director, Centre for Studies  
in Social Sciences, Calcutta.

Report of the Board of Directors of the [Company Name]

Financial Statement

Balance Sheet

The following is a statement of the assets and liabilities of the [Company Name] as of the 31st day of December, 1875.

Assets

- Capital stock, \$100,000.00
- Surplus, 25,000.00
- Real estate, 15,000.00
- Personal property, 10,000.00
- Accounts receivable, 5,000.00
- Notes and bills, 5,000.00
- Other assets, 5,000.00

Total Assets, \$165,000.00

Liabilities

- Accounts payable, 10,000.00
- Notes and bills, 5,000.00
- Other liabilities, 5,000.00

Total Liabilities, \$20,000.00

The above statement is true and correct to the best of our knowledge and belief.

Respectfully,  
 [Signature]  
 [Title]



Impact of Plantations on the Agrarian Structure  
of the Brahmaputra Valley

Introduction :

Plantations in most parts of the world, by their very character and process of development, have been among the most representative examples of colonial economies. Historically they have been the out-growth of the colonisation of tropical areas. Such economies have established linkages between the imperialist countries and their colonies in terms of definite patterns of economic relationships. The pattern of production in such economies are so organised that capital and management are brought from the imperialist countries, whereas land and labour are made available in very advantageous conditions in the colonies.

The Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during the mid-nineteenth century offers us one of the most appropriate case studies of the development of plantations in a background in which a traditional agrarian economy of a subsistence nature predominated. The tea plantation economy, from its very inceptions developed in the form of regional enclaves within the spatial structure of the traditional agrarian economy of the Brahmaputra Valley. Our endeavour here will be to study the specific enclave features in the Brahmaputra Valley arising out of the coexistence of these two sectors of differing nature, the traditional and the modern. Our attempt will be an examination of the system of land administration, the nature of land use after the inception of plantations, and the impact of this pattern on the regional agrarian economy and society. The particular focus will be on the impact of state regulation in land administration and land use. This article relates to a case study of the effects of state power in creating an enclave at the level of land itself.

In Assam, land on which tea plantations could advantageously be located, became a special element in the land revenue administration and land use patterns of British Indian colonialism. Special regulatory measures became incumbent on a government which acted as the executive arm of the colonial purposes of Britain, not only in India, but also in the re-export trade of Britain, as a part of the broader capitalist necessities of the British Empire.

A framework, which utilised one special produce of land, inevitably had to differentiate in a rough and ready way between the interests of land for special cropping, and those of land for ordinary cropping. It will be shown that this differentiation by the imperialist state power, committed to colonial purposes, inevitably militated in favour of entrepreneurship in 'special' land, and against subsistence cultivation in what will be termed as 'ordinary' land. This bias in favour of one type of land, against the other, acted as a built-in depressor on the general pattern of regional economy. This is the specific context within which enclaving came to the Brahmaputra Valley.

At the outset, it should be clarified that the discussion of land administration mainly concentrates on the Ryotwari areas of the Brahmaputra Valley - the predominant system of land administration in the region. As such, the Goalpara district, which falls mainly under the Permanent Settlement of the Bengal Presidency, has had to be, in most cases, excluded from our analysis. This analysis is, therefore, mainly based on the five Ryotwari districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar.

LAND : ADMINISTRATION AND USE  
BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF TEA

Land administration in the Brahmaputra Valley had undergone a series of changes in the third decade of the nineteenth century. Prior to the British annexation of the Province of Assam in 1826, the Brahmaputra Valley was a part of the Ahom Kingdom, which had been established about the beginning of the thirteenth century. The administration was constituted by a 'Raja' at the head, followed by a hierarchy of nobles and officials. Land was claimed to be the absolute property of the sovereign. 'Not only did the king exercise this right over lands, cultivated or waste, but he extended his prerogative of ownership over all woods, forests, ferries, mines, etc.'<sup>1</sup>

There was no form of land tenure. The whole population was divided into groups called khels - each consisting of 1,000 to 5,000 persons. These were sub-divided into gots, each containing three paiks or males available for service. One paik from each got was bound to render personal service throughout the year to the Raja, or his officers, relatives, or nobles of the State. In return, each member of the got was allowed nearly three acres of land (called gaumati) for rice cultivation, and a holding (called the bari) for a house and garden. While no revenue was paid beyond the services mentioned above for the rice land, a poll tax or house tax of one rupee annually had to be paid for the latter. Revenue for land cultivated by agriculturists over and above the bari and gaumati was paid at the rate of one rupee per pura? Apart from the land given in lieu of personal service, the Ahom monarch also made

1. E. Gait. History of Assam (Reprint edition, Calcutta, 1967), p. 270.

considerable grants of land to be held revenue-free (lakhiraj) for religious and charitable purposes.

It is difficult to precisely describe the pattern of land use in the Ahom period. A contemporary historian describes the cultivation of the land to be intensive, as the soil was extremely fertile. This form could not, however, continue for long. The Burmese wars and civil wars between 1819 and 1824 had serious repercussions on the economy, where the people 'had almost given up cultivation'.<sup>3</sup>

British annexation of the Brahmaputra Valley took place in phases. Lower Assam - comprising the districts of Kamrup, Nowgong and Darrang were annexed in the first phase, followed by Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts of Upper Assam in 1839. Goalpara, which originally formed part of the Rangpur district of Eastern Bengal, was finally placed under Assam Administration on the formation of the chief commissionership in 1874

2. Pura is an Assamese land measurement which is approximately equivalent to one and one-third acres.
3. A.J.M. Mills, Report on the Province of Assam (Calcutta 1854) Appendix B, p.ii. According to Mills, Judge of Sudder Court the Burmese invasion led to a state of affairs where the people 'lived on jungle roots and plants, and famine and pestilence carried off thousands that had escaped the sword and captivity'.
4. The districts of the Brahmaputra Valley came under British administration in different phases. We shall describe these phases in two parts. The first comprises of the Goalpara district of Lower Assam, which formed part of the old Bengal territory and thereby needs separate treatment, and the second includes the rest of the five districts.
- a) The Goalpara district, part of which was the old Bengal territory, permanently settled and part acquired as the Eastern Duars after the Bhutan War of 1866. After the cession by the Burmese to the East India Company of Assam

For the first few years after the British annexation of the Brahmaputra Valley, the system of land administration of the Ahoms was continued but for minor changes. Ownership of land was transferred from the monarch to the Government. No fixed form of land tenure was introduced. Any change in the prevalent system was considered inadvisable until the decision regarding the continuance of British administration had been finalised.

---

proper in 1826, the district was annexed to the new province then constituted and was administered for revenue purposes according to the Bengal Regulations. In 1866, after the Bhutan War, the Eastern Duars was annexed to Goalpara and the district so expanded was ( in 1867 ) placed under the then newly formed Kuch Bihar Commissionership of Bengal. The general control remained under the latter till 1874, when the Province of Assam was formed.

- b) The five other districts of the Brahmaputra Valley (Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar) were ceded in 1826 to the East India Company by the Burmese, and were administered by David Scott, Commissioner of North-East Rangpur. In 1833, the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were placed under the administration of Raja Purander Singh, who paid an annual tribute to the Company. Thus, out of five, only three districts, i.e. Kamrup, Nowgong, and Darrang remained under the control of the British at that time. Purander Singh's territories were resumed by the Government of India in 1833 as he declared himself unable to carry on the administration and had fallen into arrears with his tribute. A proclamation was, therefore, issued in 1839 by the Governor General in Council, annexing the territory to Bengal, dividing it into the two districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. To the latter district, two frontier tracts - Matak and Sadiya were added in 1842.

After the decision was finally taken, in 1832 the system of tax collection underwent a change from a personal to a territorial basis. A regular system of assessment on the basis of actual holding of each person was followed till 1835. But the rights over land were neither heritable nor transferable.

It was against this background that the first regular land tenure system was introduced in the Brahmaputra Valley. There were broadly two categories of land involved in this system. The first related to land under traditional cultivation of which there were three types in the region (exclusive of Goalpara<sup>5</sup>) - ryotwari, nisfkhiraj and lakhiraj. The second concerned the waste land tenures.

#### Land Under Ordinary Cultivation

Under the ryotwari tenure, the ryot held an annual or decennial lease direct from the Government, being free to relinquish the whole or any part of his holding. In these areas, land was classified into categories according to the use to which it was put. These were (a) rupit land on which transplanted rice was grown; (b) faringati land on high ground on which crops other than rice were grown; (c) basti or homestead land.

The holders of nisfkhiraj and lakhiraj lands, however, enjoyed certain special privileges. The former was assessed at half rates of revenue while the latter was revenue-free. These tenures were granted by former rulers for religious and other purposes. In respect of the revenue-free holding,

5. The district of Goalpara demands separate notice because the land tenure system developed therein corresponded with the system in the permanently settled old Bengal territories (see Footnote 4).

i.e. lakhiraj, it was promulgated that all rights to hold land free of assessment founded on grants by any former Government were to be considered as cancelled. All claims for restoration to any such tenures could rest only on the indulgence of the Government.<sup>6</sup> Where land was not found to be held under a bonafide grant, it was resumed and settled at full rates, which in those days were rupee one per pura. The policy relating to half revenue paying holders of land (nisfkhiraj) were not, however, altered.

Apart from these there were some special tenures, the more important of which were chamuas, khirajkhatdars and Six-pie lakhiraj tenures. The terms chamua in Kamrup and Nowgong, and khirajkhatdar in Darrang and Lakhimpur mean that certain raiyats having large and important holdings are allowed the privilege of paying their revenue direct to the treasury and not through the mauzadar. These lands were, however, assessed at ordinary full rates, then prevailing in the region. Six-pie lakhiraj tenures concerned certain temple lands in the district of Darrang which were transferred from Lakhimpur to Darrang in 1868. They were practically revenue-free estates, held originally from the Assam Rajas.

#### Waste Lands

Apart from the land settled for ordinary cultivation, there were vast tracts of cultivable wasteland. This comprised the second category of land under discussion. These lands were initially occupied in places by tribal people. The nature of information available renders it difficult to make an accurate analysis on the extent and pattern of utilisation of such wastelands.

---

6. B.H. Baden-Powell, Land Systems In British India, Vol III (London, 1892) p.407.

References from official sources provide evidence to the fact that efforts were made on the part of the Government to lease such wastelands at liberal rates, in order to encourage foreign enterprise.<sup>7</sup> From 1833 onwards, a series of such schemes for the grant of wastelands were formulated. A scheme was approved by the Government in 1836, whereby after a revenue-free period varying according to the class of land, wastelands would be assessed at graduated rates.<sup>8</sup> The local authorities, including the Commissioner of Assam, received such a scheme with mixed feelings. Their apprehension was that the zamindars of Bengal would take up large tracts of land, merely for the purpose of sub-letting them and establishing thereby in Assam, the zamindari system like that of Bengal.<sup>9</sup> Another fear arose from the fact that local ryots might abandon their revenue-paying holdings and occupy rent-free tenures. It was possibly the latter which led the administrators to propose a modified scheme, which resulted in the Waste Land Grant Rules of 1838, in which amendments were made primarily to suit British entrepreneurs.

It was at this juncture that British enterprise intervened into the economy of the Brahmaputra Valley through the introduction of tea plantations. A set of rules were framed for the lease of wastelands at concessional rates to facilitate such intervention. At the same time the land revenue of the subsistence sector was enhanced gradually. The subject of the following discussion would be the pattern of land administration that eventually took shape in such a background.

---

7. See H.K. Barpujari - Assam in the Days of the Company 1826-1858 Gauhati 1963 p. 212.

8. Ibid, p. 212

9. Ibid, p. 213.



(LAND ADMINISTRATION : AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF TEA)

The background in which tea plantations were established in the Brahmaputra Valley was marked by a system of land tenures, which set off the vast tracts of wastelands as a distinct category from the land under traditional cultivation. There emerged two distinct sets of land tenures in the region - one for traditional and the other for commercial agriculture. Our aim here is to analyse the objects behind the framing of the series of laws which governed the grant of land for the two sectors with their subsequent amendments; to examine the effects of these tenures on the pattern of agriculture therein; and in particular to assess the imprint left on the traditional sector by the introduction of plantations in the region.

