

## CHAPTER V

### Economy of the Bodos in the Colonial Period

It is very difficult to find a simple and precise definition of tribal economy. The socio-economic structure in tribal communities is markedly different from that of the non-tribal or advanced group of people. They have a very simple technology which fits well with their ecological surroundings and conservative outlook. Moreover, their economy can be said to be of sustenance type. They practice different types of occupations to sustain themselves and live on “marginal economy”. Another important point to be emphasized is that a tribe is usually considered an economically independent group of people having their own specific economy. For example, agriculture had been the primary occupation of the Bodos and it has been a part and parcel of their economy since the early past. The agricultural lands were moved down from generation to generation as the source of economic activities.<sup>1</sup>

During the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the Bodos in the *submontane* belts of the Brahmaputra valley used the slash and burn farming methods in the scrubby and bushy grass jungles. The *submontane* belt received heavy rainfall of 80 to 120 inches annually.

Numerous hill streams with their shallow and shifting channels made an artificial irrigation with easy and favourable proposition. Bodos have made use of this opportunity from the past till date. Buchanan-Hamilton (1807-14), Fisher (1833), Hodgson (1847) and Dalton (1872) mentioned in their reports that the method of shifting hoe cultivation survived till the last part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Describing the transition of plough cultivation among the Bodos, Amalendu Guha states that it is impossible to prescribe a specific date since when they adopted the method of plough cultivation. However, it is believed that due to close contact with the neighbouring people, they adopted the method of plough and wet rice (*sali*) cultivation in the very past. Jenkins (1851), in his report eulogized Bodos as efficient cultivators and also at the same time mentioned their unsettled habit of displacement. The Bodos were also known as Meches in Jalpaiguri district of Bengal. Colonel Money, the Deputy Commissioner in 1875, wrote in his report that he was surprised to see the manner of artificial irrigation constructed by the Bodos where the water channels reached more than a mile long.<sup>2</sup> Amalenda Guha cited the quotes of Colonel Money as-

*“The Meches find the proximity of permanent cultivation not to be congenial to their own habits....I have of late observed that Meches are using ploughs much more freely than they used to do, and also that in many places they employ Rajbansis to plough for them”.*<sup>3</sup>

Rev. S. Endle in his book *The Kacharis* states about the irrigation skill as ‘Bodos are especially skillful in the construction of irrigation canals and earthwork embankments for diverting water from river beds into their rice fields, and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely clannish organization’.<sup>4</sup> They were also aware of the irregularity threat of the rainfall. Therefore, under the leadership of village headman they tried to find the nearest location of a river from where the water could be taken to the agricultural field by means of constructing water canals and embankments. For those arrangements the whole villagers carried out the necessary works with full strength and labour. This was an evident of highly esteemed, efficient and inexpensive public works department for themselves. Bodos not only were good in the construction works but also worked together during harvesting of rice crops and in other social and domestic activities. This vigorous characters of the Bodos reveal the efforts of self-help and seem to be worthy of high commendation.<sup>5</sup>

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture is the backbone of the people of Assam since the evolution of agrarian society. Various types of agricultural crops were grown in the district of Goalpara during colonial period. During colonial period, the Bodos along with other allied tribes in the district had been cultivating various types of agricultural crops which they inherited from their ancestors. Agriculture has been the source of livelihood of the Bodos.

Taking into consideration the outcome of agricultural production the plot of cultivable land has been classified into four categories by the Bodos, such as *Khandina ha*, *Hashrow ha*, *Shwrab daria ha* and *Jamphwi daria ha*. The first category of land called *Khandina* is regarded as temporary land by the Bodos, therefore they rejected this category of land for rice cultivation. The second type of land called *Hashrow ha* situated by bank of the river, which cannot retain the rain water for a long time on the plot, is regarded as less suitable for paddy cultivation. The third type of land called *Shwrab daria ha* is considered as medium standard of land for rice cultivation. The cultivation on this type of land solely depends on rain water for more outputs. The last type of land called *Jamphwi daria ha* is considered by the Bodos as the best and most suitable for the rice cultivation. In Bodo, the term *Jamphwi* stands for canal. The last category of land is facilitated with proper irrigation system through the proper arrangement of canal (*jamphwi*) and embankment. The Bodos call it *Jamphwi daria ha*. Rice cultivation has been the main occupation of the Bodos which they inherited from their ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

## **Rice Cultivation**

Bodos classified the rice as larger and smaller grains, which is also known as *Maima* and *Maisa* as identified by Rev. S. Endle in *The Kacharis*. They largely cultivated the *Sali* or *Maisali* rice.<sup>7</sup> Rice has been the staple crop of the Bodos. Generally rice was categorized into three main classes namely *Aus (Ashu)* or *Bitari* rice, *Bao* or *Bawa* and *hainmantic*, *sali* or *aman*. The first of the three classes of rice called *ashu* again was classified into the following categories- *chample*, *nilaji*, *dubechenga*, *pakrijabeta*, *bhujsha*, *gathia*, *bhimra*, *kasia paanja*, *baolidhar* and *kekoya*. The *ashu*

rice is normally sown in the month of March and April and reaped in the months of June and July.<sup>8</sup> *Ashu* is sown under two sets of different conditions. Firstly, when it was to be sown usually in the marshy lands it followed some procedures. Initially the jungles used to be slashed down and burnt and the land left till the end of the rains. In the beginning of the February month the process of plough started and it continued for three times in the interval of days which were also harrowed. The clods and lumps were broken by a wooden mallet. Again, before sowing the seeds, the land was ploughed and harrowed to ensure that the grain became thoroughly mixed with the soil. When the plant grew about six inches of height, again it was harrowed and weeded and finally harvested in the middle month of the July as on it was fully ripened. The plant could survive under water as long as a week, but would be destroyed permanently if the flood water did not get away soon. Secondly, the *ashu* rice was more often sown in conjunction with *bawa* rice in the hope that if the former crop was destroyed, the *bawa* could survive in the flood water for long days as being the sturdy and longer stemmed.<sup>9</sup>

The *Bawa* rice grows mainly in marshy lands and usually it is not transplanted.<sup>10</sup> It is mainly sown in about the middle of March and can be grown in the flooded tracts of lands. The rice ripens about the beginning of the month of December and harvested in the same process as the other rice. The *bawa* rice is of several kinds, some of which increase in length as the water level increases in the heavy rainy season. One variety of the *bawa* known as *lewa bawa* often rises its length to as much as 24 feet long. Other *bawas* like *Mera bawa* grows up to 15 feet in length and *kekoa* and *salmati* also grow up to 18 feet in length. B. C. Allen mentioned that *amnakasha* rice mainly found in the Parbatjoar of Goalpara district was the longest varieties kind of *bawa* rice.<sup>11</sup>

