

Settlement on Land of the Silchar Tahsil under Colonial Regime

Ratna Dey

The British administrators, keeping their imperial ideal in view, sought to introduce system of Land Revenue that might suit their own purpose, at the same time which might not create dissatisfaction among the native people. Guided by sub-conscious sentiment and practical utility, sometimes the British authorities wished to blend the existing pattern with the new outlook thereby encouraging the natives into accepting the newly introduced Land Revenue system. Gradually they adopted some measures that brought the Land Revenue system to the policy of consolidation.

The basement of the Land Revenue policy of a place is the history of a continuous process of Survey, Settlement and Re-settlements. Here, an attempt has been made to focus the Settlement on Land of the Silchar *Tahsil* of the Cachar District during the Colonial period.

South Cachar was integrated into the British Colonial dominion from the former Heramba Government in 1832, where land was held in guilds, called *Khel*, by groups or families supervised by the elected *Mukhtars*.¹ Between 1832 and 1843 the British authorities adopted various methods and experiments to strengthen the settlement on land of the newly acquired territory. One of such measures was the introduction of the *Tahsildari* system following which Cachar had been divided into three Tahsils - Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah.² Immediately after the British annexation, the Sadar Station of the Cachar District was stipulated at Silchar.³

Among the three *Tahsils* of the District, the Silchar-group was the largest one, surrounded by a boundary of North Cachar Hills on the north, Hailakandi, Chatla and Banraj groups on the south, Manipur state on the east and Katigorah-group in the west.

The Silchar -group was again subdivided into nine Parganas having its biproducts of 412 villages. The parganas were Bar-khola, Jainagar, Rajnagar, Barakpar, Sonapur, Udharbandh,

Banskandi, Rupairbali and Lakhipur.⁴

The following general principles were experimented through some Re-settlements. For the administrative convenience the lands were divided into Agricultural, Residential and Trade sites. The earlier settlements with regard to Agricultural lands were generally charged at an around rate which was equal to that in the neighbouring villages. Similarly, Residential and Trade sites had been divided into as many classes as was permitted by circumstances.⁵

The system of assessment adopted came to be known as the *Soil-unit* system which was basically based on : (1) The prior determination of the total assessment which appeared on general consideration, an area could bear; (2) The distribution of the new assessment so decided on among, (a) the groups in the area, (b) the villages in the group and (c) the fields in the village. In this connection the first step was to divide the area into a member of geographical and homogenous groups. Afterwards a classification of lands within the village was to be decided according to the relative values assigned to the various classes by the villagers themselves and their relative values had to be decided in some common measure. This common measure came to be recognised as the *Soil-Unit*. The process of assessment finally consisted of each village in a group of new incidence per soil unit which was called 'Unit-rate' having its regard to the comparative circumstances of each village.⁶ Thus the *Tahsil* of Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah each were divided into four circles and rates were determined in accordance with the assessment capacity of each circle. The rates for the first class were the same for each *Tahsil*, but there was a difference between the *Tahsil* rates, and the land was divided into four classes Viz. (i) Homestead and garden, (ii) Paddy land, (iii) Tea and (iv) Waste land.⁷

According to the Rule - 2 of the Re-settlement Rules the definition of the village was "The class in which the bulk of the rice lands of a village are placed shall ordinarily be considered to be class of a village." S. C. Banerjee in his Re-settlement Report of the Cachar District (1894) made the following classification:

Description of land		Area in bighas
Class - I	..	23,556
Homestead .. - II	..	14,811
.. - III	..	9,216
.. - IV	..	4,782
Total †		52,365

	Class - I	..	176,437
Rice	.. - II	..	135,795
	.. - III	..	87,189
	.. - IV	..	40,924
	.. - V	..	4,119
Total :			444,464
	Class - I	..	31,982
Other crops	.. - II	..	27,754
	.. - III	..	16,105
	.. - IV	..	12,665
Total :			88,506
	Class - I	..	46,443
Waste	.. - II	..	28,643
Mirasdari	.. - III	..	51,287
Class	.. - IV	..	105,828
Total :			232,201

The above statement showed the total area held by ordinary Raiyat; 6.14 P.C. was Homestead, 52.13 Rice, 10.38 other crops and 31.5 waste land.

One of the most important features of the settlement of 1894-99 was that it was based on a Cadastral survey where a Theodolite traverse of the village boundaries were carried out by a professional survey party by Amins under a Civil-party of settlement Deputy Collectors.^a

In settlement of 1900, the rates fixed for 15 years were ;

Homestead	..	6 to 13 annas
Rice	..	4 to 11 ..
Other cultivation	..	4 to 8 ..
Waste	..	1 to 2 ..