WASTE LAND TENURES

Waste lands<sup>10</sup> in the Brahmaputra Valley basically comprised of the different types of forests and grasslands, spread over the length and breadth of the region. It would be difficult, when considered from the ecological point of view, to differentiate such areas from the areas of settled agriculture. The fragmentary nature of the information relating to the extent of such wastelands stands in the way of a detailed analysis. An account of the Province of Assam, written in 1841, estimated it at 'considerably more than one-half the extent of its area'<sup>11</sup>

10. Wastelands have been defined in Rules for the Lease of Sale of Wastelands in India, 1892, p. 115, as 'unoccupied land, the property of government, which the government has not disposed of by lease, grant, or otherwise, and which is of such a character or in such a position that it is not likely to be taken up for the cultivation of the ordinary staples of the country within a reasonable time.
11. W. Robinson- A Descriptive Account of Assam (London 1841), p. 217.

The first rules for the grant of waste lands were framed in March 1838, at a time when the Government was contemplating the handing over of their experimental tea gardens to private enterprise. This was followed by a series of similar rules. The basic objective of these rules, (amendments included) was ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to encourage foreign enterprise to lease **in vast** tracts of waste land on exceptionally liberal terms. As was expected, these concessions led to the utilisation of large tracts of land for plantation.

The laws governing the grant of waste lands in different periods between 1838 and 1876, were marked by certain specific features, which need to be critically assessed. This could be done by grouping the laws into two broad categories, namely, the leasehold rules and the fee-simple and auction rules.<sup>12</sup>

With respect to the first category, land was leased out at graduated rates of revenue for a limited number of years, on the expiration of which it was to be resumed by the Government. In the case of the second category, land was either sold at fixed rates or under the auction system in which the upset price was fixed. There was, of course, ~~ampl~~ ~~xxx~~ relaxations permitted in each of these rules and the clauses contained were framed accordingly.

---

12. In the first category were included the Leasehold Rules of 1838, the Old Assam Rules of 1854 and the Leasehold Rules of 1876. The second group included Lord Canning's Rules of 1861, the Secretary of the Board of Revenue Rules of 1862 and the Rules of 1874.

The rules related to the size of the grants, the financial status of the grantee, the period of lease, the phasing out of the implementation of clearance programme of land, etc. The objectives behind some of these clauses would be brought forth in the following discussion.

The clause relating to the extent that could be leased for plantations was incorporated in the rules of 1838. No grant was to be made of a less extent than one hundred English acres, nor of a greater extent than ten thousand English acres. That the object in view for fixing the minimum extent was to keep off indigenous claimants was explicit in the wording of an official correspondence which gave the rationale for amending the above and raising the minimum to 500 acres :

"the Board ..... have fixed the minimum area of grant of 500 instead of 100 acres. It is unlikely that any applications from parties desirous of establishing plantations would be for a less area, and a high minimum like this would debar agriculturists of the Revenue from applying without rendering it necessary to draw a distinction between them and Europeans which would be an invidious one."<sup>13</sup>

The subsequent rules of 1854 incorporated an amendment to this effect. This minimum area of grants was thus enhanced from 100 to 500 acres. It should also be mentioned in this context that no limit was specified regarding the maximum size of land that could be leased out. Even when a maximum was laid down in 1862, it was stipulated that the area of grants sold by

13. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Officiating Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Proceedings, 31st May 1855, No. 8, dated 19th September, 1854.

the auction system was to be 3000 acres in a single plot. This clause was abandoned in the subsequent rules allowing the planters to lease in as much land as they desired. This resulted in the acquisition of vast tracts of waste lands, most of which were leased in for speculative purposes as would be discussed later.

The clause relating to the financial status of the grantee was incorporated in the leasehold rules of 1838. It stated that grantees must satisfy the requirements of capital and agricultural stock or implements to the extent of Rs. 3 per acre.<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, this clause indirectly prevented the indigenous population from laying their claims on wastelands.

Stipulations about the period of lease were incorporated only in the leasehold rules of 1838, 1854 and 1876, since the others dealt with outright sale. According to the rules promulgated in 1838, the period of lease varied between thirty and forty-five years, depending upon the category of land leased. In the Old Assam Rules of 1854, however, the period was increased to ninety-nine years irrespective of the category of wasteland. The pro-planter bias of the later amendments is obvious from the following table :

---

14. Barpujari, op. cit., p. 213.

TABLE - 1.

R U L E S		O F		1 8 3 8		R U L E S		O F		1 8 5 4			
Three Categories of wastelands				Land Revenue per acre		Irrespective of Categories of wasteland						Land Revenue per acre	
Under grass		Under Reed & High grass		Under Forest									
First 5 years	First 10 years	First 20 years	Nil	First 15 years	Nil								
6 - 8 years	11 - 13 years	21 - 23 years	9 as.	16 - 25 years	3 as.								
9 - 30 years	14 - 35 years	24 - 45 years	Re 1-2 as	26 - 99 years	6 as.								
On Expiry of Lease		At par with rice land		On Expiry of Lease		at par with rice land							

Source : A. Guha, Colonisation of Assam : Years of Transitional Crisis (1825-40), The Indian Economic And Social History Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1968 p.148.

The system of leases was totally discontinued by Lord Canning's proclamation of 1861. This was in response to an appeal by the planters made to the Viceroy for promulgating the system of outright purchase of land. Though the Viceroy did not accept this request, the rules of lease were further liberalised. The new rules allowed holders of leasehold grants to redeem their revenue payments on condition that the stipulated area had been duly cleared, and on the payment of an amount equivalent to the revenue (at the time payable) for 20 years.

Lord Canning's rules were, however, replaced by the auction system; and it was only in 1876 that the leasehold system was reinstated. The rules of 1876 incorporated both the leasehold and the auction system, whereby leases for a period of thirty years were put up to auction. This system continued for a number of years.

The Rules of 1854 were far more liberal in favour of planting interests, than those of 1838, not only because the period of lease was increased, but also because the rate of revenue was substantially reduced. Even though the differences in the phases of lease makes comparison of rates of revenue difficult, it could perhaps be stated that those promulgated in 1854 were approximately one-third that of the rate of 1838. (Table 1). This benefit was available to the planters in addition to the fact that the reduced rates were to be enjoyed for nearly 40 years more.

In the special rules of April 1876, however, the rates were slightly enhanced compared to the Old Assam Rules, but the benefit lay in the fact that such leases were also sold at auction, but only among applicants prior to its advertisement in the Gazette, at an upset price of Re. 1 per acre. The progressive rates were as follows :<sup>15</sup>

For the first 2 years	.....	revenue free
For the next 4 years	,.....	3 annas an acre
For the next 4 years	.....	6 annas an acre
For the next 10 years	.....	8 annas an acre
For the next 10 years	.....	1 Rupee an acre

After the expiration of the term of the lease, the land was to be assessed under the laws in force "provided that no portion of the land shall at any time be assessed at a rate higher than that then payable on the most highly assessed lands in the district, cultivated with rice, pulses or other ordinary agricultural produce."<sup>16</sup>

In the conditions of the wasteland grant rules discussed so far, no restrictive clause with regard to land settlement was placed on the planting community. The extent of grant, the rate of revenue as well as the other clauses contained in the leases favoured the grantees in all possible manner.

There were, however, two components contained in the leases which imposed certain restrictions. While the first of these governed the clearance of land (even though this factor was present only in the leasehold tenures), the second factor related to the condition of survey.

---

15. Baden Powell, op. cit., p. 413.

16. Ibid, p.414.

The Rules of 1838 stipulated that one-fourth of the total area of grants must be cleared and cultivated within 5 years of the initiation of the lease. The Old Assam Rules of 1854 further liberalised these rules; and thirty years was the time allowed for the cultivation of three-fourths of the grant. There were, however, three phases through which this was to be accomplished, one-eighth to be cleared by 5 years; one-fourth to be cleared by 10 years; and one-half to be cleared by 20 years.

The Old Assam Rules thus in a way imposed a form of restriction on the speculative motives<sup>17</sup> of the tea planters. It was observed that land far in excess of the required minimum was generally acquired but only a very small proportion of it was actually cultivated. It was further stated in these rules that the grants which did not fulfil the above mentioned clearance conditions would have to be resumed, even though such "resumptions of wasteland grants for non-fulfilment of clearance conditions were barred until the end of the year 1870."<sup>18</sup> Orders were issued by the Board to the Chief Commissioner in January 1871, with a view to the resumption of those grants in which the clearance conditions had not been complied with. "In accordance with these orders, statements were received from the several districts of Assam, which showed that out of a total number of 219 grants, comprising an area of 153, 735 acres of land, in 56 only, aggregating 36, 288 acres in area, had the necessary clearance been made."<sup>19</sup> In other words, only in 23.6 per cent

17. These restrictions were imposed in the form of clauses which promulgated that the lessees should clear land at particular intervals and provide for survey. These factors have been dealt with in details later in the Chapter.

18. Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Bengal Presidency, 1872-73, (Calcutta 1873), p.40.

19. ibid. p.40.



of the total area granted, were the clearance clauses adhered to .

Instead of resuming the grants which had not complied with the cultivation clauses, the Government was of the view that several of such grantees 'deserved to be liberally dealt with.'<sup>20</sup> Orders were passed exempting grants from resumption, 'allowing an extension of time for clearance', while 'in other cases they have permitted an exceptional application of the rules above quoted, whereby the grantees have been permitted to redeem, or retain upon lease, portions of their grants not exceeding ten times the area under cultivation and the remainder has been resumed'<sup>21</sup> These and many other concessions were granted on the spurious plea that the government was bound to be lenient and helpful 'in dealing thus liberally with men, who have experienced such difficulties as the tea planters of Assam'.<sup>22</sup> The "difficulties" were, however, not referred to.

The foregoing discussion provides ample evidence for the fact that the clauses pertaining to clearance were promulgated to check the monopoly control of land which was considered to be detrimental to growth in total output, and that the framers of the rules were themselves partly responsible for, and perhaps colluded at the breaches that took place in them.

---

20. Ibid p.40

21. Ibid p. 40

22. Ibid p.40

The second restrictive clause related to the survey of land. The Old Assam Rules of 1854 were the first to introduce the clause relating to the survey of land prior to lease or ~~sale~~. The introduction of such a clause was probably motivated by the policy of the Government to check the land rush and speculation which had commenced around that time. It was stipulated that "every applicant for a grant of wasteland shall place in deposit with the collector a sum of money sufficient to provide for a proper survey by a compass ameen, of the boundaries of the grants."<sup>23</sup> The difficulty of demarcation in a forested area and **the lack** of knowledge led in many cases, to the compass ameen sending in fancy sketches of almost imaginary tracts of land which rarely bore any **resemblance** to the real grant.<sup>24</sup> At times, survey was supposed to have been done of grants, which were actually non-existent. It was thus not difficult to influence the compass ameen for one's benefit.

In spite of all such lacunae in the rules, the planter protest against survey conditions led to its withdrawal under Lord Canning's Rule of 1861. The subsequent rules of 1862, however, saw the reintroduction of the clause relating to survey. Unlike the Old Assam Rules, however, there was no clause relating to the depositing of a sum of money for the survey, to which the planters had seriously objected.

- 
23. Papers Regarding the Tea Industry in Bengal Appendix B (Calcutta 1872), pp. 96-97.
24. Note by J. W. Edgar, Secretary to the Government of India, Agriculture, Revenue and Commerce Department on xxx Reports on Tea Cultivation, Ibid, p. 16.

The emphasis in the new rules was laid on the proper delineation of boundaries of the grants. This state of affairs continued through the Rules of 1874 and 1876. Adequate evidence is, however, not available to make any judgement about the degree of implementation of these rules.

The receptivity and the reaction of the planting community on the one hand, and of the governmental circles on the other, with respect to the enactments of the rules and their subsequent amendments, clearly reflects the interests that were served through these laws.