The *Haimantik*, *Sali (Maisali)* or *aman* crop requires sandy, moist and clayey type of land so that the roots of the plant always remain soaked in water. B.C. Allen called this type of rice as *roa dhan*<sup>12</sup> which means transplanted paddy. This type of rice sown in nurseries in the month of May, June and July and is mainly transplanted in the month of the July and August, which is later finally reaped in the month of November, December and January. There are several varieties in this type of rice namely *Tulsi jaba*, *kharika jaba*, *madhikar malati*, *malbhog*, *banni*, *kala suagmani*, *dudh suagmani*, *jul bardhan*, *eli jabri*, *mainaguri*, *akhaia* or *katari dabua*, *dal kachu*, *rangi bardhan*, *santi*

*boka* and *para chakhua* etc. Other species of rice grown in the district were *bharma* and *boka dhan*. The latter type of rice could be consumed uncooked after being steeped in the water till it turned soft.<sup>13</sup> The practice of cultivating these three main types of rice is still prevalent among the Bodo cultivators in the erstwhile Goalpara district.

## **Cereal Crops**

Besides the rice cultivation, the following cereal crops were grown in the district of Goalpara namely *gaham* (wheat) which were sown in the month of October and November and harvested in the month of February and March. Crops like *jab* (barley), *but* (gram) and *sarisha* (mustard) were also cultivated in abundance. These crops were sown in the month of September, October and November and reaped in the month of December, January and February.<sup>14</sup>

## **Pulse and Green Crops**

The pulse was cultivated either on the riparian flats or higher types of land after the summer rice was cropped. B.C. Allen mentioned that there were varieties of pulse grown in the Goalpara district such as *Mash kalai* (*phaseolus mungo*) sown in the month of September and harvested after three or four months, *Thaguri kalai*, *mug* (*phaseolus mungo* Linn), *khesari* (*lathyrus sativas*) grown in the month of October and November and reaped after six months, *Masuri* (*lens esculenta*) and *arhar* (*cajanus indicus*) which were sown in the month of April and May and required about ten months after being ripen.<sup>15</sup>

The green crops such as *palang*, *chukka*, *lafa*, *babri*, *lai*, *mula*, *baigun* and *lau* or pumpkins were grown in the month of September, October and November and reaped in the month of December, January and February. *Kumra* was cropped in the month of April and May and reaped three or four months later. The fibre crops grown in Goalpara district mentioned as *pathw* or *koshta* (jute) and *son* (hemp), both of these crops were sown in the month of March and April and cut in the month of August and September.<sup>16</sup> The cultivation of jute required considerable amount of labour and times. In the stiff type of soil as many as ten times were ploughed.<sup>17</sup>

## Miscellaneous Crops

The accounts of cultivating of various types of crops were *kusiar* or *akh* (sugar-cane). *Pan* creepers were also cropped in the month of June and July and it was grown all around the year because they survived for a considerable period of time. Some other fruits such as *tiah* or *sasa* (cucumber), *banga* or *phuti*, *turmuj* (water melon), *makai joha* and *chhindal* were grown in February, March and April and ripened in the month of May, June and July. These crops were generally grown in the garden lands situated around the homestead. This cultivation required good amount of manures.<sup>18</sup>

Plantain was the most common and valuable crop grown in the district. Most common variety of plantain trees were *athia*, *manua*, *cheni champa* and *malbhog*. The commonest form of *athia* plantain was *bhim*, a large in size and height and found growing in the garden near every house in the village. It was generally useful as food for the infants. Besides the plantain some other valuable crops were also grown such as betel nut (areca catechu) and bamboo. Fruits like mango, jack fruit, lemon and coconut trees were most commonly planted. Tobacco plants were also sown in the majority of the gardens. The most common vegetables such as spinach, arums (*kuchu*), yams (*dioscorea*) and guards, *lafa* (*malva verticillata*), *chukka sag*, brinjal, potato, onions, garlic, chili, ginger and turmeric were grown in and around the house garden.<sup>19</sup>

## Agricultural Implements

Many of the tools and implements used for agricultural purposes during colonial period were familiar with the Bodo terms. The most useful implements were as follows:

*Nangal* (Wooden plough), *Moi* (harrow), *Moi jari* or *Moi rasi* (rope attached to the harrow), *Lari* or *Chari* (a kind of goad for driving the oxen), *Dolibari* or *Kushi bari* (wooden mallet), *Kolbani* or *Jalka* (Small rake), *Bida* or *Bedha* (large wooden rake), *Pagha* or *rasi* (rope used for binding the cattle), *Kodal* or *Kodali* (mattock), *Dao* or *Sika* (knife or bill-hook), *Kachi* (sickle), *Khanta* (instrument used for weeding and digging or loosening the earth around the plant.), *Ruwa* or *Kathar* (axe), *Hulabari* or *bankha* (a pole made of bamboo used for carrying goods), *Dhol*, *pacchi*, *khorahi*, *gola* and *dala* (a sorts of baskets and used for stowing the rice after threshing ), *Kula* ( a flat tray made of bamboo), *Chandri* or *Chalani* (a sieve), *Don* (a basket measuring 5 sers), *Katha* (a

small basket measuring  $\frac{1}{2}$  ser), *Phanati* or *phanta* (kind of sandal or shoe), *Chanch* (adze), *Batal* (chisel), *Tokan* or *lathi* (stick), *Dhenki* (mortar), *Thora* (pestle of the mortar), *Katora* (part of *thora*), *Khubli* or *pakhli* (vessel for husking), *Uwal* or *Ural* (mortar made of wood) and *Gom* (pestle used for grinding corn).<sup>20</sup> These implements were either made by the agriculturists or procured from the markets. All of these implements valued high prices in the market. According to B.C. Allen, Bodo and Garo tribes of the Goalpara district sometimes made the *nangal* for the purpose of sale.<sup>21</sup> In the market price it valued at 4 *annas* or 6d. Similarly, the *moi* was either made by the cultivator himself or purchased in the market at a value amount of 2 *annas* or 3d. All the implements mentioned above fetched satisfactory values in the market. Without them no cultivation was thinkable for agriculturists.

### **Domestication of Animals**

The Bodos being the agrarian based economy they domesticated various animals for the purpose of food as well as for commercial purpose. W.W. Hunter has stated that the Bodos mainly used the buffaloes and oxen in the agriculture, but sometimes a few economically poor Bodos even obliged to use the cow in the agricultural field.<sup>22</sup> The animals reared for the food purposes were oxen, goats, sheep, pigs, geese, ducks, fowls, pigeons, doves etc. Those animals were also reared for the purpose of trade as a source of income to sustain the family. Other domesticated animals consisted of elephants, asses, mules, horses, milch-cows, milch-buffaloes, cats, dogs, and cage birds such as parrots, *mainas* and *bulbuls*. Some of these animals were domesticated for luxuries in the house as well as for the convenience of means for communication.<sup>23</sup> In the Goalpara district most popularly recognized variety of buffaloes were *kachhar* and *bangar*. The *kachhar* buffaloes yielded more milk and its command of market price was reasonably high. In the market the price of a bull buffalo started from Rs.10 to Rs. 50 and of a cow ranged from Rs. 15 to Rs. 70. The price of a pair of bullocks ranged from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40 and cows from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15. The price of a cow sometimes shrunk as low as Rs. 8 and hiked up to as much as Rs. 25. In the Eastern Duars the Nepalese cattle were more occasionally found and it was regarded as one of the fine animals as large as buffalos in size.<sup>24</sup> The price of other animals such as the sheep ranged up to Rs. 50 and for the full grown pigs it hiked up to Rs. 60.<sup>25</sup>

## Weights and Measure

Before the introduction of the metric system of weights and measure in 1959, there was no standardized system of measurement among the people of Goalpara district, rather the inhabitants followed the age-old system of weighing and measuring for the commodities. Bodos and some other allied tribes in the district had been following the age-old system of weighing and measuring for the commodities which are still found among them in the remote villages as a specimen.<sup>26</sup> To measure and calculate the units of such as time, days, quantity, weight, liquid, money, gold and silver, land and distance they followed age-old systems for their convenience. These were<sup>27</sup>:

## Measurement of Time

60 *bipal* = 1 *pal*

60 *pal* = 1 *danda*

60 *danda* = 1 *dibas* or full day of 24 hours

Here, 2 ½ *danda* is equivalent to one English hour. Similarly, the given units *bipal*, *pal*, *danda* and *dibas* were equivalent to second, minute, hour and day respectively as units of time.

## Counting of the Day

7 *dibas* = 1 *saptaha* or week

15 days = 1 *paksha*

30 days = 1 *mas* or *danse* or month

12 calendar months = 1 *batsar* or *bwsr* or year

They also had the practice of counting the days by the fortnight of moon's age. In case of increasing fortnight from the new moon to full moon was termed as the white or *sukla paksha*, on the other hand, in case of decreasing fortnight from full moon to next new moon is called *Krishna paksha* or the black. Bodo also count the one fortnight moon's age as *Okaphwr danse*.



## Measurement of the Quantity and Weight

The following standards were adopted to measure the quantity of the food grains:

$$5 \text{ sikki} = 1 \text{ kachha}$$

$$4 \text{ kachha} = 1 \text{ chhatak}$$

$$4 \text{ chhatak} = 1 \text{ poya}$$

$$4 \text{ poya} = 1 \text{ ser}$$

$$5 \text{ ser} = 1 \text{ pasuri}$$

$$8 \text{ pasuri} = 1 \text{ maund, equivalent to } 82 \frac{2}{7} \text{ lbs avoirdupois.}$$

## Measurement of Liquid

To measure the liquid materials the following methods were used:

$$5 \text{ sikki} = 1 \text{ chhatak}$$

$$4 \text{ chhatak} = 1 \text{ poya}$$

$$4 \text{ poya} = 1 \text{ ser}$$

$$40 \text{ ser} = 1 \text{ mound}$$

## Calculation of Money

The following standards were used to calculate the money:

$$3 \text{ danti} = 1 \text{ kranti}$$

$$3 \text{ kranti or } 4 \text{ kag or } 80 \text{ til} = 1 \text{ kauri or cowry}$$

$$4 \text{ kauri} = 1 \text{ ganda}$$

$$5 \text{ ganda} = 1 \text{ buri, equivalent to } 3 \text{ pies or } 1 \frac{1}{2} \text{ farthings.}$$

The coin currency used by the people in the district was as same as used throughout India. These were as follows:

12 *pies* = 1 *anna* or 1 ½ d.

4 *annas* = 1 quarter rupee or 6 d

8 *annas* = 1 half rupee or 1s.

16 *annas* = 1 rupee or 2s. (Nominal)

## Measurement of Gold and Silver

The following were the units of measuring gold and silver, which also are being followed at present:

4 *dhan* = 1 *rati*

6 *rati* = 1 *anna*

4 *annas* = 1 *sikki*

2 *sikki* = 1 *adhali*

2 *adhali* = 1 *rupee*

16 *rupees* = 1 gold *mohar* of 180 grains troy

## Measurement of Cloth

The following units were followed to measure the cloth:

3 *jab* = 1 *anguli* or finger breadth

3 *anguli* = 1 *gira*

8 *gira* = 1 *hath* or cubit of 18 inches

2 *hath* = 1 *gaz* or yard

To measure the length of the cloth the Bodo weavers followed another traditional method called *muh*, which means cubit. It is an ancient system of measurement. It measures from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger which lengths about 45 cm or 18" to 22". However the Bodo *muh*, measures from the central point of the two chests to the end of the middle finger. Other than the Bodos the neighbouring

people measured the cubit with the term *haat*. Another method of measuring length was measured with the folded fingers called *muttom* by the Bodos. The *chaddar* or *jwmgra* one of the garments of the women was being measured three *muh* in length and two *muh* in breadth.<sup>28</sup>

## Measurement of Land

To measure the land the following units were used:

3 *jab* = 1 *anguli*

4 *anguli* = 1 *muti*

3 *muti* = 1 *bigat*

2 *bigat* = 1 *hath*

5 *hath* = 1 *chhatak*

16 *chhatak* = 1 *katha*

20 *katha* = 1 *bigha*, equivalent to 14,400 square feet.

In the Habraghat Fiscal Division different methods of land measuring was in vogue. These were as follows:

14 *haths* or cubits = 1 *tar* or pole

60 *tar* or 840 *hath* in length by 8 *tar* or 112 *hath* in breadth make one *hal* = 17 *bigha*, 4 ½ *katha*, or a little less than six acres.

The indigenous people of the Khuntaghat Fiscal Division under Goalpara district used the following methods for measuring the land. Such as-

12 *hath* = 1 *tar* or pole.

60 *tar* in length by 10 in breadth = 1 *hal*. This *hal* was again divided into 16 parts known as *annas*, each of which was equal to about 1 *bigha* and 1 ½ *katha*.

There were again other standards for measuring the lands in the district. These were:

4 *anguli* = 1 *muti*

11 *muti* = 1 *gaz* or English yard

40 *gaz* in length by 40 in breadth = 1 *don*

20 *don* = 1 *bishi*, equivalent to 20 *bigha*

## Measurement of Distance

Again to measure the distance the following units were used as -

3 *jab* = 1 *anguli*

4 *anguli* = 1 *muti*

3 *muti* = 1 *bigat*

2 *bigat* = 1 *hath*

2 *hath* = 1 *gaz*

4 *hath* = 1 *dhanu*

1000 *dhanu* = 1 *tal*

2 *tal* = 1 *kos*

4 *kos* = 1 *yojan*

Generally, a *kos* is considered to be 2 miles, but at the same time in Goalpara *kos* was equivalent to 1 mile, 1 furlong, 3 poles, 3 ½ yards in English measure.

Besides that, to measure the commodities one of the devices called *Tulachani*, the weighing scale was commonly used by the indigenous people in the village *hats*. It was made of bamboo with two circular trays which are suspended with strings from the both ends of a round shape stick wooden pole. For measuring the liquids the bamboo *sungas* were also used by the indigenous people. It was due to lack of the uniformity of weights and measure systems from place to place many illiterate villagers were preyed by the unscrupulous traders. The provisions of Assam Weights and Measures (enforcement) Act, 1958, was enacted to meet the challenges of non uniformity in

measuring, metric system of weights and measures in the district of Goalpara since 1962.<sup>29</sup>

### **Land Owning *Mahajan* (Richman) and Landless Labour Classes**

Generally the Bodos possess the simple virtue of high value such as simplicity, honesty, truthfulness and trustworthiness by nature. But, occasionally they had adverse effect on them. Taking advantage of the simplicity and honesty some sections of the covetous land owning *mahajans* perpetrated exploitation by means of oppressive policies to the landless poor class in society. To witness the status of *Mahajan* and labourer class in the society, Mohini Mohan Brahma emphasized following systems as mentioned below<sup>30</sup> :

**Money Lending Policy:** It was undoubtedly the money lending policy that had been prevailing in Goalpara district that had much impact on the Bodo society. Though this system of money lending was profitable for the money lenders, it was harmful to the borrowers. The system of giving money in advance on certain conditions was known as *dharta* or *dadana prata* by them. According to the system, money was given by a village *mahajan* or a businessman to the poor borrower on certain agreements when the borrower asked for it to meet their urgent necessities. The agreement was made verbally at the will of the money lender with assurance that money would be returned in kind. Since the rate of interest was fixed by the money lender, the borrower had to deposit large portion of paddy to the money lender. Moreover, due to non realization of the agreement at the stipulated time, the interest was calculated double at 50 percent in terms of paddy. In this way after some years the payable amount of borrower became too high due to the inclusion of compound interest and ultimately the debtor had to lose the lands to the creditor.

**Land Mortgage:** The system of land mortgage in a large scale played a harmful role against the poor Bodos. According to this system a poverty stricken villager approached a *mahajan* to borrow money with a proposal of pledging his land in favour of the latter. As per the agreement, the *mahajan* agreed to lend the money and the land of the borrower went under the possession of *mahajan* for certain period of time. Generally, the agreement also prescribed some conditions that the land concerned would

be forfeited to the *mahajan* in the event of failure of the debtor to repay the debt within the stipulated time. It was a fact that through this system many of the borrowers failed to regain their lands from the *mahajans* and finally the lands came under the possession of the *mahajans* as per the conditions mentioned earlier.

***Adhiar System:*** By this system of *adhiar*, a landless poor peasant cultivated the land of a *mahajan* on condition that half of the products from the cultivated land would be given to the latter. Moreover, if the peasant borrowed paddy from the *mahajan* in the past or during the course of cultivation he had to pay another quantity of paddy from his own share.

***Dhana or Dahwna System:*** This system was the contract of labour executed between a poor male peasant and a *mahajan* on certain condition which is called the *dhana* system among the Bodos. According to this system, the peasant resides in the house of the *mahajan* and cultivates his land and renders all other domestic services as instructed by the latter. During the summer contract it tends effective from the early part of *Bwisag* or *Bohag* month (April-May) to the end of *Ashin* (September-October). For this six months period of rendering services to the *mahajan*, a peasant was paid 7 to 10 *maunds* of paddy as his remuneration. In this way a poor peasant had to defend his family with this source of income.

***Ruathi System:*** This was also a contract of labour agreed between a poor village woman or girl and a *mahajan* under certain conditions. As per the agreement she stayed in the house of the latter for doing all kinds of domestic works including paddy plantation for the period of six months just like in *dhana system*. For this period of service, she was paid 6 *maunds* and 10 kilograms of paddy as her remuneration. After the end of the term she may again re-enter into another agreement for six months on the remuneration of a pair of *dokhnas* and a piece of scarf only.

It was also obvious that the poor peasants were also found sending their children to the rich village families for the means of living as a cowherds and baby sitters in lieu of meager remunerations.

Regarding the landless labour classes W.W. Hunter also described as many as seven different classes of people in the Goalpara district who owned no land of their own. These were<sup>31</sup>:

Firstly, persons were regularly engaged in service and received amounts from 8 *annas* to Rs. 1. 8. 0, or from 1s to 3s. These people were called as *chakar*, like the *dhana* system of the Bodos.

Secondly, persons had been paid certain amount of money in advance. In this case the borrower himself cultivated the land of the lender in lieu of interest. This type of contract was called *panjali*.

Thirdly, under the *adhiar* or *adhi halua* system, the cultivator had to share the outcome of the production equally with the proprietor. However, in this system the *adhiar* had to pay extra from their share as a rent of land to the proprietor.

Fourthly, persons having no lands of their own cultivated the land of the proprietor with their own plough and oxen had to share the produce equally with the proprietor without extra sharing for the rent of land to the latter. These were termed as *prajas*.

Fifthly, the most prominent system was *chukani*. Under this system the persons cultivated the land of other and had to give rent for the land as well as render services to the land owner for certain stated days.

Sixthly, persons cultivated the land of the owner without paying any rent for the land but had to cultivate additional plots of land of the same owner without any payment. This sort of additional service of land was termed as *chakaran* lands.

Lastly, it was a contract between a person and a land owner. As per the contract a person occasionally cultivated the land of an owner and lived in the owner's family on the condition that the owner would give him his daughter in marriage or arrange another wife for him if necessary. But, in case of violating the agreement the cultivator had to pay certain stated of sum of money as damages to the owner.

## **Industries**

In 1929, the Government of Assam in the memorandum written to 'Royal Commission on Labour' mentioned that Assam was an agricultural province having no big towns and industrial centres. The tea industry was the largest and most important industry and was primarily agricultural. Apart from the tea industry there were some other small industries with large labourer supply like coal mines, oil fields and match factory. The saw mills, rice mills, oil mills and printing presses were also scattered in the province. There was neither pressure of population as an agricultural province nor indigenous industrial classes in Assam. However, there were some skilled and unskilled sections of indigenous casual labourers to meet the general requirements of the people namely agricultural labourers, potters, blacksmiths and carpenters. But, based on the demand of large labourers supply in the industries the labourers had to be imported from other parts of India irrespective of caste and creed.<sup>32</sup> It was very difficult to identify and place the distinction between the capitalist and the labourers. Firstly, because most of the people were self employed and rarely found working for hire. They generally manufactured products in their own homes. Secondly, no class of workers was hereditarily attached to any particular trade. Each village had self sufficient socio-economy units with skilled persons.<sup>33</sup>

## **Small Scale Industries**

The small industries of the Goalpara district during the British colonial period were making of brass and iron utensils and instruments, gold and silver cup and ornaments, knitting, sewing, cloth weaving, oil-pressing, carpentry and pottery. It is to be mentioned that the copper or brass cup was known as *kansa* made by the brazier and the silver tray known as *thaggi* or *sarai* made by the goldsmiths which were peculiar to Assam. In the district majority of the people excelled in weaving their own garments, constructing their own houses and making their own baskets. For the purpose of doing this they collected essential materials from the neighbouring jungles. However, there was absence of manufacturing classes exclusively in the Eastern *Duars*. The Bodos living in great majority in the Eastern *Duars* were primarily agriculturist in spite of that they made their own cloths, mats, baskets etc. They purchased other essential articles such as brass and utensils from the nearby shops. They also procured earthen vessels



from the potters who exchanged it for rice, paddy, mustard oil etc. The article commonly manufactured and sold in the Eastern *Duar* was a coarse silk cloth which was popularly known as *eri* or *endi* cloth made of the produce of silkworms which fed on the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*). It had a wide demand with the quality of strong, durable and warm fabric. The Bodos also manufactured boats or canoes known as *dungas* which also had the combined trade with their chief occupation of agriculture. The boats were made of cut tree trunks by hollowing it.<sup>34</sup> Besides that the Bodos also made agricultural implements such as *nangal* (plough), *Moi* (harrow), *bedha* (large wooden rake), mallet etc. by themselves for the purpose of using them in the agricultural fields.<sup>35</sup> There was neither an evidence of mines and quarries work nor gold washing carried out in any river beds or streams in the district of Goalpara.<sup>36</sup>

### **Sericulture and Handloom**

Sericulture was an essential part of cottage industry in the Goalpara district. The people of the district took it as a subsidiary occupation for them during the agricultural off-season. There were three varieties of silk in Assam. Among them *pat* was the costliest, *endi* was coarser and was generally used by the common people. The *muga* was stouter, coarser and less glossy than *pat* but more durable than the latter. However, in the district of Goalpara only the silk of *endi* worm was most commonly reared by the people.<sup>37</sup> It has been mentioned by H.K. Barpujari that only the women of respectability manufactured *endi* cloths among the Bodos.<sup>38</sup> For apparels, Bodo women used to weave cloths for themselves from the *muga* and *eri* or *endi* silk. Generally the clothes woven in Golpara were inferior in texture to that of the Upper Assam but had more durability in quality. The *endi* cloth had extensive sale demand. For an instance, according to the fineness of its texture a piece of 18 feet length by 4 feet breadth *endi* cloth had the sale value of price from Rs. 6 to Rs. 10 or 12s to £1.<sup>39</sup> B.C. Allen stated that Eastern *Duars* were the main silk producing region in the district.<sup>40</sup> In the Brahmaputra valley the locally made cloths came in large number in weekly markets of Kamrup, Nagaon and Goalpara. Invariably the Bodos of Kadam *maouza* in North Lakhimpur were considered as the best weavers as well as the cotton cloths made by the Bodos of Goalpara district was also highly praised for elaborately decorating the cloths with flowered borders.<sup>41</sup>

Generally, the produce of silk is obtained from the *endi* worm (*attacus ricini*). The worm derived its name from the *endi* or castor oil plant (*ricinus communis*)<sup>42</sup> which the Bodos called *endi*. The silk was produced in large quantity in the Eastern *Duars* where the Bodo population was dominant.<sup>43</sup> In producing the *endi* silk there were some procedures to be followed. The *endi* silkworm commonly fed on the *endi* or castor-oil plant leaves. The simple process followed was by unwinding the cocoons. The cocoons were generally boiled in water before being unwound and in case they were not treated they were kept together for some days with *amrita* and *madhu* fruit to rot. With this the process of spinning of threads commenced either with the hand or by means of spindle.<sup>44</sup>

Handloom weaving is an important cottage industry which has been flourishing in Assam since ancient period. It is practiced by the rich and the poor commonly and there has been absence of stigma on the caste or creed attached with it. In the district of Goalpara the weavers mainly used the raw materials of cotton and *endi* threads.<sup>45</sup> Both the rich and the poor commonly carried out the weaving of cotton clothes almost in every house courtyard. The loom comprised of four stout posts which are formally driven into the ground to make a rectangle of about 5' 10'' × 2' 6'' and are usually joined together at the top by cross beams.<sup>46</sup> Bodo women had been using notably various kinds of implements for weaving cloths which included *salkunta*, *tatsal*, *Kunta*, *Maku*, *gandwi*, *rasw*, *kilabari*, *ujunabari*, *kadini*, *baleb or sewari*, *gonsa*, *bangwja*, *gorai*, *gorka*, *bowdangi*, *tunjri*, *dirung* or *durung*, *mushra taokri*, *taokri solta*, *danganata*, *swrki gidir*, *swrki fisa*, *fogai*, *sal-saikong*, *nw hasung*, *boula* and *jenther*.<sup>47</sup> The Bodo women occupied an important role in weaving and the use of homemade garments and facilitated to bring family income. Among the principal articles woven were *patanis* clothes mainly worn by the women that are tied above the breast, large clothes known as *gilap* or *bor kapor*, smaller shawls called *pachara* and the *gamchas* or napkin.<sup>48</sup> The Bodo women preserved the culture of Bodos by the means of weaving cloths. They are expert and self sufficient in producing various kinds of cloths for domestic use. They are expert in portraying different *Agars* or designs on the cloths. They weaved *Dokona*, *gamsa*, *fasra*, *aronai* etc. in various colours and designs. By selling them in the market the Bodo women earned handsome money, which in greater sense expanded the market place of the Bodos.<sup>49</sup>

But with the advent of the British, the dark era began on the indigenous handloom weavings in Assam. The British from the very beginning had very keen interest to find markets to sell their Lancashire products. The indigenous weavings of Assam faced tough competition with British mill made cheap goods which dominated the markets even in the remote villages of Assam. Due to the increasing pressure of competition, the traditional weavers left their age old occupation in search of other avenues of job.<sup>50</sup>

Gurudev Kalicharan one of the socio-economic reformers among the Bodos in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries took initiatives to revive the textile and handloom among the Boods by establishing weaving centers in 1925. Its main objective was to enrich the culture and economic condition of the Bodo family by engaging the Bodo women in that newly established weaving centers.<sup>51</sup>

## **Banking, Trade and Commerce**

**Banking:** As observed by W.W. Hunter there was no banking establishments in Goalpara till 1879. The periodic loans were conducted by shopkeepers and wealthy landholders who combined their regular trade along with money lending.<sup>52</sup> During the Pre- British period the economy of the country was mainly based on the barter system, where the exchange of commodity to commodity took place. The use of credit money was hardly found as the money was scarcely available to the public for day to day transaction instead smaller denominations such as *cowries* or conch-shells were used for minor transactions. Meanwhile, the British administration introduced currency system for transactions in Assam, thus it made the people well acquainted with the new system. The growth of free trade and commerce in the region attracted the large number of traders and businessmen from outside Assam. Mainly the Marwari merchants from Rajasthan and Bengali merchants from Bengal established their respective commercial enterprises in different trade centers of the district. They acted as a banking institute in the rural economy. Besides investing money on the trade they used to lend money to the people at the rate of profitable interest. The Marwari and other merchant lenders advanced loan for short terms to the village agriculturists. In 1909, The Cooperative Town Bank was registered at Dhubri which was regarded as the first banking institution organized in the cooperative sector. This bank was limited only to the needs and credit

of the Dhubri Municipal area. In this way banking institutions was followed by the Central Cooperative Banking Union at Dhubri, registered in 1917 and the Central Cooperative Banking Union at Bijni, registered in 1922 respectively. In 1929-30 there were as many as seven loan offices to enhance the loan to the general public. The United Bank of India also opened its branch at Dhubri on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1938. In spite of these banking developments and such credit facilities offered by the banking institutions, the money lenders retained their predominant position among the general public in the credit field in the Goalpara district. Naturally the people became the victim to the exploit of money lender. According to the Census Report of 1891, there were total 1,792 professional money lenders in the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. Thus the money lenders played an important role in the rural finance as a professional and semi professional.<sup>53</sup>

In the Eastern *Duars* also a few *mahajans* or the money lender played an important role as the rural financier. In the case of a borrower pawning some articles such as ornaments or house hold vessels, the lender never advanced the full value of the article pawned. As stated by W.W. Hunter, generally the people had to pay an interest at the rate of 6 *pies* in rupee in a month or 37 ½ percent per annum. In the case of advancing trivial to agricultural peasants, the rate of interest was charged from 24 to 30 percent per annum. The landed property was not sold in the Eastern *Duars*.<sup>54</sup>

**Barter System:** In early days before the invention of currency as a medium of exchange the barter system was extensively used by the people of entire world. Generally the barter system was the method of exchange of commodities for other commodities. Usually, the proclivity of necessities among the people tended for the origin of barter system in the absence of currency for exchange. It was undoubtedly the barter system that had streamed among the Bodos in the early days before the occurrence of the currency system. In 1905 B.C. Allen had described that in the Eastern *Duars* the trade was usually carried on by means of barter system<sup>55</sup> and as per the records found the Bodos were the major population in the eastern *Duars* of Goalpara district. There were some evidence of barter system in the village livelihood of the Bodos which could be drawn from such equitable relationships and activities of those days. These were described as follows:<sup>56</sup>

**Exchange of Edible Items:** The practice of exchanging eatable items for other items among the Bodos had subsisted. For an instance, exchange of prepared delicious curry with other was common among the Bodos. In the event of some graceful family occasions the hiring of livestock such as hen, pig, goat etc. were in vogue among them.

**Use of Cowry as Medium Exchange:** The introduction of the cowry as the medium of exchange made people a petty easier to exchange their needs. The Bodos used the cowries for the exchange of livestock animals, food and beverages, cloths and other commodities. Besides, it was observed that religious clerics of the Bodos used the cowries for baby child believing to avoid from any envious person.

**Exchange by Means of Maid Services:** *Dhana* (male servant), *ruwati* (maid), *bokali* (baby sitter) and *laokar* (cowherd) had been the common system of labour among the Bodos. It was the system of contract of labour agreed between the owner and the worker. According to this kind of labour system, as described by the Mohini Mohan Brahma the labour resided in the house of owner for certain period and rendered agricultural service and other domestic works and in exchange for it he/she was paid 7 to 10 *maunds* of paddy in kind. However the *Bokali* and *laokar* were paid less.<sup>57</sup>

**Exchange of Plant Saplings:** Generally the Bodo villages were surrounded with garden crops and other valuable plants. The valuable orchards such as betel-nut, coconut, mango, jack-fruit tree, bamboo, betel-leaf, plantain and others were commonly seen in the garden. Bodo villages being close to the nature, generally bartering of plant saplings with each other was practiced to a large extent.

**Exchange of Paddy Seed:** Agriculture was the primary source of livelihood of the Bodos in the colonial period. They inherited the tradition of paddy cultivation in the Brahmaputra valley from the very early times. Naturally for a good crop the seeds for sowing entailed a good quality. The practice of bartering of fine quality paddy seeds to enhance more outputs was in vogue among the Bodo villagers. They equally exchanged the seeds with any other items.

**Exchange of Selfless Services:** In the village life of the Bodos the sense of brotherhood is very core. Since the very early period the term *saori*, which means selfless service has been prevailing among the Bodos till date. According to this system

the villagers come forward to help someone's family in the village when needed. In various social and household activities such as reaping of crops, yarning of silk, chopping of wood, house building, in ceremonial activities etc. they worked selflessly and helped each other without receiving any kind of cash in return. This kind of social bondage among the Bodo villagers made village system well equipped.

**Exchange of Domesticated Animals (livestock):** Domesticating animal has been the common feature in the village livelihood of the Bodos. Cow, buffalo, goat, pig, dog, horse, fowl, duck and others are commonly domesticated in the Bodo villages. In the past, for an instance, a pair of bullock was exchanged with three cows. Besides, other domesticated animals were also exchanged based on the situation of requirement. It was a common belief that those families who owned more livestock were regarded as rich in the society.

**Thang Exchange with the Bhutaneses:** There used to be a frontier trade with Bhutan during the colonial period. The Bhutias frequently entered in the Eastern *Duars* for procuring necessary articles which were not found in their country. They also followed the barter system of exchange for commodities. They came down to the plains along with various commodities to obtain various foodstuffs through barter system. It was called *thang swlainai* (exchange) by the Bodos. H. K. Barpujari described that Bhutias (Bhutanese) brought mule-loads of rock-salt, gold-dust, musk, woolens, yak tails, Chinese silk etc. with them and carried back necessary commodities such as various kinds of cloths, raw silk and thread, rice and dried fish. The following routes were followed through which the Bhutias descended to the plains. They were Bijni, Sidli, Ripu, and Guma *duars* and entered the districts of Goalpara and Daranga (present Udalguri and Darrang) and proceeded to Kamrup.<sup>58</sup>

## **Trade and Commerce**

Due to the lack of proper communication system, scope for external trade was limited in the early times. The trans-frontier trade was carried out through the Eastern *Duars* and with the Garos on the border *hats*. They mainly followed the barter system in trade as a means of transaction. During the early British period the course of trade in Goalpara district was same as in the past. However, after the British occupation of

Assam in 1826, Goalpara was included in Assam as a separate district and thus the course of trade began to improve.<sup>59</sup> According to the census of 1891 as mentioned by H.K. Barpujari there were only 110 *hats* in Goalpara district.<sup>60</sup> There was no such kind of internal trade organization in Assam. The peasants raised crops only for own consumption and not with the commercial view.<sup>61</sup> Both the exports and import trade was in vogue in the district. As stated by W.W. Hunter, the main articles of the trade were rice, paddy, *kalai*, pulses of various kinds, jute, lac, *eri* and *muga* silk, *pipali* or long pepper, wax, *china*, *kaon*, mustard seed, ivory, oil, *sal* logs and other kinds of timber, castor-oil seeds, *til* seed (sesamum orientale), canes and rattans, molasses, tobacco, mats, cotton, various descriptions of earthen pots, brass and bell metal, cooking and household utensils, clarified butter, baskets, dried fish, country cloth, beads and other trinkets, *pan*, betel-nuts, wooden furniture such as stools and boxes and long country knives, vegetables and fruits, reeds, grass and bamboos. Besides, considerable numbers of animals such as cows, bullocks, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs etc. were also simultaneously traded.<sup>62</sup> **Table 5.1** shows the estimate of export and import trade of Goalpara district from 1868 to 1873.

The main seats of trade and commerce in the Goalpara district were Bilasipara, Bijni, Dhubri, Jogigopha, Dumaria, Gauripur, Patamari, Agamani, Simlabari, Kherbari, Dimakari, Bagribari, Marnali, Rangjuli, Damra, Jira, Nibari, Singimari, Rajabala, Putimari, Manikachar, Karaibari and Dalo. Literally, the local trades were carried on by means of periodical fairs on the occasion of religious festivals as well as at the permanent markets.<sup>63</sup> In the Census Report of Assam, 1931, C.S. Mullan stated that less than 3 percent of the total number of earners and working dependents were associated with trade.<sup>64</sup> As mentioned by B.C. Allen, there were five main places at which the seasonal fairs were held in the Goalpara district till 1905 (as shown in the **Table 5.2**).<sup>65</sup>

**Table 5.1 - Estimated Import and Export Trade of Goalpara District<sup>66</sup>**

(Note: mds=maunds)

ARTICLES	IMPORTS				
	1868-69	1869-70	1870-71	1871-72	1872-73
Salt	56,920 mds.	45,418 mds.	48,719 mds.	55,797 mds.	54,444 mds.
Rice and other staples	499,596 mds.	498,999 mds.	566,773 mds.	497,986 mds.	586,949 mds.
Sugar	2,726 mds.	2,515 mds.	2,636 mds.	3,117 mds.	3,001 mds.
Oil	10,113 mds.	12,113 mds.	13,115 mds.	12,960 mds.	15,690 mds.
Ghi	5,033 mds.	5,383 mds.	5,061 mds.	5,668 mds.	6,747 mds.
Tobacco	8,772 mds.	7,334 mds.	9,732 mds.	9,873 mds.	10,773 mds.
Cotton Thread	107 bales	103 bales	97 bales	115 bales	127 bales
Silver	3,102 tolas	1,994 tolas	3,300 tolas	3,468 tolas	3,684 tolas
Gold	6,607 tolas	7,031 tolas	6,934 tolas	8,811 tolas	8,644 tolas
Metals	5,691 mds.	6,720 mds.	6,654 mds.	8,096 mds.	8,523 mds.
Piece-goods	4,000 bales	4,100 bales	3,900 bales	4,20 bales	4,300 bales
Iron	4,680 mds.	5,330 mds.	6,344 mds.	6,440 mds.	6,116 mds.
Miscellaneous articles	100,000 mds.	116,775 mds.	106,973 mds.	112,280 mds.	160,612 mds.
EXPORTS					
Sarisha or mustard-seed	198,179 mds.	207,269 mds.	227,585 mds.	242,562 mds.	252,083 mds.
Cotton	11,428 mds.	12,049 mds.	17,671 mds.	18,457 mds.	19,857 mds.
Lac	11,346 mds.	9,949 mds.	11,637 mds.	14,225 mds.	15,336 mds.
India-rubber	2,335 mds.	3,055 mds.	3,746 mds.	4,256 mds.	5,801 mds.
Ivory	95 mds.	86 mds.	97 mds.	105 mds.	119 mds.
Eria cloth	2,055 pieces	2,150 pieces	1,997 pieces	2,076 pieces	2,595 pieces
Pipah or long pepper	197 mds.	208 mds.	287 mds.	336 mds.	320 mds.
Muga silk	95 mds.	86 mds.	76 mds.	101 mds.	120 mds.
Jute	2,595 mds	4,035 mds.	5,935 mds.	6,504 mds.	11,076 mds.
Rhinoceros horns	8 mds	7 mds.	9 mds.	12 mds.	11 mds.
Manjit	765 mds.	995 mds.	795 mds.	806 mds.	959 mds.
Til-seed	576 mds.	1,232 mds.	1,291 mds.	2,119 mds.	1,851 mds.

Source: W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam, Volume II*, p. 77



**Table 5.2 - List of Fair or Mela Held on Certain Months with Estimated Numbers of People Attending**

Name of the place at which fair is held	Parganas in which situated	Date or Month on which held	Estimated number of people attending
Chhatrasal	Ghurla	Middle of March	25,000
Dalgoma	Habraghat	End of January or beginning of February	700 or 800
Dhubri	Jamira	Middle of April	5,000
Gauripur	Jamira	Middle of April	3,000
Gauripur	Jamira	Middle of July	3,000

*Source:* B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara*, The Government of Assam, DHAS, 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), p. 103.

There were small shops found all over the district. There were also weekly *hats* held on certain days in most of the villages. The petty traders known as *bsania bepari* or moving traders visited almost in every village for the purpose of exchange or sale or purchase of certain articles. The adjoining *hats* with Garo frontier such as Damra, Jira, Nibari and Patamari etc. were generally held once in a week where large numbers of Garos attended in the winter season. They brought the produce of their village for sale and purchased in exchange other requisites for them by means of barter.<sup>67</sup> The following were the main items of exports such as mustard seed, jute, cotton, timber, lac, rice, fish, silk cloth, betel-nuts and small quantities of wax and ivory. The principal articles received as imports in the district were European piece goods, salt, hardware, oil, tobacco, gram and pulses, flour, sugar, molasses, spices, brass and bell metal utensils, gold and silver articles, chinaware, paper, spirits, *ganja*, opium, musical instruments, spades, knives, cotton thread, butter etc.<sup>68</sup>

In the Eastern *Duars* the internal trade was generally carried on by means of barter system<sup>69</sup>, where the Bodo people mostly habited.<sup>70</sup> The principal articles of exports from the Eastern *Duars* included rice, paddy, mustard seed, *endi* cloth, cotton, India-rubber, *ashu*, timber and boats. In exchange of it, articles such as brass vessels, earthen vessels, salt, oil, cloth, tobacco, spices, cocoa-nuts, beads etc. were the main imported items. As observed by W.W. Hunter, there was no large seats of commerce, fairs, religious festivals or permanent markets in the Eastern *Duars*. The only manufacture item of Bodo which formed as an article of trade was the *eri* or *endi* silk cloth. In the tract neither the exports nor imports were of large extent. The crops were produced enough only for local wants.<sup>71</sup>

## **Forests and Trade**

The British realized that forest resources could bring an unending source of revenue for them. Therefore, as soon as possible they established their exclusive control over the flora and fauna of the province. The government had no policies for the conservation of the forests till 1879. The involvement of the indigenous people with the forest was limited to the collection of wood for building of houses, boat building and other materials along with daily essential for fuel logs, thatch, reeds and canes. In the beginning the people did not take any advantage to exploit this new area of economic activities. The commercialization of forest began in Assam when the Bengal merchants started to expand their commercial operation. The absence of commercial class in the province facilitated golden opportunity for the flow of external capital. The commercial capital was followed by the industrial capital and the forest of Assam offered them unending quarries.<sup>72</sup>

Along with the growth of tea, coal and oil industry, the growth of timber trade was recognized as the new industry in Assam. The large requirement of timber for the manufacture of tea chests, railway sleepers, bridges, planking, posts, buildings, and for various uses by the municipality and local boards, made the exploitation of the existing forests of Assam an urgent necessity.<sup>73</sup>

Next to the boat, the elephants were recognized as most useful means of communication by the rich person, even the government officials, the mauzadars, the

planters, the contractors and the *satradhikars* possessed it. The policy of free to hunt and catch the elephants continued in Assam till 1874. The new regulation was enforced by the government after 1874-1875. The elephant *mahal* or the rights for catching of elephants in those tracts was sold in auction. However as per the auction for every captured elephant the amount Rs. 100 had to be paid as royalty.<sup>74</sup> Besides, a considerable trade of wild elephants was carried on with the Garos, and thus many of the hunters from Purniah, Rangpur, Mymensing etc., came to capture the elephants from the jungles.<sup>75</sup>

**Table 5.3 - Name of the Trees in Local Language and Their Botanical Names**

Local names of the trees	Botanical names
<i>Sal</i>	Shorea robusta
<i>Sissu</i>	Dalbergia sissoo
<i>Khayer</i>	Acacia catechu
<i>Chelauni</i>	Schima vel Gordonia mollis
<i>Gambhari</i>	Gamelina arborea
<i>Pama</i>	Cedrela toona
<i>Chama</i>	Artocarpus chaplasha
<i>Shilikha</i>	Cetrena
<i>Uriam</i>	Andrachne trifoliata
<i>Jambora kadam</i>	Nauclea kadamba
<i>Singari</i>	Castanea
<i>Odal</i>	Sterculia urens
<i>Gandh sarai</i>	Camphora glandulifera
<i>Bargachh</i>	Ficus elastica
<i>Simul</i>	Bombax Malabaricum

**Source:** W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Trubner & Co., London, 1879, p. 24. & B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara*, Government of Assam, DHAS, 1905, p. 80.

In the district of Goalpara many of the large and important forests situated at the Eastern *Duars* yielded good amount of profit. The trade of *sal* timber in the Porbotjowar and other *parganas* of the district contributed to earn wealth and prosperity of the

district. It was also an important source of income of the landholders and landlords of Porbotjowar area. Their total income was estimated at £3000 per annum. Besides, the *sal* trees and some other valuable trees available (as shown in **Table 5.3**) in the Eastern *Duars* of Goalpara district were traded as well as used for various manufacturing.

The above mentioned trees such as *gambhari* and *chama* were mainly used for boat-building and general purposes. The *pama* was also used for making canoes and furniture. In addition to that numerous kinds of trees such as bamboos, canes and some other trees filled the dense forests and jungles of the Goalpara district. However, the woodcutters from Bengal poured into the Eastern *Duars* of Goalpara district and exploited the *sal* timbers. Even they cut down a number of other useful trees which were left lying on the ground. W.W. Hunter had pointed the statement of timber-cutters' that each cutter brought down at least fifty logs and in the meantime logs were realized at Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 per pair in the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>76</sup> Among the wild vegetable products a considerable number of local medicinal plants and herbs were also available in the jungles of the district. The Bodos and other tribes had accumulated the knowledge of such herbal medicines from the forest for curing various diseases which are still in vogue in some village life. The jungle products and the timbers provided subsistence of living to the castes and tribes such as Bodo, Rabha, Garo, Rajbansi and Hajong by means of trading. Every year about six hundred boats came from Sirajganj, Dacca and some other natives of Bengal for the purpose of purchasing timber. Thus the total value of trafficking of timber as noted by W.W. Hunter was amounting to £12,000 per annum.<sup>77</sup>

The government demands for the logs were also for the construction of the railways. After 1880, the construction of railway lines was given more impetus when the government developed a New Guarantee system. By 1882 and 1900 the construction progressed more rapidly averaging 744 miles per year. The government demand of logs was also for other reasons. But public also depended on them as essential material for construction purposes. The forest materials like boats, dugouts, logs, posts, piece, canes, reeds and thatching were exported to Rangpur, Mymensing, Bogra and Pabna of eastern Bengal district.<sup>78</sup>

There were several valuable forest tracts in the Eastern *Duars*, Sidli Duars and Chirang *Duars*. The following were the list of different forest tracts in the respective *Duars* with their certain estimated areas.

**Bijni Duar:** In the Bijni *Duar* there was the forest known as Khairbana or forest of *khair* (Catechu) tree with areas of 8039 acres or 12.56 square miles.

**Sidli Duar:** There were seventeen *Sal* forests. These were:

- (i) Hultagaon with area 2676 acres
- (ii) Salbari Barabathani with area 7421 acres
- (iii) Bhugamguni (part of) with area 1372 acres
- (iv) Parsangaon (part of) with area 175 acres
- (v) Bansbari (part of) with area 1856 acres
- (vi) Salbari Karigaon with area 2312 acres
- (vii) