

CHAPTER: V

FRONTIER TRADE OF UNDIVIDED GOALPARA DISTRICT

Goalpara district is closed to Bhutan on the north and Garo Hills on the south. In the early days Bhutanese regularly came down to frontier markets of Goalpara with their products like rock salt, musk, cow tails, blankets, knives, rubber, elephant tusk, ponies, Chinese silk, woolen cloth to exchange with rice, dried fish, cotton cloth, glass, breads, salt, utensils, brass metal, *eri* and *endi* clothes. Likewise, the Garos of Garo Hills also used to visit frontier markets of southern Goalpara. They carried articles like cotton, chillies, wax, lac, rubber, timber to barter with cows, pigs, goats, fowls, salt, earthenware pots, swords, spearheads, cloth, etc. Cotton of Garo hills was supplied to Dacca through Goalpara to meet the industrial demand of British India.

V. 1. BHUTAN

Bhutan had a good commercial relation with the plain area of Assam and Bengal prior to British cessation to all territories. Goalpara district was situated close to the fiver *Duars* i.e Guma, Ripu, Chirang, Sidli and Bijni which were collectively known as Eastern *Duars*. The Bhutanese attended at the trade fairs of Dhubri, Dotma, Rangpur and market of Bijni etc. After Anglo-Bhutan war of 1866, Eastern *Duars* came under British India, which was added to Goalpara district for administrative convenience. Thereafter, all the trade of Eastern *Duars* came under the colonial power.

The Industrial revolution of 18th century showed a great change in the economic life of England, which compelled the British East India Company to search raw materials and to find out new markets to sell their finished products. On 10 April 1771, the Hon'ble Court of Director wrote a letter to the Governor and President of Fort William of Bengal to inquire into the possibilities for vending the Company's articles. Accordingly, President of Fort William of Bengal sent a person to Rangpur for exploring the interior parts of Bhutan, Assam and other part of adjacent countries.¹ Bengal Government instructed the President of Comptrolling Committee of Commerce to inquire into the matter. After that the Comptrolling Committee referred a letter to Mr. Charles Purling, Collector of Rangpur regarding the trade in Bhutan. He indicated that the sales of British articles would be promoted in the countries of Bhutan and Assam.² Mr. Purling made inquiry about the possibility of trade relation with Bhutan. However, the Bhutanese attitude was negative as they did not like to have trade relation with the English.³ So, Warren Hasting, the Governor of Bengal decided to take active steps for establishment of commercial intercourse with Bhutan and Tibet. He decided to send a trade mission to Bhutan and Tibet under George Bogle. On 6 May 1774 Mr. Bogle was appointed for the trade mission to Bhutan and Tibet. Mr. Bogle left Calcutta by the middle of the month of May accompanied by Dr. Alexander Hamilton for the task. He carried some English articles and Indian manufacture goods like clothes, brocade, chintz, muslin, pearl, spices, cloves, Birmingham glassware, cutlery, mirrors clocks or watch to present to Deva Raja and Tashi Lama for securing a market in Bhutan and Tibet.⁴ He travelled via Murshidabad, Dinajpur and reached Koch Behar by end of May, 1774 and proceeded to Tassisuden via Chechakhata, Buxa Duar, Murichom and Chuka then reached the capital of Bhutan in the last of June, 1774.⁵ Mr. Bogle made a cordial dialogue with Deva Raja on 4 July in 1774 but no decisive result came out from conversation.⁶ In 1775, second mission was sent again to Bhutan under the leadership of Mr. Bogle to fulfill the aim of British East India Company but that time also returned with empty hand. The third mission was sent in July 1777 under Dr. Hamilton, which also returned with negative result. Fourthly, Warren Hasting appointed Samuel Turner for the trade mission to Bhutan and Tibet. Samuel Turner proceeded to Bhutan on 9 January 1783 as per the assignment of British East India Company. He followed the old route which was discovered by Mr. Bogle but he also returned without good result. Despite the failure of the trade mission to Bhutan, Warren Hasting made up his mind to send once again the trade mission under Purnagir Gossain to Bhutan to establish market of the Company. But

Lord Cornwallis, the new Governor General of India had stopped the proposal for sending the trade mission to Bhutan.⁷ No doubt, there was no good commercial relation between Bengal Government and Bhutan Government. Besides, Bengal Government allowed the Bhutanese traders to come down to Bengal markets to carry out their business both selling and buying.⁸ Mr. Smith, Collector of Rangpur asserted that the Bhutanese trade caravans generally arrived at Rangpur in February and March in every year and they returned to their country in May and June of the year.⁹ Bengal Government carried all expenses for providing staple food for horses and erected temporary tent houses to the Bhutanese trade caravans.¹⁰ The Bhutanese traders sold Tangun horses, blankets, walnuts, musk, orange and cow tails at the markets of Rangpur.¹¹ In the early period, Bengal Government levied taxes on the Bhutanese goods till 1799 but it was abolished with the aim to establish trade relation with Bhutan.

British had given freedom to the Bhutanese for conducting trade in Bengal but Bhutan Government did not allow any British subject to carry out trade in Bhutan. When Assam was annexed by the British East India Company under provision of treaty of Yandaboo 1826, there was adversely affected on the normal relation between British East India Company and Bhutan Government in *Duars* areas. *Duars* on the side of Assam were partially under the Ahom and adjacent *Duars* of Jalpaiguri district of Bengal were totally controlled by the Bhutanese.¹² By treaty of Yandaboo, *Duars* on the side of Assam were passed into the hands of British East India Company. The payment of the revenue to Bhutan had stopped with the establishment of new administrative system in *Duars* by British East India Company. Therefore, the Bhutanese frequently raided in *Duars* of Assam because of nonpayment of taxes to them. The Bhutanese behaved inhuman character upon the people of *Duars*, which became a key point of bone of contention between Company and Bhutan. The British East India Company sent a mission to Bhutan under Captain R.B. Pemberton to resolve the dispute over Assam *Duars*. Mr. Pemberton was specially instructed by British authority to settle a terms on commercial relation with Bhutan. As directed by British authority, Pemberton proposed a treaty with Deva Raja of Bhutan on 25 April 1838. This mission was politically failure but it was a great success in term of trade. Bhutan Government did not accede all the terms of the treaty which was proposed by Mr. Pemberton.¹³ Bhutanese either directly or indirectly obtained almost every article for consumption or luxury from *Duars*.¹⁴ The trade mission of Pemberton was not fruitful one. So, in 1841, *Duars* of Assam were

completely annexed to British territories by payment of a sum of Rs. 10,000 to Bhutan Government as compensation.

The annexation of Assam *Duars* to British territory created a havoc situation between English and Bhutanese. Therefore, Bengal Government assured that they would not intervene in the internal affairs of Bhutan.¹⁵ But continuing incursions into the plain areas of Bengal from the Bhutanese side compelled British authority to send a mission to end the border skirmishes. On 11 August 1863, British authority sent a mission under Ashley Eden, Secretary to the Governor-General of Bengal. Mr. Eden tried to impress the king of Bhutan and made a proposal to establish commercial intercourse between two countries. He also had ensured the security of merchants and travelers. But no good reply was received from the Government of Bhutan.¹⁶ In fact, there was no formal relation between two powers, although the Bhutanese continued to carry trade with Bengal and Assam through *Duars*.¹⁷

The meaning of *Duar* is door in English. It was used to refer to the areas below the foothill.¹⁸ *Duars* covered the narrow strip of the plains and the foothills of Bhutan.¹⁹ They were under the controlled of officers called *Subha*.²⁰ *Subah* were the representative of Deva Raja, who could exercise the judicial, military, financial and mercantile activities in the *Duars*.²¹ There were eighteen *Duars* closed to the northern part of Bengal and Assam. Out of eighteen *Duars*, eleven were on the northern frontier of Bengal lying between Teesta River on the west and Manas on the East and Seven *Duars* were closed to the northern boundary of Assam. *Duars* were as follows:

Bengal *Duars*:

1. Dalimkote *Duar*.
2. Zamerkote *Duar*.
3. Cheemurchee *Duar*.
4. Lukhee *Duar*.
5. Buxa *Duar*.
6. Bulka *Duar*.
7. Bara *Duar*.
8. Guma *Duar*.

9. Ripu *Duar*.
10. Chirang and Sidli *Duar*.
11. Bijni *Duar*.²²

Assam *Duars*:

1. Ghurkolah *Duar*.
2. Baksha or Banska *Duar*.
3. Chappagooree *Duar*.
4. Chapakhamar *Duar*.
5. Bagh *Duar*.
6. Booree Guma *Duar*.
7. Kulling *Duar*.

Guma *Duar*, Ripu *Duar*, Chirang *Duar*, Sidli *Duar*, and Bijni *Duar* were laying in between Sonkosh and Manas River. These *Duars* were adjacent to the territories of Goalpara's *Zamindars*, who were earlier taxpayer to the Nawab of Bengal under the Mughal rule. *Zamindars* of Goalpara came under the British after the establishment of permanent settlements in 1793.

Geographically, the areas of *Duars* had been divided into two i.e. northern and southern portions. The northern portions of *Duars* were generally covered by dense and lofty Sal, khoir, sisu, bamboos and other valuable trees. On other hand, the southern portions of *Duars* were very fertile and suitable for rice cultivation.²³ The northern tracts of *Duars* were inhabited by the Meches and Kacharis.²⁴ Only Mech and Kachari could apparently be able to live in these malaria zones despite the atrocities of Bhutias.²⁵ In the southern portion, there was a plain area which varies from 16 km to 32 km in width and was chiefly occupied by the Koches and Rajbhanshis.²⁶

Guma *Duar* was situated on the eastern side of Gadadhar River, which flowed from the Tassisudon, the western capital of Bhutan. Gadadhar River was known as Tchinchoo River above the Hills, which was under Subah of Bara *Duar*.²⁷ Pran Singha was the Subah of Guma *Duar*. Guma *Duar* was a small tract on the western bank of Gadadhar River surrounded by the territories of Koch Behar.²⁸

Subah of Ripu *Duar*, whose jurisdiction was confined to an area called Raymana, which occupied the eastern bank of Sonkosh River. This area was controlled by two brothers, namely Genkata and Bohot Singha who were the descendants of Koch.²⁹

Subah of Chirang was seemed to be one of the most considerable revenue collectors from Sidli and Bijni. The authority of Chirang's *Subah* was covered all tract lying to the west of Manas river and to the west of Sankosh river. The residence of *Subah* was in Chirang near the foothill, midway of between the famous castle of Wandipoor and a place called Cutchabarry. *Subah* moved down in seldom to the plain area in the cold season only.³⁰ Hilly tracts between mountains and low level country came under the *Subah* of Chirang which had divided into two parts. The area lying to the north of Sidli was called Nunmattee, which belonged to a chief called Chamuka in early days. The other tract was lying on north of Bijni, which was subdivided in two parts namely Nicheema and Hatee Kura which were under the possession of a chief called Mamuduna.

The chiefs of Sidli were the descendent of Koch dynasty, who paid land revenue to Bhutan government. The territory of Raja of Sidli extended to the Memattee of Bhutan. Raja of Sidli used to pay five hundred (500) Rupees along with some oil, dried fish and coarse cotton cloths as an annual tribute to Bhutan Government. The revenue of Sidli to Bhutan government became mere one. So, Bhutan government desired to collect more revenue from Sidli through the pressure of *Subha* of Chirang who was an agent of a very influential officer called Wandipoor Zoompon or Governor of Wandipoor. He exercised supreme power to control whole *Duars*.³¹

The chief of Bijni *Duar* was descendant of Visva Singha. He also paid revenue to Bhutan government through the *Subah* of Chirang.³²

Wandipoor Zoompon or Governor of Wandipoor had appointed Jaolia Mech as Diwan (revenue collector) of Sidli- Chirang *Duar* and Tengpakri (Birgwsri) for Bijni *Duars*. Both of them assisted *Subah* of Chirang for the collection of revenue from *Duars*.

In 1865, a war broke out between British and Bhutan which came to an end by the treaty of Chinsulla in 1866. As a result of the treaty, Bengal *Duars* were annexed to British territories. For the convenient of administration, *Duars* of Bengal was made into two divisions namely Western and Eastern *Duars*.³³ Western *Duars* were located between on the east of Teesta and to the west of Sonkosh river.³⁴ Eastern *Duars* were lying on east of Sonkosh river and to the west of Manas river. Eastern *Duars* comprised

of five *Duars* namely Guma, Ripu, Chirang, Sidli and Bijni.³⁵ After the treaty of Sinchulla, Eastern *Duars* came under the charge of Deputy Commissioner with the headquarter at Dotma in Khuntaghat Fiscal Division of Goalpara.³⁶ British agreed to pay annually a sum of rupees 50,000 to Bhutan Government for submission of all the *Duars* to British India. The submission of *Duars* to British lost economically on the side for Bhutan because the lands of *Duars* were fertile and good for agriculture. On the other hand, the annexation of *Duars* became beneficial on the part of British for plantation of tea.³⁷

The trade relation between Assam and Bhutan was cordial before the coming of British. *Zamindars* of Goalpara set up *hats* (market) at *Duars* to make convenient both for plain and hill people for marketing. Slowly and steadily the *hats* became a trading centre where Bhutanese exchanged their goods with traders of Goalpara.³⁸ Robinson mentioned that some articles like pepper, ginger, wax, ivory, cotton, wool, yak tails, rubber and elephant tusk were bartered by the hill tribes for glasses, beads, *endi* clothes, salts, utensils and agricultural implements.³⁹

The foothills of northern part of Goalpara district were suitable for cotton cultivation. Cotton was grown in plenty in the lower slopes of Bhutan Hills. The plantation of cotton on the lower slopes of the hills was called *Gari*.⁴⁰ Some jealous officers of Bhutan prohibited the traders to access into cotton cultivated areas as well as to buy cotton from individual peasants.⁴¹ However, they allowed very few known traders from the adjacent frontier villages to collect the cotton and trifling barter with the inhabitants of Bhutan.⁴² Cotton also was grown in highland of Bijni and Sidli *Parganas* of Goalpara district. Two types of cotton namely *Borkopah* and *Saru Kopah* were grown in that parts and harvesting was done in twice in a year. The plantation of cotton was also done in the forest area after clearing jungle.⁴³ Rice was the staple crop but other crops like barley, mustard seed, black gram, tobacco and cotton were also grown in these areas. Long pepper was grown in the *Duars* which became an important article for exporting.

After subjugation of all *Duars*, British officials organized markets and annual trade fairs at number of places in *Duars* areas to promote trade and to popularize European goods.⁴⁴ The traders of Bhutan came to participate in the trade fair of *Duars* which was conducted by Goalpara district administration in winter season. The trade fair was officially for three days but it continued nearly three month i.e. from January to March in every year.⁴⁵ In this trade fair considerable trade was carried out between

Bhutan and Goalpara. Numbers of Bhutanese trader came to attend Dhubri and Dotma trade fair through the several routes of *Duars*.⁴⁶ The trade fair of Dotma in Goalpara was started by the district authority in 1873 to attract the Bhutanese.⁴⁷

In 1911, the Government of Bhutan accepted the entire commercial proposal which was proposed by British India. Afterward, Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara granted permission to Nepalese, Bhutanese and Tibetan trader for coming to Goalpara to operate trade activities.⁴⁸ The Conservator of forest was also instructed the Divisional Forest Officer of Goalpara division to keep open all four roads which passes through the Kochugaon, Sarbhang, Bhor Tinali and the route near Ai river. These roads were made and maintained by both Bhutan and British but Divisional Forest Officer of Goalpara forest division had power to close any of them, if forest rule is violated.⁴⁹ The Nepalese of Bhutan brought down orange, cattle, brassware, ghee, pigs and woolen articles to the markets of northern part of Goalpara district.⁵⁰ Sunday *Bazar* of Kochugaon in Goalpara district which run by the forest department became an indispensable trade centre between plains and hills. The Bhutanese used to visit Kochugaon *Bazar* every week in the winter session. The Bhutanese and Nepalese came to Kochugaon *Bazar* with Rangga (forehead carrier) on their forehead. There was a great trading scene in every Sunday *Bazar* at Kochugaon where huge buyers and sellers gathered.⁵¹

The Bhutanese moved down to Goalpara through the Bijni, Sidli, Ripu, Guma and Chirang *Duars*.⁵² Ashley Aden observed that several routes were connected from northern Goalpara to Bhutan. The route from Wandipur of Bhutan was connected with Bijni, Sidli, Bengtoli, Kachubari, Buro Bungloo, Dubleng, and Chirang. Every winter season, the Bhutanese came down with mule-loads of rock salt, gold dust, musk, woolens, yak tail and Chinese silk etc. In return of that they took away cotton clothes, Assam silk, raw silk and thread, rice, dried fish, etc.⁵³

The Kacharis or Meches tribes were principal inhabited at *Duars* areas of the northern part of Goalpara district.⁵⁴ They had a close contact with the Bhutanese because of their geographical position. The Meches of the *Duars* were treated as force labourer by the Bhutanese ruler in pre British period. They supplied rice, clothes, betel nut, cotton and ghee to the Bhutanese to make them satisfied.⁵⁵ The Meches supplied several articles to Bhutan in every week to the fort of Jungpens which was situated in lower range of the hills.⁵⁶

The Meches or Bodos (Kacharis) were very expert in rearing of silk worms from which they obtained raw silk called *endi*. The Meches women spent a large part of their day in weaving on a dorsal strap loom. Other members of the family carried out domestic tasks for them. A good weaver could weave a half yard per day and the price obtained for the clothes contributed significantly to the family economy.⁵⁷ The price of silk was very high for its good quality like softness, solidity and warmth. The Meches used to manufacture two types of clothes - *kharu* and *dunko lepa* especially for the Bhutanese.⁵⁸ When the *Duars* were under the Bhutanese jurisdiction the Mech used to pay taxes to the Bhutanese Government in kind such as food grains and clothes.⁵⁹ Till 20th century, the Bhutanese were frequently visited Mech villages, which were situated below the foothills to collect *endi* cocoon.

Before Anglo - Bhutan war, Bhutan Government collected land revenue in kind from *Duars* which were inhabited mainly by Meches or Kacharis.⁶⁰ Sometime, Bhutanese made incursions into *Duars* areas as well as settled tract of Goalpara district and forcibly took away some male Kacharis to carry their booties from plain areas to Bhutan.⁶¹ Carriage of the booties to Bhutan was known as *Ada Bhaoka Bannai*.⁶² Like China, Bhutan also exercised close door policy and never disclosed the route which reached to Bhutan due to fear of external aggression. There was no record of return of people who were abducted by the Bhutanese during several incursions in the plain area. These people were engaged as unskilled labour in several works under Bhutan Government. Sometimes, they were made to forcefully enter into a conjugal union with some inferior Bhutanese woman, which made them to settle permanently in Bhutan. The Bhutanese were called as *Gangar* by the Kacharis (Bodo) because of their terrible character. *Gangar* means arrogant and people hijacker.⁶³

V. 2. GARO HILLS

Garo Hills district is bounded by the district of Goalpara on the north and west, on the south Mymensingh district of Bengal (present in Bangladesh) and Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts on the east.⁶⁴ During the Mughal rule, the areas lying between Brahmaputra river and Garo Hills were occupied by the powerful *Chaudhuries*. *Chaudhuries* were enjoyed status of semi - independent ruler by paying nominal tribute

to the Mughal *Faujdar* of Rangamati.⁶⁵ They paid tribute in kind like elephants, cotton and *agar* wood etc.⁶⁶ *Chauduries* of Koraibari, Kalumalupara, Habraghat and Mechpara were kept relation with the border chiefs of Garo Hills. They protected the plain subject from the aggression of Garos but they maintained good relation with the Garos with aim to enrich cotton trade.⁶⁷ Cotton of Garo Hills became a valuable article in colonial period which was exported to Goalpara and then Dacca.⁶⁸ The British East India Company appointed a *Sazawal* or contractor annually in spite of *Faujdar* to look over cotton trade. By 1822, all *Choudhuries* came under the newly created Goalpara district.⁶⁹

In 1775-76, *Choudhuries* of Mechpara and Koraibari did not remain silent because of frequent Garos raid in the plain area of *Zamindary* estates. *Chaudhuries* brought a considerable tract under their control.⁷⁰ The Southern Hills of Goalpara district was controlled by a Garo chief called Rengtha who was a revenue collector of Koraibari *Zamindar*. Rengtha was trying to establish himself as an absolute independent chief. So, he stopped the payment of revenue to Koraibari *Zamindar*. Lastly, Rengtha was arrested in 1815.⁷¹

Frequent raids of the Garos in the plain area, *Chaudhuries* were bound to exercise lawlessness character upon the hill tribes which naturally brought bitter relation between plain and hills.⁷² In 1816, the Governor General of India appointed Mr. David Scott as an agent of the Company. He was posted at Goalpara to inquire into the matter of northeast frontier.

The four principal *Zamindary* estates are discussed as follows:⁷³

1. Koraibari: *Choudhury* of Koraibari estate was vigorous who controlled all the Garos of his jurisdiction. As a result of controlling the Goros, all Garo chiefs of frontier areas became taxpayer of Koraibari estate. The frontier chief offered cotton to the *Zamindar* in order to keep good relation.
2. Kalumalupara: *Choudhury* of Kalumalupara was in feeble hands. The Garos of border area were virtually independent but they had to pay nominal tribute in kind to *Choudhury* for keeping peace.
3. Mechpara: *Choudhury* of Mechpara occupied large area of below the Garo Hills. But *Choudhury* was succeeded by a minor son, thereafter, only few

outlying Garo villages in the plains remained as ordinary ryots under the Bengal Regulations.

4. Habraghat: The Garos on the first range of hills were unconditionally reduced by the *Zamindars*. Thereafter, the Garos of that area paid unconditional taxes to the *Zamindars* till the implementation of Bengal Regulations (Land Settlement).

In 1817, an administrative district called North East Rangpur was bifurcated from the Rangpur district. The Commissioner of North East Rangpur not only looked after the Goalpara but also maintained political relations with Garo chiefs in the hills. When a portion of lower region of Garo Hills came under British control, a Sub-Assistant Commissioner was posted at Singimari to assist the political agent of Garo affairs.⁷⁴ With the extension of Company's power toward Garo Hills, the office of Sub-Assistant Commissioner of Singimari was upgraded to the office of Assistant Commissioner.⁷⁵ The lower tract of Garo Hills was controlled by David Scott, the special Commissioner.⁷⁶ The Governor- General Council entrusted David Scott with the power of judicial, police and magistrate to conclude any terms with Garo Chiefs.⁷⁷ The lower tract of the Garo Hills remained in tact with Goalpara district till the formation of Garo Hills district in 1869. Tura was made headquarter of newly formed Garo Hills district.⁷⁸

During the colonial period, salt was a very important commodity which gave huge revenue to *Zamindar* of Bijni. The traders had warehouses of salt at every market and paid a rent to the Raja of Bijni. Salt was sold to petty traders at the eight rupees per *mound* (84 10/15 S.A. a ser). Sometimes, the traders mixed salt with clay to increase its weight up to $\frac{1}{8}$ in one *mound* salt to exchange with three *mound* of cotton.⁷⁹ However, the British East India Company paid 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ rupees for 3 *mounds* 15 *sers* (k.g.) of cotton with seed. The petty traders sold cotton at 5 rupees per *mound* at Goalpara market. The profit of cotton trade was shared with *Zamindars*.⁸⁰ The petty traders were permitted to bring any other article except salt for sale by paying some transit duties.

The Garos depended on frontier markets of Goalpara district where they sold their fresh commodities. After selling items which they brought, they took away the commodities which were not available to their area.⁸¹ *Choudhuries* of Koraibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara and Habragahat suppressed the incursions of the savage tribes of uplands, who plundered agricultural crops of the plain area.⁸² Therefore, *Chauduries*

established peace and tranquility with the Garos by establishing *hats* and markets below the Garo Hills.⁸³ The Garos moved down with loaded cotton to the markets of plain areas.⁸⁴ They also brought small bundle of cotton which was locally called *bucha* to present to *Zamindar* as tax.⁸⁵ Cotton was carried on the back by loading in long basket.⁸⁶ At the same time a *bucha* was carried in one hand and the *cumburee* (long sword) on another hand.⁸⁷

Cotton of Garo Hills was made attraction to local and foreign traders. Most of the frontier *hats* and annual fairs were held on the border of Goalpara district where Garos bartered their products.⁸⁸ There were 14 *hats* (weekly market) on the border of Garo Hills.⁸⁹ The important markets were located at Nibari, Luckichar, Jerah, Singimiri, Damrah, Rangjuli, Rajaballa, Bangal khatta, Tikri, Salmara, Mankachar, Bahadur Khatta, Putimari and Parakhaslana in Goalpara.⁹⁰ *Hats* were established by the *Zamindars* in Koraibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara and Habragahat estates situated along the Garo frontier.⁹¹ The Garos used to travel long distances with 40 to 60 kilogram of cotton and other goods like chillies, wax, lac, rubber, timber, etc. which loaded in long bamboo basket and carried on their back. They bartered their items with cows, pigs, goats, fowls, salt, earthenware pots, swords, spearheads, cloth, etc.⁹² All transactions were done through the barter and money also was used but not in large scale.⁹³ A number of petty traders, called *basania* bepari literally mean moving traders were visited different villages of below Garo Hills for the purpose of selling their goods.⁹⁴ The *hats* or markets of Damra, Jira, Nibari, Patimari, etc, were held generally once a week in the month where numbers of Garos attended. Cotton was most important export article of Bengal. Garo Hills supplied cotton to Goalpara from where it was supplied to Bengal.⁹⁵ Cotton was carried down by Garos to the *hats* of Goalpara where they bartered with rice, cattle, pigs, goats, salt, cotton cloth, ornaments, brass work and weapons.⁹⁶ Cotton was sold at twenty markets which were situated at the border of Goalpara district, especially in Tura. During cold session, unclean cotton was sold at the markets but in the months of March and April cleaned cotton was brought to the markets.⁹⁷ The gin cotton was exported to foreign market at the rate of Rs. 27 per *mound* and unclean cotton was sold at the rate of Rs.7 per *mound*.⁹⁸ In 1809, a large volume of cotton around 47,000 *mounds* was brought by the Garos to Goalpara which was supplied to Bengal.⁹⁹ Garo Hills supplied 60,000 *mounds* of cotton to Goalpara by the year 1835.¹⁰⁰ According to Martin Montgomery, Garos brought a huge amount of cotton to regular markets of Hawraghat, Mechpara and Kalumalupara of Goalpara district.¹⁰¹ In 1837-38, about 50,000 *mounds* cotton was sold

at Garo *hats* and earned Rs. 35,000.¹⁰² The selling of cotton was increased up to 60,000 *mounds* in 1838-39.¹⁰³ It was estimated that around 14,000 *mounds* of cotton was sold at Nibari, Luckiduar, Kakripara, Jeerah, Mahendrganj, Putimari, Singimari and Damrah in 1873. The sell quantity of cotton was increased up to 24,000 *mounds* in 1874. The trade in cotton during the decade of 1880 - 1890 was partly inter - district and partly inter - provincial. The plains districts purchased huge amount of cotton for local consumption from the markets of foothills.¹⁰⁴

Cotton was sold at the market of Tura as well as in the market of border of south Salmara, Goalpara and Manikachar of the Goalpara district from where it was exported to Bengal.¹⁰⁵ Manikachar was a village, located in extreme southwest of Goalpara district where a considerable trade was carried out in cotton, jute and mustard.¹⁰⁶ Several hills passes played an important role for delivering articles to the petty traders of Goalpara. The trade routes between Goalpara and Garo Hills during colonial period were (i) land route from Agia to Tura and (ii) Singimari to Dhubri which was river route. In rainy season, small country boats were plying between Singimari to Dhubri through the Jinjiram river which was a tributary of Brahmaputra.¹⁰⁷

Lac was in heavy demand especially for production of colour.¹⁰⁸ The cultivation of *lac* (a kind of plant used for colouring) was encouraged by Captain Williamson, the first Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills district.¹⁰⁹ He hoped that *lac* could be exported to Bengal but it could not fetch much benefit. About 2,220 *mound* of *lac* was sold in the markets of Damra, Jeerah and Nibari.¹¹⁰ In 1874, a total of 1,436 *mounds* of *lac* were brought to Goalpara from Garo hills. Out of which, 43 *mounds* was kept for local use and remaining quantity was exported to Bengal.¹¹¹ In 1874-75, the price of *lac* was only Rs. 4 per *mound* or about eleven shillings in hundred weights. The average price of rough *lac* was started from Rs. 20 to Rs. 22.8.0 per *mound* or from £2,14s.8d. to £3,1s.5d. a hundred weight.¹¹²

Thus, the frontier trade of Goalpara with Garo Hills did crucial role for colonizing hills tract. The Garos came down to the markets of Goalpara which were established by *Chaudhuries*. In the frontier markets of Garo Hills, salt also occupied a principal article for bartering with the forest articles of Garo Hills. Cotton of Garo Hills occupied very important article in the markets of Goalpara as well as Bengal also.

Endnotes

- ¹ Shantiswarup Gupta, *British Relation with Bhutan*, Panchseel Prakashan, Jaipur, 1974, p. 39.
- ² *Ibid*, pp. 39 - 40.
- ³ *Ibid*, p. 40.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, p. 41.
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- ⁶⁰ A. J. Moffat Mill, *A Report on the Province of Assam*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1853, p. 47.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁶² Biswanath Narzary, Age- 106, S/O- Bishiram Narzary, Village- Dangaon, Kajalgaon, Occupation- cultivators as well as Social worker of Christian Society. He was born in

1911 in Hogoma Village of present Dotma, Kokrajhar district. He was converted in to Christian around 10 years old and studied up to class 4 in Christian Mission at Jaima of Gossaigaon. Their family was migrated to village Dangaon of Kajalgaon due to fear of *Marki* mean epidemic diseases like cholera, Kala ajar, Malaria. *Ada Baoka* word mention in the text body signified that carrying goods on the shoulder by a short bamboo pole to Bhutan.

⁶³ *Ibid*, the Bhutanese were shown their superior powers upon the Kacharis of Duars. Due to atrocities character the Kacharies called as Gangar which is mean arrogant and adamant characters.

⁶⁴ B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. X, Part - II*, Pioneer Print, Allahabad, 1906, p. 1.

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⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ B. C, Allen, *Op. cit*, p. 14.

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⁷⁶ K. K. Batthacharjee, *North East India*, Cosmos Publication, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 38 - 39.

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- ⁷⁸ K. K. Batthacharjee, *Op. cit*, pp. 38 - 39.
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- ⁹⁰ Manjula Borthakur, *Op. cit*. p. 37.
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- ⁹⁵ Sarah Hilaly, "Cotton Export from Assam and the Railways - Colonial period" *Fifteenth Proceeding of North East India History Association*, NEHU, Shillong ,1994, p. 175.
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- ⁹⁷ Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, David Nutt, London, 1909, pp. 45 - 46.

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¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

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