In 1917, the lands of Silchar-group had been classified into six rates

Bari	(good homestead)	8 to	Rs. 1-3	annas
Bhit	(.. ..)	5 to	11	..
Sailura	(land growing trans-planted winter paddy)	6 to	15	..
Asraura	(land growing broadcast winter paddy)	5 to	12	..
Chara	(land adjoining homestead)	4 to	10	..
Patil	(waste)	1 to	3	..

Table—1
The amount of Sub-letting pargana by pargana as Disclosed in the Assessment of the Silchar group.*

Serial No.	Name of Pargana	Total settled area including Baksha but excluding tea & waste in tea Gardens	Net cropped area excluding tea	Area sublet settled area colm. 3	Area sublet p.c.	Area sublet total cultivation atlast Re-settlement	
1	2	3 Bighas	4 Bighas	5 Bighas	6	7	8
1	Barkhola	29,009	24,073	4,144	14.28	17.21	8
2	Jainagar	18,899	13,510	1,310	6.93	9.70	4
3	Rajnagar	18,239	11,591	257	1.41	2.22	6
4	Barakpar	75,208	50,325	1,607	2.14	3.19	5
5	Sonapar	51,726	40,000	1,662	3.21	4.06	9
6	Udharbond	7,537	38,542	5,218	10.98	13.54	11
7	Banskandi	21,806	19,347	3,449	13.90	17.83	8
8	Rupairbali	39,237	24,697	1,648	4.20	6.67	13
9	Lakhipur	61,718	41,211	5,525	8.95	13.41	28
Grand Total :		366,979	264,196	21,820	6.77	9.30	12

* W.L. Scott, Assessment Report of the Silchar-Group in the District of Cachar, 1917

The classification were undertaken by the Patwaris themselves, under the supervision of superior Kanungos and Asstt. Settlement Officers who had to check a large proportion of land classing at that stage.

In comparison with the last Re-settlement of the Silchar Tahsil the surveyed area had increased from 7,37,874 bighas to 7,78,449 bighas. The area settled on Mirasdari terms had increased from 4,83,4890 bighas to 5,00,486 bighas, the area of Baksha land had been decreased, un-settled waste area open to settlement had increased from 36,116 to 62,927 bighas due partly to the reservation of grazing grounds and partly due to the survey of new villages. As regards the various kinds of crop a comparison with the other groups would make it clear :-

1	Aus	Sail	Asra
Katigorah	10.27	44.03	24.39
Hailakandi	18.53	43.71	14.50
Silchar	5.69	56.98	9.56

The selling value of the land in the Silchar group varied inversely from its distance to the river Barak along with its distance from the Sadar station. A clear picture of the selling value of the different Parganas will make the point more clear.

(1) In Barkhola Pargana, the average price of rice land raised from Rs. 60 to Rs. 100 and from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40 in case of flood-stricken villages.

(2) In most of the villages of Jainagar, there was a decrease in the value below Rs. 60 and rises to Rs. 80

(3) In Rajnagar, the limits were much the same though land in river side villages fetched upto Rs. 100

(4) In the river side villages pargana of Barakpar any land under Rs. 100 might be considered cheap ; and values raised to Rs. 209 in Kanakpur and Berenga near the town.

(5) The values in most of Sonapur were slightly lower than in the three parts of Govindapur ; lands distant from river side villages were not so valuable and the price seldom varied upto the point of Rs. 60.

(6) In the Parganas of Udharbond and Banaskandi - as the villages situated near the river Madhura and Barak a change shown in the value of prices from Rs. 60 to Rs. 140 a bigha.

(7) In the case of Lakhipur and Rupairbali, the land was

cheaper even if situated by the river side and the values ranged from Rs. 40 to 60 and Rs. 40 to 100 respectively.¹¹

The Tenant system had occupied a prominent place in the settlement on land in Cachar. The British Government had superseded the 'Communal holding'.¹² Report of W. L. Scott, shows two separate classes of tenants in the District, distinguished as *Raiyats* and *Paikasth*. A *Raiyat* was a tenant who was entirely dependent on his landlord and who had *Bari* in his possession. The *Paikasth*, however, had at any rate a *Bari* of his own and was not bound on his landlord by living. But very often he had to hire the surplus land of his neighbour to cater the needs of his family members. The *Raiyat* could have managed from its rent whereas the *Paikasth* could make a profit. Very often the landlords were in a position to sacrifice something in lieu of getting permanent tenants for which he could utilise it in private choice and so on.

There was no Tenancy law in force in the District and the relation between the landlord and tenant were governed solely by contract. So, the tenant had to live at the mercy of the landlord without having any right on land. 'If the Raiyats do not obey the orders of the landholders they are turned out of their homes and, their lands are forcibly taken away'. Again, the fixation of rent depended on the will of the landlord, and no standard or uniform system of measurement was in vogue, resulting in untold sufferings of the tenants.¹³

References

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