Outlining the opinion of the planters regarding the Wasteland Grant Rules, one may perhaps begin with those features which failed to meet with their favour. The Old Assam Rules of 1854 and the Auction Rules of 1862 provide two of such instances. As has already been mentioned, the conditions in the Old Assam Rules which met with the planters' protest related to firstly, the clearance of land at specified intervals, and secondly, to the proper survey of land before lease.

The views of the planting community were taken note of by the administration of the Province and the restrictive measures imposed under the Old Assam Rules were relaxed in a number of ways. The measures taken by the government in extending the time allowed for clearance have already been referred to. In spite of this and similar amendments made in favour of the planters, the clauses were ultimately deleted in the subsequent rules of 1861, which regulated the outright sale of land in fee-simple. This is precisely what the planters had been wanting; and they got it without any conditions attached. But these rules lasted for only a few years.

Another wave of protests by the planters followed rules issued in 1862 by the Secretary of the Board of Revenue. Their objection related to the system of sale of land by auction. It gave rise to a situation where the buyer, after spending time and money in selecting a suitable site for a tea plantation, lost it to another buyer bidding a higher price at the auction. The Report on the Tea Industry of 1873 gave ample evidence of such objections raised against the policy. A tea planter of Sibsagar, described it as 'an attempt by government to profit at our expense'. A number of planters unanimously supported a reversion to the sale of land by fee-simple in their evidence.

The planters objected to the reservation of valuable forest land, which they could not clear for their plantations. One comes across numerous references to this objection in the correspondence<sup>25</sup> of the period. Though the government furnished adequate reasons for not leasing out valuable forest land to them, the planters considered this to be a serious obstacle in the development of the tea industry. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, commenting on this aspect wrote thus:

"At present, the prodigal waste of timber for charcoal in gardens where trees exist, is excessive, and I have lately estimated that on a moderate computation 1,000 trees are on an average used yearly in this way alone in one each garden, while not a single tree is planted to replace them. This is a state of affairs which cannot last for many years; but so long as high dividends are the chief desideratum, I see no remedy for

25. Ibid., pp. 60-69.

In burning also the waste is great, and I doubt if 50 manunds of wood produces more than 10 maunds of charcoal!<sup>26</sup> This statement from a senior government official clearly brings out the fact that the planters in their mad rush for quick gains, were not concerned about the conservation of the eco-system and objected even to the measures that the government took in this direction.

In defence of the governmental policy relating to the reservation of forests, it was further stated that "the wants of the general population must be taken into consideration and it is requisite that the ryots should have access to certain tracts for such articles as wooden ploughs, posts for huts, etc."<sup>27</sup> It was, therefore, considered desirable that the forest tracts contiguous to villages should be reserved for the use of villagers. Since the period of three years, in which a tea plant matures, was adequate for new trees to be planted within the grants, it was felt that the plantations would become self-sufficient for their timber requirements and need not encroach on forest tracts. The planters could not present the plea of inadequacy of land for growing trees because land acquired by them to establish plantations was generally far in excess of the technical minimum.

It is obvious that the tea planters, enjoying all the benefits of concessional land rules, were not even prepared to make provision for fuel at their own expense. In gardens where trees with valuable timber was present,

---

26. Note by Major Graham, Deputy Commissioner of Darrang. Ibid., p. 61.

27. Ibid., p. 61.

they were burnt for charcoal, without any provision for re-planting. This affected the ecological balance, which was bound to have negative repercussions on the fertility of the soil in future.

Whenever the planters, in order to secure maximum concessions expressed their reactions to the laws, which went against their interest, the government, on its part, always took such issues into consideration. From the very inception of the plantation enterprise, it was the aim of the Government to lease out land to tea planters at exceptionally concessional rates. They formulated the Wasteland Grant Rules accordingly. The policy of maintaining a land revenue far below that for the ordinary agricultural land and thereby allowing exceptional privileges to the tea planters was consistently followed.

As has been stated earlier, the first set of restrictive clauses were present in the Old Assam Rules of 1854, The land-rush which overtook the tea industry in that period and continued upto the mid-sixties may have made the administrators tighten their grip. This led many planters to urge the government to be more 'accommodative' and some of them even complained of an alleged 'bias' shown against them. In a situation where Wasteland Rules were made as liberal as possible to encourage foreign enterprise, the few restrictions were made out to be biases against the planters. That these so-called 'biases' did not in any way hamper the growth of the plantation enterprise is verified by the rapid growth in plantation acreages in subsequent years.

It has already been stated that there were two broad types of land-settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley when tea was introduced therein as a commercial crop - the wasteland grants and the ordinary tenures relating to traditional cultivation. Having discussed the relevant features of the former, let us now trace the broad outlines of the latter.

TENURES PERTAINING TO TRADITIONAL CULTIVATION.

The mode of land tenure existing in the Brahmaputra Valley at the time of the introduction of wasteland tenures (1838) was a continuation of the system of annual settlement in force since 1836. The rates of land revenue assessed for each category of land varied in each district and did not change markedly till 1867. Till this period, the revenue for rupit or rice land varied between 12 as. and Re. 1-4 as. per acre, whereas the revenue for all other categories of land ranged between 6 as. and 12 as. per acre. In 1867, however, land revenue for all categories of land were enhanced two-fold; the system of periodic settlement for a period of 10 years was introduced and the variations in the rates of revenue for the different districts were removed. The following were the new rates of land revenue of cultivated land:<sup>28</sup>

<u>Categories of land</u>	<u>Land Revenue</u>
Rupit or rice land	Re. 1-4 as. per acre
Faringati or land growing dry crops	Re. 1-8 as. per acre
Basti or Homestead land	Re. 3-0 per acre.

28. Government of India, Revenue Department, The Assam Land Revenue Manual, Vol. I 8th Edition, (Shillong 1968), p. IV.

The settlement operations of 1867, which enhanced the land revenue two-fold were followed by the Settlement Rules of 1870 and 1883; and finally by the Re-Settlement Rules of 1893. The first two did not bring about any appreciable change in the rates of revenue introduced in 1867;<sup>29</sup> but the third did.

On the expiry of the decennial settlement of 1883, there ensued a series of correspondence between the Government of India and the Assam administration, on the subject of re-assessment and re-settlement of the five districts of the Assam Valley. It was for the first time that the demand for land was considered as the chief factor for determining its value. This was assessed on the basis of the density of population, the proportion of the settled area to the total area, and the proportion of fluctuating cultivation to total cultivation.<sup>30</sup> The villages were accordingly grouped into first, second and third classes and the rules assumed that all the lands of each description, i.e. rupit, faringa and basti would belong either to the first, second or third class.

On the basis of the classification mentioned above the rates of revenue per acre for each category of land in each class of villages were as follows :

---

29. See Assam Land Revenue Manual, ibid., pp. I viii-Ixvi. In 1870, however, the major departure from the previous rules was the fact that all cultivated lands were divided into 'fixed' and 'fluctuating' cultivation. The former included rupit and homestead land and were settled for a period of ten years, and the latter included high paddy lands where mustard seeds and different descriptions of pulses, and were settled annually. These rules were the first to recognise a permanent, heritable and transferable right in land, although only in the case of fixed cultivations.

In 1883, a form of decennial lease was for the first time prescribed. No marked change was brought about in the revenue of the region.

30. Ibid., p Ixvii.



	<u>Rupit</u>			<u>Faringati.</u>			<u>Homestead (Basti)</u>		
	Rs.	as.	p.	Rs.	as.	p.	Rs.	as	p.
First class	3	0	0	2	4	0	4	2	0
Second Class	2	10	0	1	14	0	3	12	0
Third Class	2	4	0	1	11	0	3	6	0

To this was added a fourth class, comprising villages in which, for special reason, no enhancement of the old rates was made.

A comparison of the revenue rates of 1867 and 1893 would show a marked enhancement in the latter with respect to each of the three categories of land. This enhancement seems all the more profound when one considers the fact that in the re-settlement operations of 1893, the land revenue of villages considered to be the least valuable from the point of view of agriculture (third class villages) were much higher than the average rates of 1867. Obviously, the enhancement in the case of the two higher classes (first and second) would come out to be of a far higher value.

The administrators were, however, not fully convinced of the benefit arising from the principles guiding the Settlement Rules of 1893 :

"The criterion of 'demand of land' as evinced by the proportion of unsettled land in a village, was not satisfactory as a means of ascertaining where the land which should bear an enhancement was to be found. The most thickly populated villages naturally generally fell into the first class, and one these was imposed a heavy and sudden increase of revenue. Before the

Assam Valley had settled down to the new rates, two severe catastrophes were suffered, which caused what might be called devastation in two districts, and severe losses in others . . . . . The net result of all the unfavourable conditions was that by 1899-1900 the occupied area was actually less than it was before the re-settlement of 1893 while arrears of revenue largely irrecoverable had mounted to a figure previously unknown"<sup>31</sup>

The experiences of the settlement operations of 1893 were being assessed in the governmental circles with a view to decide the form of settlement that would take place after the expiry of the decennial settlement. The Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Henry Cotton expressed the opinion that the 1893 Settlement should be continued, as it was, for another ten years. He refused to accept the view that the Assam Valley districts were under-assessed and refused to accept any proposal for the further enhancement of land revenue.

Resettlement operations were started in the five districts in different periods between 1902. The system of settlement for 20 years was introduced in all the districts and land revenue was adjusted according to the conditions of land in each district.<sup>32</sup>

---

31. Ibid., pp. I xxii - Ixxiii.

32. Ibid., pp. Ixxv - Ixxxii. The following were the periods of resettlement of the different districts - Kamrup 1902 - 05; Sibsagar 1902 - 06; Darrang 1905 - 09; Nowg 1905 - 09; Lakhimpur 1908 - 12. In each district, land was divided into a number of classes, basically dependent on the type of crop cultivated.

From the very beginning of the promulgation of the wasteland tenures, a marked distinction between wastelands and land meant for traditional cultivation had been maintained. This was particularly so in respect of the rates of land revenue. Wastelands were meant only to be leased for 'special cultivation' exclusively and were barred from the cultivation of the traditional staples of the region. Land meant for traditional cultivation on the otherhand could, however, be leased for special cultivation. In other words, while the tea planters had access to both types of land, the wastelands were barred for traditional agriculture. Consequently, the planter could exercise their option freely and encroach upon land under traditional crops, if suitable tracts of wastelands had already been exhausted or there were exceptional advantages in this course. That they made the best of both the worlds is borne out by the fact that in 1872, 8.56 per cent of the total land taken up for tea in the five districts of the Brahmaputra Valley were held under tenures other than wasteland grants; and that this figure was as high as 30.21 per cent<sup>33</sup> in the Darrang district.

The Resettlement Rules of 1893 laid down land revenue for the traditional staples of the region as well as for special cultivation. But an interesting distinction was made between the two. Unlike the rates for ordinary cultivation, those for special cultivation were not related to the class of land as stipulated in the rules. In the case of tea, the rates were fixed on the basis of, the average productivity of the land taken up and the value of the produce;

---

33. Calculated from figures given in the Papers Regarding the Tea Industry in Bengal, op. cit., p. 26.

the average cost of production; and the cost of conveyance of the produce to Calcutta.

On the whole, however, the rules assumed that the net profits derived from the lands in the five districts were higher in Upper Assam, and diminished as one proceeded down the valley.

These considerations led to the assessment of all tea lands taken up under the ordinary rules at the following rates

<u>District</u>	<u>Rate per acre</u>		
	<u>Rs.</u>	<u>as.</u>	<u>p.</u>
(1) Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and the Tezpur Subdivision of the Darrang district	2	4	0
(2) Nowgong	1	14	0
(3) Kamrup and Mangaldai Subdivision of Darrang district	1	9	0

A disparity was thus introduced in the Resettlement Rules of 1893, whereby the same land in terms of government specifications was assessed differently if under tea or under traditional crops.

The feature was absent in the earlier tenures of settlement. The basis of such a distinction is not difficult to guess. While the wasteland grants were the main sources of land acquisition for the tea planters before 1893, the supply of suitable wastelands was getting exhausted in the post-1893 period and policies had to be enunciated to facilitate encroachment in land under traditional crops by tea plantation

In the subsequent resettlement operations, lasting between 1902-1912, the rates of land revenue for special cultivation was further revised and except for the Lakhimpur district, they were reduced in the rest of the region.

The conclusion is inescapable that even if wastelands, which were the special preserve of the tea plantations are kept out of consideration, a marked discrimination was being practiced infavour of 'special' (i.e. commercial) crops, against traditional cultivation in the ordinary tenures of the region.

The institutional factors governing the grant of wasteland for the purpose of tea cultivation thus laid the foundation of a system which was kept aloof from the subsistence economy of the region in which it developed. This duality exercised a tremendous impact on the economy, and the ensuing repercussions manifested themselves in many ways. Firstly, it gave rise to a speculative element which adversely affected the overall production of the region. Secondly, land, which was acquired at exceptionally low rates was cleared without much concern for the demand of regional ecology, resulting in the rapid deterioration in the potentialities for future plant growth on the one hand, and on the other, prevented the use by villagers of their timber and other fuel products. All this led to a period, referred to in contemporary accounts as a period of 'Tea Mania'. Thirdly, it led indirectly to indigenous aspirants being left out of this commercial venture and disrupted the indigenous tea production of the tribal community existing in the region. Fourthly, it markedly widened the gap between traditional and special cultivation by enhancing the revenue rates in the case of the former,

and reducing it in the case of the latter. This was done in spite of the fact that the special cultivators were profit making enterprises, whereas the ordinary cultivators were, in general, subsistence farmers. Finally, it artificially created a land hunger on the part of the peasantry by denying to them the use of uncultivated land, exclusively earmarked for the tea companies.

EFFECT OF LAND TENURES ON THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY  
OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

The policies regarding the grant of wastelands and those guiding the land tenure of traditional cultivation had varied repercussions on the economy and society of the Brahmaputra Valley. They exercised a profound influence on the use of land in the plantations. They affected the claim of wastelands by the indigenous population. They led to a widening of the gap between the commercial and subsistence sectors of the economy.

EFFECTS ON THE USE OF LAND IN PLANTATIONS

Plantations in general have been associated with the opening up of unexploited land available at low costs. As a consequence, it has been observed that vast tracts of land are generally acquired which are far in excess of the required minimum for viable plantations. The motives behind such acquisition may be the desire to maintain the continuity of the plantation tract, to control the right of way to other favourable areas, to have marginal land for profitable future use, to speculate or to keep prospective competitors out of the market. All these lead to over acquisition and gave rise

to under-utilisation plantation land.<sup>34</sup>

The case of the plantations in the Brahmaputra Vally in the middle of the nineteenth century was no exception. The factors mentioned above may have singly or collectively determined the emergence of such a situation. The process was accelerated by the willing assistance given by the Government through the Wasteland Grant Rules promulgated between 1838 and 1976. In terms of these Rules, there was practically no limit imposed on the extent of land that could be leased in or bought except in the case of the leasehold rules of 1838, and the auction rules of 1862. But even under the latter, the upper limit was originally put at 1000 acres in 1838 and then increased to 3000 acres in 1862. The rates of revenue for wastelands were consistently kept below those for traditional cultivation in the region in order to facilitate large scale acquisition of land. Consequently, the unutilised proportion of land leased for plantations had a consistently high magnitude throughout our period of analysis. This fact can be substantiated from an examination of Table. 2. In the case of the Brahmaputra Valley as-a whole, the proportion of land under tea cultivation had not exceeded 32.83 per cent in the period between 1860 and 1944. If one considers the spatial variations in this proportion, it is found that with the only exception of the Goalpara district<sup>35</sup> of Lower Assam,

34. This feature has been discussed at length in a study of the plantation economies of the Third World. G.L. Beckford, Persistent Poverty underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of The Third world (London, 1972)
35. The high proportion for Goalpara does not affect the general features of the region as a whole, since the magnitude of plantation land had remained insignificant throughout our period of analysis.

the same feature of underutilisation is evidenced in all the other districts. The proportion of tea cultivation had, however, been seen to exceed the regional average in the two Upper Assam districts of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar where the high proportions had been only 35.60 per cent and 33.72 per cent respectively. An examination of Figure 1 reflects this fact.

It may be noted that the very nature of the plantation enterprise necessitated the utilisation of a portion of land for factory site, labour quarters, bungalows for officers, nurseries, etc. But all these taken together took up an insignificant portion of the total area that was leased in. There is some evidence to indicate that some land was leased out to cultivators of the area, if it was not utilised for plantation crops. For example, there were ~~some~~ instances of land being given to time-expired tea garden labourers as an incentive to settle on the grants and be available for plantation work. Even in such cases the land under traditional crops was marginal and the magnitude of under-utilisation was affected only to an insignificant extent.

The under-utilisation of plantation land persisted in the plantations of the Brahmaputra Valley right upto the end of our period of analysis. A change in the rate of over acquisition appears to have taken place by about 1861. The liberalisation of rules and the successes attained by the pioneers of the tea enterprise gave rise to a land-rush, which was described by Griffiths in the following words :

Source : a) Report on the Administration of Assam, 1890 to 1914.  
b) Reports on Tea Culture in Assam, 1890 to 1914.  
Confidential. Page - 2



TABLE - 2

## TEA CULTIVATION AREA AND ITS PROPORTION TO TOTAL PLANTATION ACREAGE

DISTRICT	G O A L P A R A			K A M R U P			D A R R A N G			N O N G O N G		
	Area of Tea Plantation (in acres)	area under Tea Cultivation (in acres)	% of (3) to (2)	Area of Tea Plantation (in acres)	Area Under Tea Cultivation (in acres)	% of (6) to (5)	Area of Tea Plantation (in acres)	Area Under Tea Cultivation (in acres)	% of (9) to (8)	Area of Tea Plantation (in acres)	Area Under Tea Cultivation (in acres)	% of (12) to (11)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
1860	-	-	-	12953	622	4.80	3939	1078	27.30	7025	797	11.35
1875	154	79	51.30	17816	4099	23.01	50693	9615	18.97	17798	5929	33.31
1890	1378	397	28.21	24297	6361	26.18	100531	21327	21.21	59750	11688	19.56
1900	852	670	78.64	16562	3973	23.99	133640	41708	31.21	49270	12673	25.72
1910	1177	707	60.07	17673	3999	16.97	136969	43156	31.51	48071	12263	25.51
1914	1177	697	59.22	19622	3075	15.97	151659	45815	30.21	47050	12546	26.67

Source : a) Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1860-61.

b) Reports on Tea Culture in Assam, 1890 to 1914.

DISTRICT	LAKHIMPUR			SIBSAGAR			BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY		
Year	Area of Tea Plantation	Area Under Tea Cultivation	% of (15) to (14)	Area of Tea Plantation	Area Under Tea Cultivation	% of (18) to (17)	Area of Tea Plantation	Area Under Tea Cultivation	% of (21) to (20)
(1)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)
1860	20143	3165	15.71	27159	7561	27.84	71219	13223	18.57
1875	80341	12788	15.92	119592	27433	22.94	286394	40713	14.22
1890	121936	36357	29.82	222298	54940	24.71	530190	131250	24.76
1900	189661	67509	35.59	237154	78422	33.07	627139	204955	32.68
1910	203418	72415	35.60	246176	83003	33.72	653484	214543	32.83
1914	240661	79040	32.84	279966	90727	32.41	740155	231900	31.33

1  
2  
3

# TEA CULTIVATION IN PLANTATION ACREAGE

20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 MILES

1860

1875

AREA OF TEA PLANTATION

(IN ACRES)

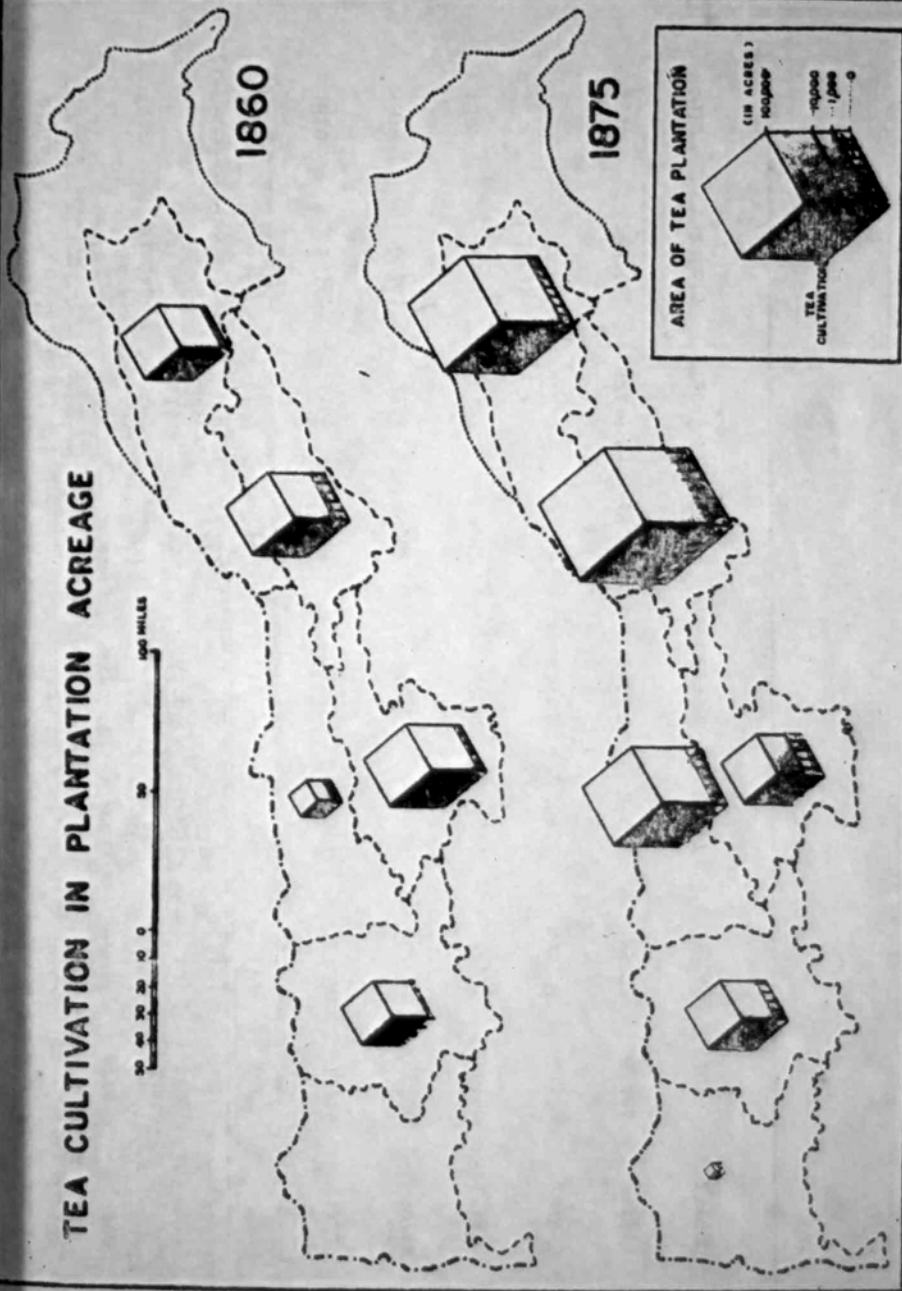
100,000

10,000

1,000

100

TEA CULTIVATION

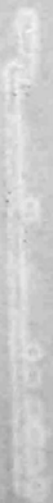




1933

1933

FORSAKEN, DECEMBER 18, 1933

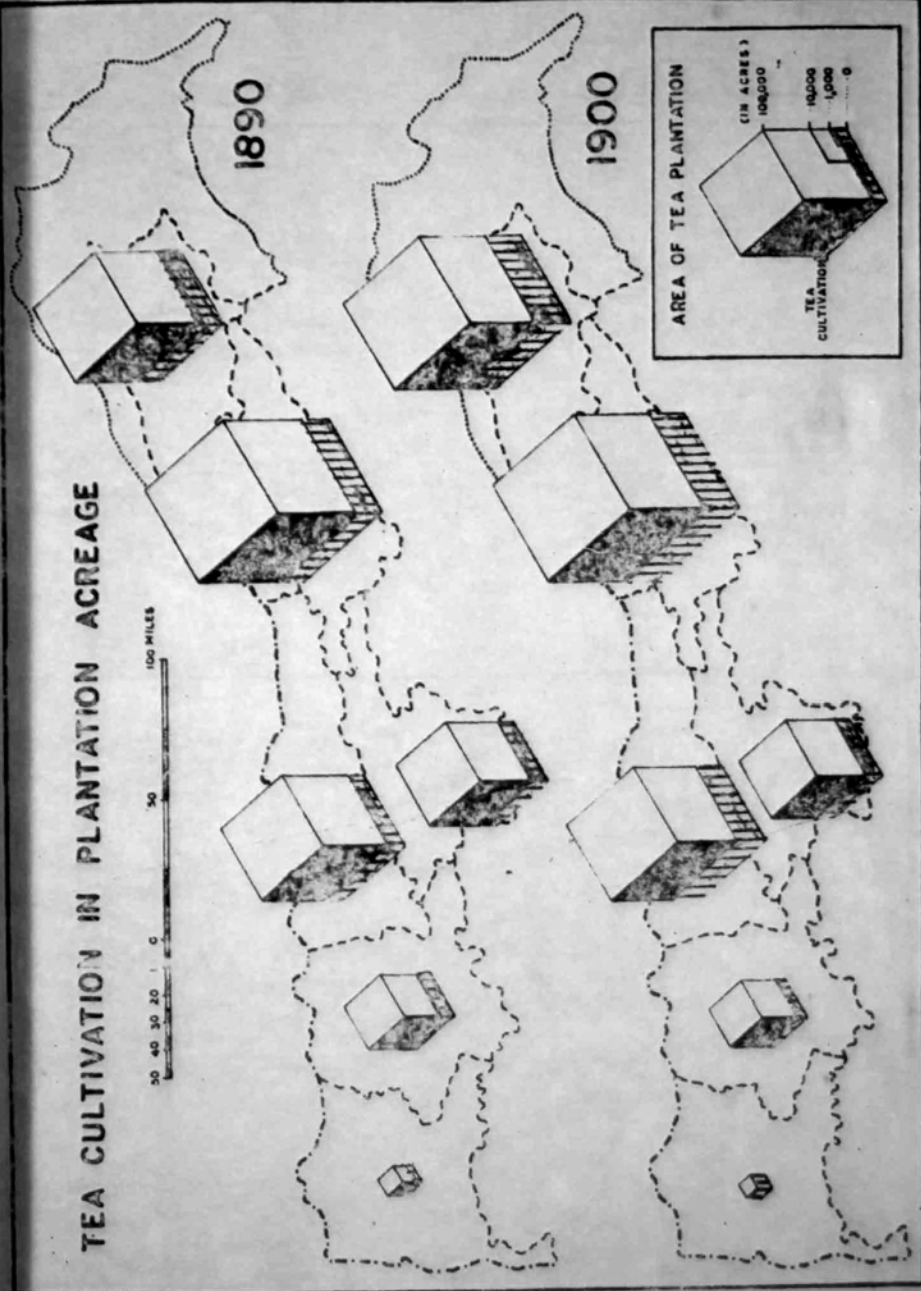
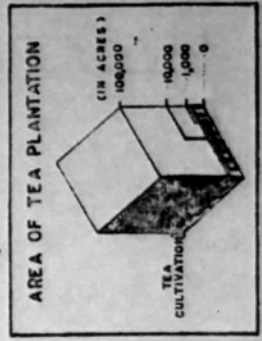


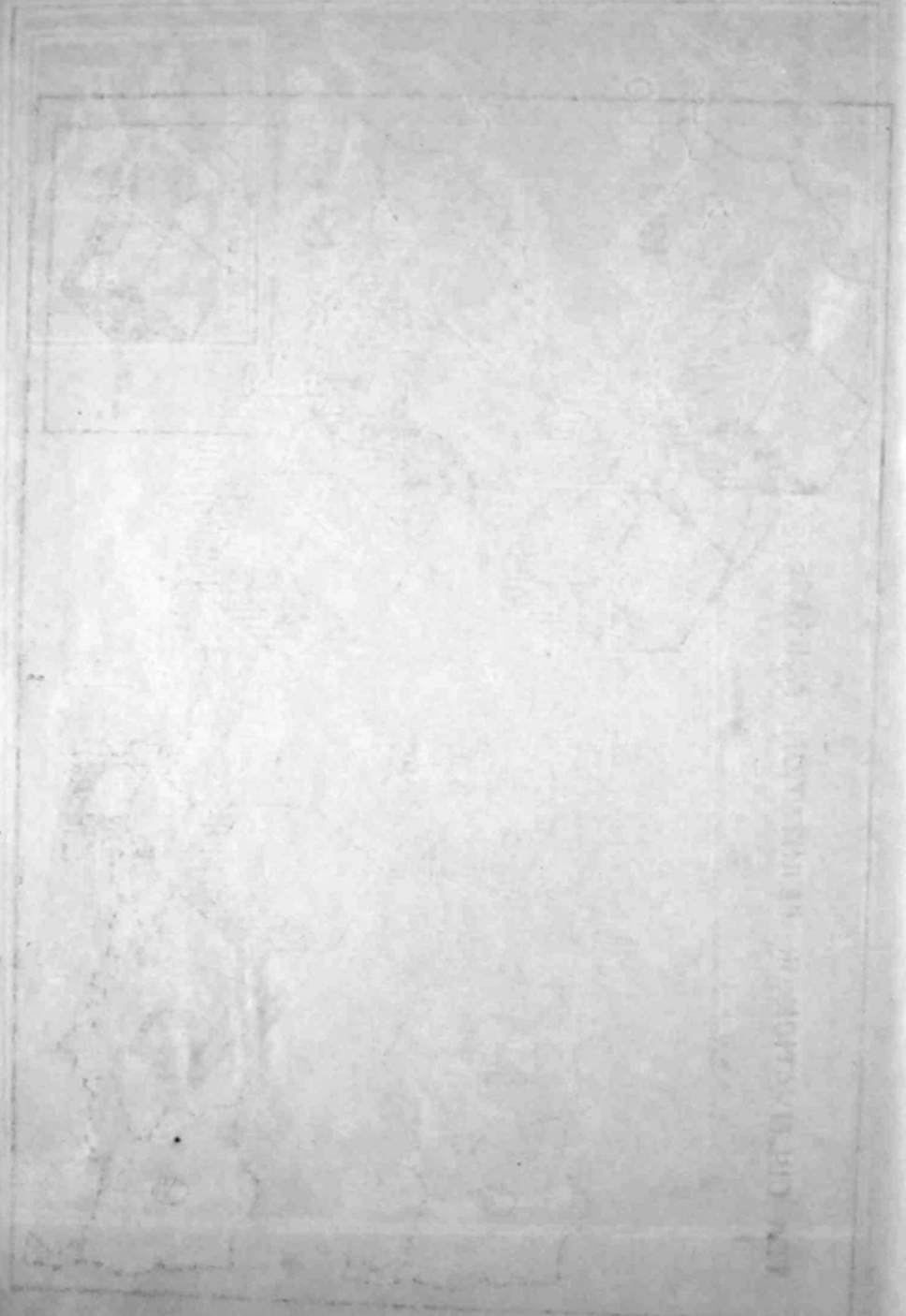
# TEA CULTIVATION IN PLANTATION ACREAGE



1890

1900





THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

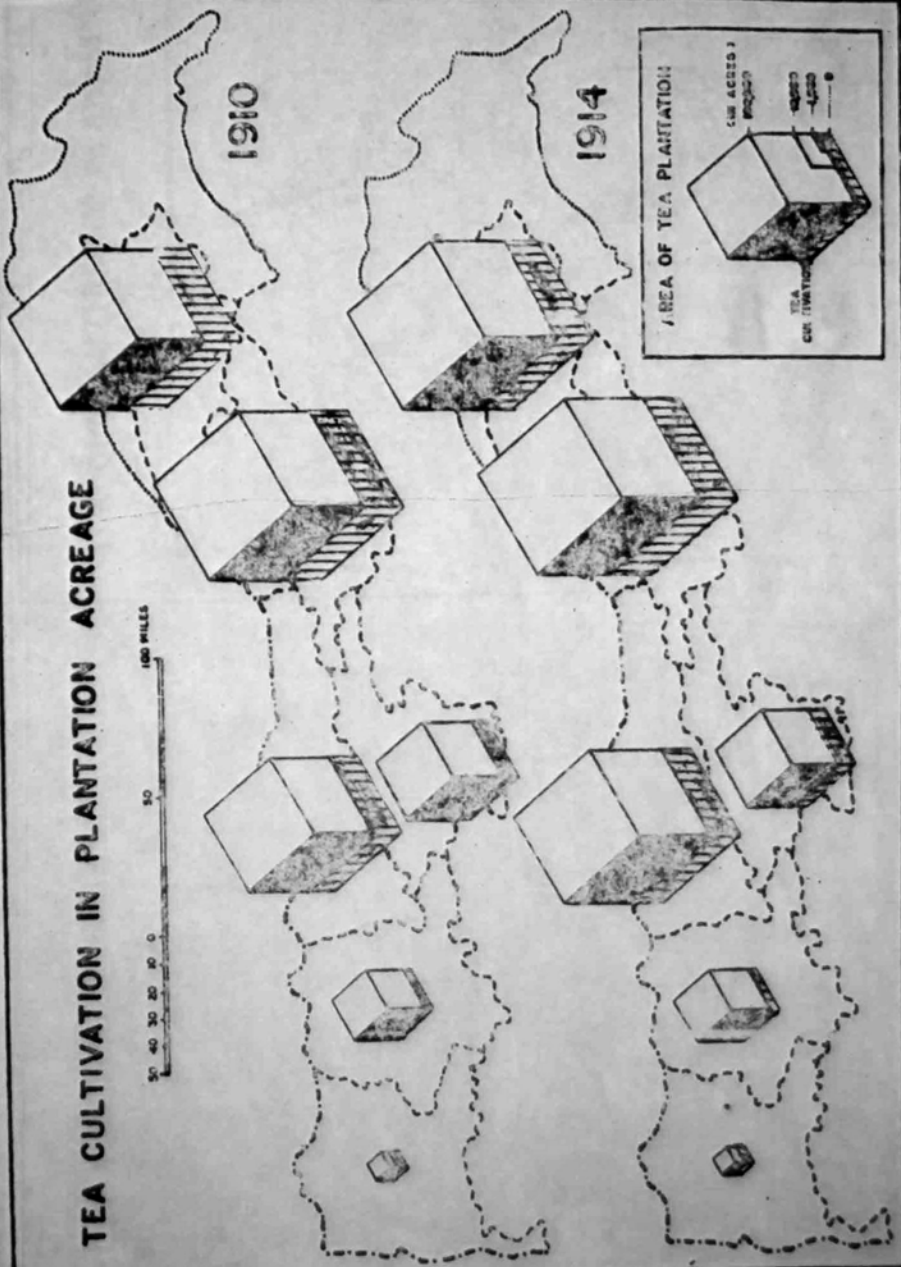
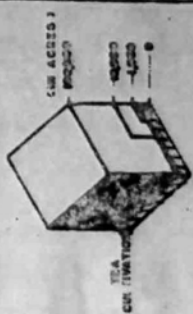
# TEA CULTIVATION IN PLANTATION ACREAGE

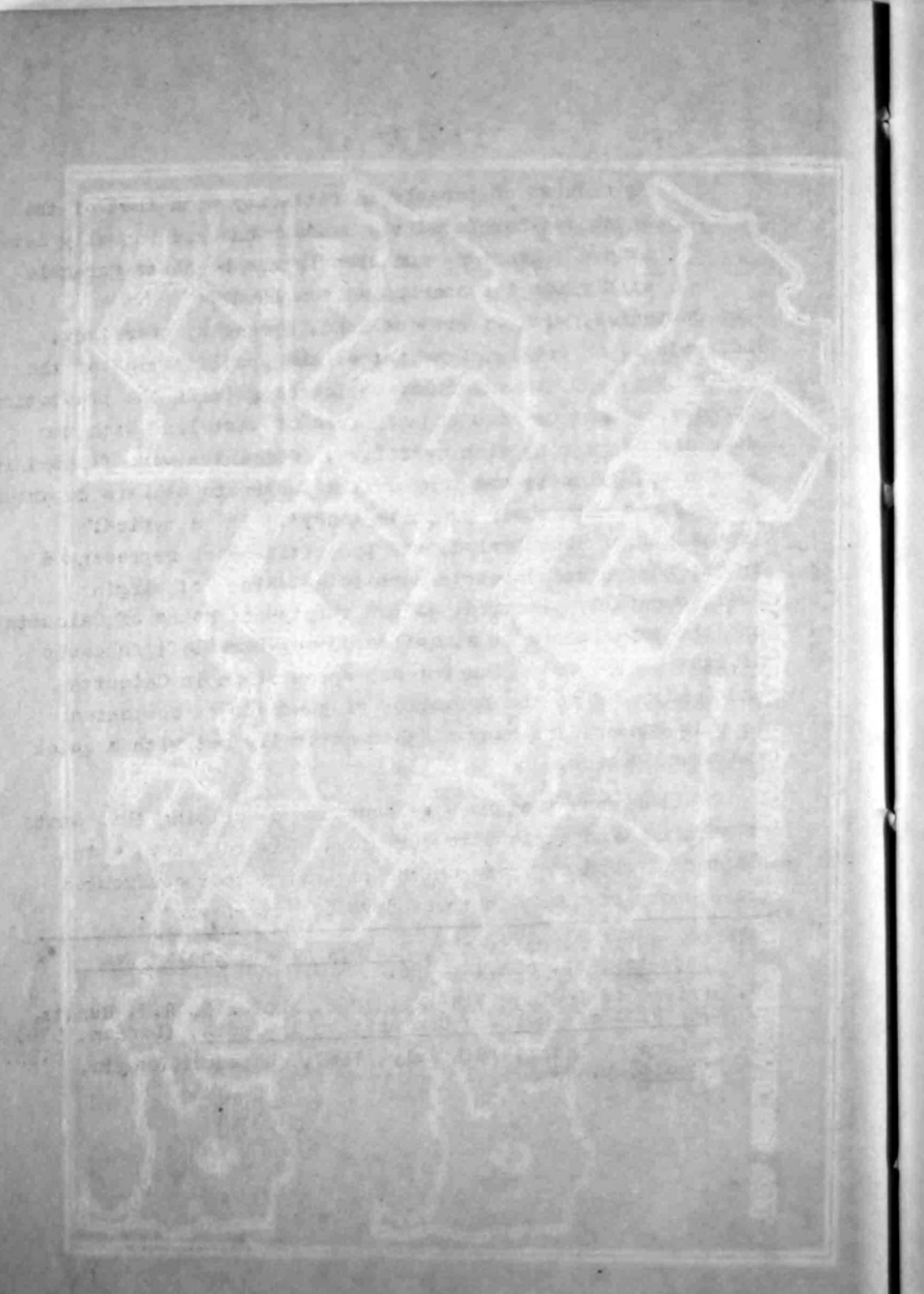
100 MILES  
50  
0 10 20 30 40 50

1910

1914

AREA OF TEA PLANTATION







"A madness comparable in intensity with that of the South Sea Bubble seized men's minds and normally level-headed financiers and speculators began to scramble wildly for tea shares and tea lands!"<sup>36</sup>

Tea Companies, with or without land, sprang up overnight, individuals or groups, ignorant of the specificities of the environment and the interplay of forces guiding the plantation economy, bought up thousand of acres of wasteland with the sole aim of getting rich overnight. 'Companies were floated in London and Calcutta and many of the fortunate sellers departed for England with their purchase money'.<sup>37</sup> In a typical prospectus of that period, the properties were represented in the London and Calcutta markets as being 'of virgin soil, carefully selected, within thirty-six hours of Calcutta' and the 'specimen of tea, collected anywhere left no doubt of its excellence'.<sup>38</sup> The intense speculation in Calcutta and London led to the promotion of hundreds of companies in this manner; and many of them naturally met with a quick and a sad demise.

Numerous instances of accounts describing this state of affairs lend support to our view. Edward Money, a tea planter of repute, wrote on the situation that confronted the economy of Assam in those days of 'tea-fever' :

- 
36. Quoted in P. Griffiths, History of the Indian Tea Industry, op. cit., p. 96.
  37. Friend of India, 17th May, 1866, quoted in R.S. Rungta, The Rise of Business Corporation in India, (London, 1970)
  38. Friend of India, 18th July, 1867, quoted in Rungta, p.98. op cit, p. 99

"Individuals and Companies rushing into tea bought tracts of five, ten, fifteen and twenty thousand acres .... I conceive, however, there was a hazy idea that if 500 acres paid well, 1000 acres would pay double, and that eventually even two or three thousand acres would make the fortunate possessor a millionaire .... It was madness to expect aught but ruin, under the conditions which the cultivation was entered on in the tea-fever days. People who had failed in everything else were thought quite competent to make plantations. 'Tis true Tea was so entirely a new thing at that time, but few could be found who had any knowledge of it. Still had Managers with some practice in agriculture been chosen the end would not have been so disastrous. But any one - literally any one - was taken and Tea Planters in those days were a strange medley of retired or chasiered army or navy officers, medical men, engineers, veterinary surgeons, steamer captains, chemists, shop-keepers of all kinds, stable-keepers, used-up policemen, clerks, and goodness knows what besides".<sup>39</sup>

The above lines amply exemplify the condition of the plantation enterprise in the 1860s.

---

39. E. Money, Essay on the Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea (Second Edition, Calcutta 1874). pp 1-2

The situation described above reached its crisis in the mid-sixties. The Government of India set up a Commission in 1867 to report on the state and prospects of the tea industry, and to enquire into the roots of the crisis of the sixties. Evidence of reputed planters as well as of Government officials were taken. A Resolution of a meeting of tea planters at Golaghat submitted to the Tea Commission admitted that "over speculation and not over-scrupulous honesty on the part of many vendors of some tea estates has caused great and not altogether unwarranted distrust in tea as a speculation.<sup>40</sup>

Commenting on the state of affairs in 1863. J.W. Edgar, Secretary to the Government of India, Agriculture, Revenue and Commerce Department, aptly described the situation in the following words :

"..... there used to be a saying in the mouths of planters that it was very doubtful whether it would ever pay to make tea, but that there was no doubt it paid to make gardens ... Another saying to the same effect was that gardens were made to sell, not to pay.<sup>41</sup>

The land rush described above had adverse effects on the physical environment of the region. Land, cleared to make gardens, was abandoned soon after it was found unsuitable for tea culture. A contemporary account describes it thus :

---

40. 'Copy of Resolutions of a Meeting held at Golaghat submitted to the Tea Commission for Consideration', in Report of Commissioners appointed to enquire into the state and prospects of Tea cultivation ~~xxx~~ in Assam, Cachar and Sylhet (Calcutta 1868).

41. Note by J.W. Edgar in Papers regarding the Tea Industry in Bengal, op. cit.

"At all callings, at all trades, a knowledge of the work is naturally considered a sine qua non to success - not so with Tea. The boy fresh from school who knew naught of agriculture, less, if possible, of horticulture was pitchforked into the Manager's berth and told to plant tea."<sup>42</sup>

Most of the 'bubble gardens' had thus to be ultimately wound up or abandoned - leaving the thoughtless and hurriedly cleared tracts to take care of themselves.

The plantation system in the Brahmaputra Valley had in a way impounded the development potential of the region. Most of the land acquired was kept unutilised as it was held primarily for speculative purposes. Land was thus barred from any other use, specially by the traditional agricultural sector.

#### WASTELANDS AND INDIGENOUS CLAIMANTS

The precise nature of the demand for and the utilisation of wastelands in the Brahmaputra Valley by the indigenous population cannot be fully spelt out due to lack of adequate information. It is, however, possible to throw light on some significant aspects on the basis of the fragmentary and scattered information, which is available.

---

42. Quoted in P. Griffiths, op. cit., p. 100

At the inception of the plantation enterprise in the Brahmaputra Valley, the wastelands which were leased for such enterprises were not totally unoccupied. There are evidences in the letters issued by the Tea Committee of the fact that the Singhpo tribe<sup>43</sup> were cultivating the tea plant in Upper Assam when the idea of introducing tea into Indian territories was initiated by the Government. A map showing the tea tracts discovered by C.A. Bruce<sup>44</sup> accompanying his Report on the Manufacture of Tea in 1839 forms part of the circumstantial evidence on the indigenous tea tracts in Upper Assam. Twelve of these tracts are shown to be in the Singhpo country<sup>45</sup> and most of these were named after Singhpo chiefs. As can be identified from the maps in subsequent periods, most of these tracts were developed into tea plantations later on, although their nomenclature might have undergone changes.

The practices associated with the collection or cultivation of tea of the Singhpos were quite different from those of British planters. "They did not cultivate it, however, but collected the leaves from plants growing wild in the jungle, from which ... they made, by some unspecified process, a concoction that resembled tea."<sup>46</sup>

---

43. The villages of the Singhpos 'occupy the level tract of country extending east from the Mooamarea borders across the Noa Dihing and Tenga Panee; and in the mountains, to the heads of the Duphla Panee, and Dihing River'. They, along with the Khumpti and Mooamariea tribes, 'hold their lands in acknowledged dependence on the British government' ... (Quoted from Capt. R.B. Pemberton, 'Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, (1835) (2nd Impression Gauhati, 1966)', pp. 69-71.

44. See Footnote 24.

45. These tracts were located at Ningrew, Kaunung, Kujidoo, Ginlong, Jugundoo, Jugto, Namcheen and Terap Panee.

46. H.A. Antrobus. History of the Assam Company., op.cit, p.249.

One of the main problems faced by the Tea Committee in the first few years arose out of the fact that the maximum use was to be made of the indigenous tea tracts, most of which were under the occupation of the Singhpos. Any interference within their territories would have led to a confrontation with them.

The most convenient means to overcome this problem was suggested by Bruce himself, who proposed that he would make the native chiefs collect leaves from the indigenous tea tracts in their respective territories and send them in to him for manufacture in the Government experimental factories. In consideration for this, they were to be paid a monthly salary and the value of the tea delivered by weight.

This was a suggestion appreciated by the Calcutta Board of the Assam Company who in one of their reports stated that 'this will save the expenditure of establishment and lead more rapidly to the extension of the cultivation amongst the natives than by any measure of our own, and become eventually the most important auxiliary of our Establishment in Assam.'<sup>47</sup> It is recorded in the History of the Assam Company that 'nothing came of this short-cut to greater production.' Bruce, writing in 1840, mentioned that -

"The Singhpos are indolent to the extreme.

Starvation obliges them to cultivate or plunder ....

As to tea, they make as much as will satisfy their immediate wants but not for sale or barter .... I

believe it will be a very long while before the chiefs can be induced to cultivate tea for sale or barter."<sup>48</sup>

---

47. Quoted in Antrabus, op. cit., p. 320.

48. Ibid.

The above premise, is, however, questionable. A hand bill about the first shipment of Assam tea into the Calcutta market, dated the 5th March 1841, is an evidence of the participation of the Singhpos in the commercial production of tea, which were sold in the same year. The Circular mentioned to parcels of tea offered for sale - "35 chests manufactured by the Singhpo Chief Ningroola of the Province (aided by the Government Establishment) with the greatest care" and "95 chests of the produce of the Government tea plantations in Assam."<sup>49</sup> This is a clear indicator of the involvement of the Singhpos in the production of tea in Upper Assam.

According to him  
The encroachment on the lands of the Singhpos by tea planting interests is referred to by Mackenzie in his wellknown account of the relations of tribals of the North-East frontier of Bengal with the Government.<sup>50</sup> One of the main causes of the rebellion of 1845 was "the encroachment on the lands and privileges of the Singhpo." He further mentions that although the tribe was "meant to apply within certain limits,... no such limits were even regularly defined, and of late, the extension of tea cultivation had made this omission of serious consequence... The factory of a Mr. Bonyng, which had been a prominent object of attack in the late rebellion, actually stood on forfeited Singhpo territory."<sup>51</sup>

- 
49. The True copy of the Circular has been reproduced in W.H. Ukers, All About Tea, Vol. II, (New York, 1935)p.147.
50. See, A. Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal, (Calcutta 1884)
51. Ibid, p. 70

The Singhpos could not become part of the plantation economy in the long run, inspite of the fact that their assistance was indispensable to the enterprise at its initial phase. They were administratively barred from the bulk of their own territories - the indigenous tea tracts, which were being occupied by the tea plantations. And in the bargain they had to sacrifice the indigenous form of tea culture that they had been carrying on for years. The spread of plantations in these areas in later periods bears evidence to the fact that most of the indigenous tea tracts were taken over by joint stock companies engaged in the production of tea.

While the traditional lands of the Singhpos were snatched away from them and their traditional way of life given a mortal blow, the other components of the indigenous population were kept away from the wastelands. We find very few instances of the people of the region leasing land for the production of tea. In spite of the fact that tea had attained commercial supremacy within a very short period, the indigenous population was excluded from participating in its development and sharing in its fruits.

Wasteland Grant Rules did not specifically exclude Indians from taking up grants. A study of the correspondence among the administrators however, indicates that such a policy was in operation in substance. In a letter to the Government of Bengal proposing amendment to the Old Assam Rules, the officiating Secretary of the Board of Revenue wrote that "when those Rules were under discussion, it was contemplated (though the intention does not appear from the wording of the Rules) that grants should be made only to Europeans and



foreigners possessed of capital to the exclusion of agriculturists of the Province."<sup>52</sup> The explanation given was that "the natives of the Province might be induced to abandon lands already held by them on the terms of the ordinary settlements for other lands which could be obtained on the more favourable terms conceded by the Rules."<sup>53</sup> This concern for the abandonment of land already held by the cultivators is motivated by the expected fall in revenue, consequent upon it, since land under traditional cultivation was taxed at a much higher rate than that of wastelands. Two clauses incorporated in the Wasteland Grant Rules throw some light on this aspect of the problem - firstly, the clause relating to the financial status of the grantee; and secondly, to the minimum extent of grant allowable under the Rules of 1833 and 1854. These show that the policy of discrimination against the indigenous population was being implemented by devious methods.

There were officers of the Government, though very small in number, who held a contrary view. Captain Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue of Assam did not encourage discrimination in granting land between Indians and Europeans. He requested the Board of Revenue to reconsider the subject of refusing grants to 'all natives' and proposed that grants should be allowed to any native of the Province 'who can satisfy the Collectors that they have sufficient capital to cultivate farms of moderate extent.' In order to ensure

---

52. From the Officiating Secretary, Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, dated 16th May 1856. In Revenue Proceedings, 22nd May 1856; No. 28.

53. Ibid.

that indigenous enterprise in tea does not lead to the abandonment of traditional cultivations in the region, he suggested that the natives in the region "should not establish on their farms any of the Ryots of the Pergunnah or Mauzah in which their farm is situated."<sup>54</sup> Thus even in the case of proposals, emanating from a benevolent officer regarding the grant of land to 'all natives', there were strings attached.

#### EFFECT OF LAND POLICIES ON THE SUBSISTENCE AND COMMERCIAL SECTOR

It has already been mentioned that the dominant system of land tenure in the Brahmaputra Valley had two components, the first relating to land for traditional cultivation and the second, to wasteland tenures. At a time when the first Wasteland Grant Rules were promulgated in 1838, settlement operations in the Brahmaputra Valley had already taken place. Through gradual enhancement of the revenue of the subsistence sector on the one hand and concessions for wasteland grants on the other, the land tenure system set in motion a process which widened the gap between the two. The immediate result of the system was a boost to the plantation enterprise and an anaemic growth in the traditional segment. This differentiated impact affected the pattern of land-use in the region, if looked at from the long term point of view. It is our endeavour here to analyse the nature and magnitude of the disparity that developed between the subsistence and commercial sectors in the background of the colonial economic policies.

---

54. From Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue, Assam to Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces, dated 19th April 1856, Revenue Proceedings, 22nd May 1856, No. 29.

An examination of the comparative rates of land revenue for traditional cultivation and wastelands would clearly show that there was a definite discriminative policy as regards the two forms of settlement. In the leasehold rules of 1838, for example, the maximum revenue payable (and that even in the last twenty years of the lease, and on three-fourths of the grant) was Re. 1-2 as per acre, far lower than the land revenue for traditional cultivation in most parts of the region. These rates were further lowered under the Old Assam Rules of 1854. In the last seventy five years of a ninety nine year lease, the revenue on three-fourths of the grant was only 6 as. per acre. This was between one-half and one-fourth of the rates prevailing in the rice lands till 1868 and about one-fifth of the same from 1868 to 1893. This comparison is, however, incomplete if one leaves out of consideration the other privileges enjoyed by the wasteland grantee. One such concession, for example, was the fact that under the 1838 rules, the land revenue of three-fourths of the grant was nil in the period of the first five to the first twenty years (according to the category of land). This concession was available for 15 years under the Old Assam Rules of 1854. All this was in addition to one-fourth of the grants under both the rules which were revenue free in perpetuity.

The discriminating attitude towards land under traditional cultivation had serious repercussions on the agrarian economy of the Brahmaputra Valley. A note sent by the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. Henry Cotton to the Government of India in 1898 bears evidence to this fact.

"Forty five years ago, (in 1853), about one million of acres were cultivated and the revenue derived therefrom was undoubtedly very low, amounting to only Rs.7, 41, 971...In 1866, the revenue amounted to about ten lakhs of rupees and the cultivation to 1, 324,000 acres ... In 1868-69, the land revenue was doubled by Colonel Hopkinson with a stroke of the pen, and rose to over twenty lakhs of rupees. But the area under cultivation began to wane, and when this Chief Commissionership was formed in 1874-75, although the revenue amounted to Rs.21.32,008, there were only about a million and a quarter of acres under cultivation. ....

Excluding 178,000 acres of tea and 86,000 acres discovered by more accurate survey, the total increase of ordinary cultivation between 1876 and 1898, it is only 96,580 acres. During the interval of 32 years from 1866 the land revenue has more than quadrupled, but the land under cultivation notwithstanding that the room for expansion is infinite, has increased by a little more than 7 per cent ... the rates of rent are so high as not to encourage extension of cultivation!<sup>55</sup>

- 
55. The Colonization of Waste-Lands in Assam. Being a reprint of the official correspondence between the Government of India And the Chief Commissioner of Assam, The 'Indian Daily News' office, Calcutta, 1898. p. 35

Sir George Campbell in the same account referred to a Resolution dated 17th May 1872 in which it was stated :

"It seems a great anomaly that we have been giving away the land in fee-simple for Rs.2-3 per acre paid by long instalments, and at the same time, no one cultivate it under the revenue system without paying Re. 1-3 to Rs. 3 per annum down in cash."<sup>56</sup>

These lines clearly exemplify the discriminatory tenurial policies of traditional and special cultivation.

The following figures<sup>57</sup> have been given in the same report to show that since the extension of cultivation had been discouraged by the land settlement, acreage under non-tea crops had diminished between 1893-94 and 1897-98, and that the acreage under tea had increased substantially.

Year	Area under tea crop (in acres)	Area under crops other than tea (in acres)
1893-94	145,134	1,574,175
1894-95	153,874	1,533,438
1895-96	154,389	1,537,845
1896-97	164,639	1,540,157
1897-98	178,720	1,506,358

Note : These figures relate to the five Districts of the Brahmaputra Valley- Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur

56. Ibid, p. 38

57. Ibid, p. 38

The administration was unanimously in favour of the decision to enhance land revenue for traditional cultivation. Colonel Hopkinson, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, wrote in 1872 :

"Were I forced to choose between two schemes, one for doubling the area of cultivation and the other for halving the area and doubling the assessment. I would elect for the latter in the assurance that it would be far more beneficial for the people in the long run."<sup>58</sup>

Needless to say, no explanation as to how the enhancement of land revenue was to be beneficial for the people was furnished, and this was discussed in the context of the factors which could lead to the 'extension of cultivation' in the Province of Assam. "When such views were in vogue among the highest in authority, it is not surprising that the continuous tendency of Assam revenue administration has been to enhance the revenue but to leave extension of cultivation to take care of itself."<sup>59</sup> This is an admission by the administrators themselves.

Two facts thus stand out clearly from the above discussion. Firstly, land taken up for plantation was increasing in the Brahmaputra Valley at an exceptionally fast rate and secondly, the land under non-tea cultivation witnessed a slow expansion. These facts are clearly brought out by Table 3 and Figure 2.

---

58. Ibid, p. 39

59. Ibid, p. 39.

TABLE - 3

TEA PLANTATIONS AND NON-TEA : COMPARATIVE ACREAGE EXPANSION : 1875 to 1914

(In Acres)

DISTRICT	G O A L P A R A			K A M R U P			D A R R A N G			N O R G O N G		
	area of tea plantations	area under non-tea cultivation	area of tea plantations	area under non-tea cultivation	area of tea plantations	area under non-tea cultivation	area of tea plantations	area under non-tea cultivation				
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)				
1875	154 (100.00)	665,521 (100.00)	17,816 (100.00)	495,164 (100.00)	50,693 (100.00)	108,625 (100.00)	17,298 (100.00)	234,071 (100.00)				
1883	2,040 (1324.68)	*	24,983 (140.23)	561,897 (113.93)	96,768 (190.89)	187,397 (89.82)	66,365 (383.66)	220,036 (94.00)				
1890	1,378 (894.81)	*	24,297 (136.38)	547,301 (110.97)	100,531 (198.31)	230,253 (110.37)	59,750 (345.42)	264,389 (112.95)				
1895	852 (553.25)	*	18,798 (105.51)	548,205 (111.16)	92,956 (183.37)	235,402 (112.83)	49,118 (283.95)	244,929 (104.64)				
1900	832 ( )	*	16,562 (92.96)	464,162 (94.12)	133,640 (263.63)	231,985 (111.28)	49,270 (284.83)	195,231 (83.41)				
1905	1,173 (761.69)	420,035 (63.11)	16,247 (91.19)	494,208 (100.21)	100,839 (198.92)	242,051 (116.02)	49,988 (288.98)	195,418 (83.49)				
1910	1,177 (764.29)	382,059 (57.41)	17,673 (99.20)	597,988 (121.25)	136,969 (270.19)	254,008 (121.75)	48,071 (277.90)	261,589 (111.76)				
1914	1,177 (764.29)	407,966 (61.30)	19,622 (110.14)	579,671 (117.54)	151,659 (299.17)	298,384 (143.02)	47,050 (272.00)	267,587 (114.32)				

Contd..... Table 3.

Year	L A K H I M P U R		S I B S A G A R		B R A M A P U T R A		Area under non-tea cultivation
	Area of tea plantation	Area under non-tea cultivation	Area of tea plantation	Area under non-tea cultivation	Area of tea plantation	Area under non-tea cultivation	
(1)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	
1875	80,341 (100.00)	84,492 (100.00)	119,592 (100.00)	281,047 (100.00)	286,394 (100.00)	1986,167 (100.00)	
1883	130,061 (161.89)	82,932 (98.15)	189,940 (158.82)	361,220 (128.53)	510,157 (178.13)	**	
1890	121,936 (151.77)	106,472 (126.01)	222,298 (185.88)	337,892 (120.25)	530,190 (185.13)	**	
1895	187,589 (233.49)	138,497 (163.92)	230,350 (192.61)	370,812 (131.94)	579,663 (202.40)	**	
1900	189,661 (236.07)	161,317 (190.93)	237,154 (198.30)	410,395 (146.02)	627,139 (218.98)	**	
1905	218,525 (272.00)	186,865 (221.16)	235,508 (195.25)	434,430 (154.58)	620,280 (216.58)	1973,007 (99.34)	
1910	203,418 (253.19)	205,015 (242.64)	246,176 (205.85)	494,747 (176.04)	653,484 (228.18)	2225,406 (112.05)	
1914	240,681 (299.57)	238,781 (282.61)	279,966 (234.10)	576,120 (183.64)	740,155 (258.44)	2308,509 (116.23)	

Note : Figures in brackets indicate Index Numbers taking 1875 as the base year

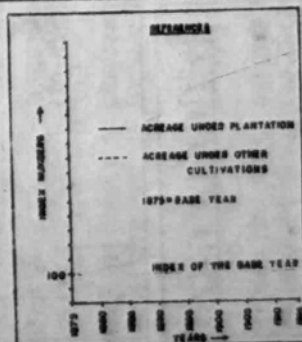
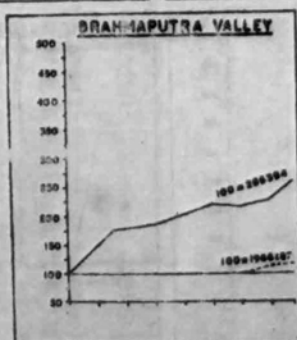
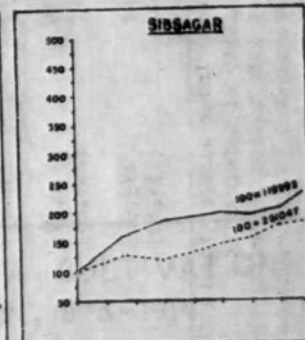
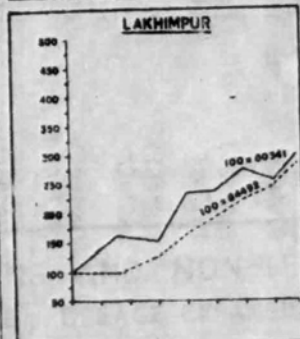
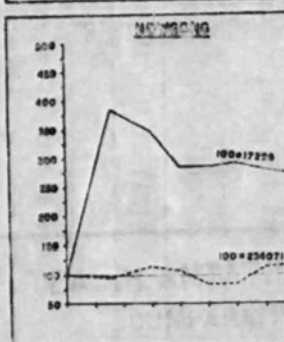
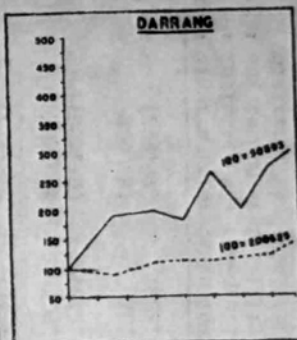
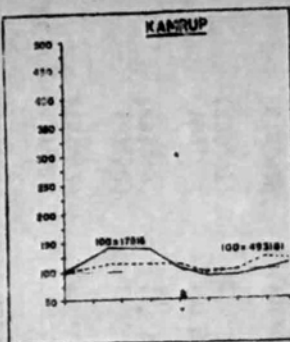
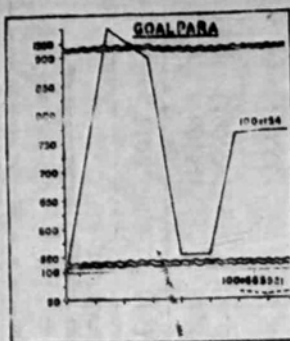
\* : Indicates the non-availability of information.

\*\* : Due to non-availability of information regarding the area under non-tea cultivation in Goalpara district, the total for Bramaputra Valley could not be computed.

Sources: a) Reports on Tea Culture in Assam 1890-1914 b) Reports on the administration of Assam, 1875-'76, 1883  
c) Agricultural Statistics of British India 1890-91 to 1895-96  
d) Agricultural Statistics of India 1900-01 to 1914-15.



# TEA PLANTATIONS AND NON-TEA CULTIVATION COMPARATIVE ACREAGE EXPANSION, 1875 - 1914



MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD  
SUBJECT: [Illegible]

[Illegible text in the first column of the memorandum body]

[Illegible text in the second column of the memorandum body]

[Illegible text in the third column of the memorandum body]

[Illegible text in the first column of the lower memorandum body]

[Illegible text in the second column of the lower memorandum body]

[Illegible text in the third column of the lower memorandum body]

[Illegible text at the bottom of the page, possibly a signature block or footer]

Taking the Brahmaputra Valley as a whole,<sup>c</sup> one finds that while the area under plantations increased between 1875 and 1914 by 158.44 per cent, the area under traditional crops increased by only 16.23 per cent. The situation was basically the same in all the districts except Kamrup, where tea was not of major significance. While one cannot assume that the two facts are causally linked without a detailed study of the relationship, there are some indications in the assessment of contemporary experts that this was so. W.W. Hunter in his Statistical Account of the Lakhimpur District, published in 1878, for example, states that in that District, "rice cultivation is stated to have retrograded instead of advanced during the past twenty years owing to every other description of agriculture having been sacrificed to tea cultivation."<sup>60</sup>

One may not however rule out the possibility of competition for land between tea and traditional crops in the Brahmaputra Valley during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Even though our period of analysis extends only till 1914, one may perhaps cite some evidence from a later period because relevant information for the period under study is not available. An Honorary Correspondent of the Agricultural Department of Assam, for example, clearly stated before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1927, that "if land is being absorbed by tea, there is very little land available for cultivation by other crops, particularly food crops, rice and other things."<sup>61</sup> If such was the state

60. An account of the District Lakhimpur in W.W. Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. I (London, 1879) p. 371.

61. Oral evidence by Rai Sahib Narayan Barua, Hony. Correspondent, Agricultural Department, Assam, in the Royal Commission on Agriculture, Evidence taken in Assam, Vol. V. Extracts from the above evidence is given below :- Questions are by Sir Henry Lawrence, and answers by Rai Sahib Narayan Barua.

of affairs prevailing during the twenties of the twentieth century, it would not be illogical to project it backwards and assume that the roots of the phenomenon lay in the earlier

---

Q. 'You ask that the further extension of tea cultivation should be limited. What is your reason for wishing to stop further tea cultivation ?

Ans. The area for tea ought to be limited.

Q. I ask you why do you wish it to be limited ?

Ans. In order to increase the cultivation of staple food crops; if land is being absorbed by tea, there is very little land available for cultivation by other crops, particularly food crops, rice and other things.'

In a later part of the evidence, Rai Sahib Barua, gives details of how tea can be grown on paddy lands.

Q. 'Tea land is quite distinct from paddy land. Do you say it is possible to grow tea on paddy land ?

Ans. Not on a big scale. Occasionally, paddy land is converted into tea land; that can be done. If a corner is enclosed, that can be planted with tea.'

There are a number of other evidences which lend support to the above.

CONCLUSION

The conditions that gave rise to the establishment of plantations and the institutional factors-determined the patterns of-its development in-the initial stage have left a deep imprint on land settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley. The change-over from-a land use of a-basically subsistence nature to one where the export oriented-commercial sector occupied the-commanding height, was pretty sudden and quick not gradual. Within fifty years of its inception, the rate of expansion of plantation acreage far outstripped that of the area under traditional crops.

Reasons for such disparate-growth rates between the-traditional and the commercial sectors may to a great-extent be explained by-land administration policies. While the planters benefited from concessional land revenue, the ordinary-cultivators suffered from revenue enhancement. Such discriminatory revenue policies did not only constrain the expansion of traditional cultivation, but-also gradually led to the encroachment upon cultivated land by plantations, as was evidenced by the Royal Commission on Agriculture.

The overall impact of the inception of plantations on the pattern of land utilisation was also quite significant. So far as the-plantation sector was concerned, this-pattern was mainly characterised by non-productive activity-in the phase of speculation in land and the underutilisation of land bought or leased.

In addition to affecting a disparate growth in the commercial and subsistence sectors,-the policies-of the Government relating to land administration left their imprint on the indigenous society as well. The tribal people, whose

land was snatched away from them, lost their own world and did not get much in return.

The insignificant participation of Indians in the plantation enterprise has been partially explained by the policies of the Government. Official correspondences lend evidence to the fact that from the very beginning the exclusion of indigenous enterprise influenced the policies guiding the Wasteland Grant Rules.

The process through which plantations came to be superimposed on the structure of the indigenous economy left along its trail a series of repercussions. These could be summed up as representing an "effort to superimpose commercial economy upon subsistence economy in such a way as to stimulate the first and tranquilise the second."<sup>62</sup>

---

62. Clifford Geertz, 'Agricultural Involution', the Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia (Berkeley 1970), p.84.

11. DIPESH CHAKRABORTY : Communal Riots and Labour : Bengal's Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s ( forthcoming in *Past and Present*, Oxford)
12. NRIPENDRANATH BANDYOPADHYAY : An Enquiry into the Causes of the Sharp Increase in Agricultural Labourers in North Bengal (*Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XII, No. 53, December 31, 1977)
13. ARUN GHOSH, comp. : Research Notes and Documents Collected by the Late Prodyot Mukherjee
14. AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI : Choice of Techniques and Technological Development in Underdeveloped Countries : A Critique of the Non-Neoclassical Orthodoxy (*Cambridge Journal of Economics*, June, 1978)
15. PARTHA CHATTERJEE : On the Scientific Study of Politics : A Review of the Positivist Method (*The State of Political Theory : Some Marxist Essays*, Calcutta, Research India Publications, 1978 )
16. RUDRANGSHU MUKHERJEE : Trade and Empire in Awadh, 1765-1804
17. SHIBANI KINKAR CHAUBE : The Ethnic and Social Bases of Indian Federalism
18. DEBES ROY : বাংলা সংবাদ-সাময়িকপত্রে বর্জিতকের ব্যবহার, ১৮১৮-১৮৫৮ ( Use of Punctuation Marks in the Bengali Journalistic Prose, 1818-1858 )
19. AMALENDU GUHA : Medieval Northeast India : Polity Society and Economy, 1200-1750 A. D.
20. BARUN DE : The Colonialist Premise in the British Occupation of Bengal : Contributions by Clive and Pitt, the Elder, During 1757-59
21. PARTHA CHATTERJEE : Thinking About Ideology : In Search of an Analytical Framework
22. RANAJIT DAS GUPTA : Material Conditions and Behavioural Aspects of Calcutta Working Class 1875-1899
23. A. P. RAO : An Essay on John Rawls' Theory of Distributive Justice and its Relevance to the Third World

**PROCEEDINGS OF CONFERENCES & SEMINARS :**

Problems of the Economy and Planning in West Bengal ( CSSSC, 1974 )

**PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES :**

*Volumes of essays on a common theme by scholars in the Centre to be periodically published :*

I. Historical Dimensions ( Calcutta, Oxford University Press, 1977 )

**MONOGRAPHS :**

*Results of research work individually undertaken by the Centre's staff :*

1. **SUNIL MUNSI** : Geography of Transportation in Eastern India under the British Raj. Calcutta, K. P. Bagchi & Co. ( in press )
2. **NIRMALA BANERJEE** : Demand for Electricity ( in press )

**PUBLIC LECTURES**

1. **ASOK MITRA** : Terms of Exchange and Accumulation: The Soviet Debate ( R. C. Dutt Lectures on Political Economy, 1975 ), Calcutta, Orient Longman, 1977
2. **KRISHNA BHARADWAJ** : Classical Political Economy and Rise to Dominance of Supply and Demand Theories ( R. C. Dutt Lectures on Political Economy, 1976 ), Calcutta, Orient Longman, 1978
3. **B. N. GANGULI** : Some Aspects of Classical Political Economy in the Nineteenth Century Indian Perspective ( R. C. Dutt Lectures on Political Economy, 1977 ), Calcutta, Orient Longman, 1979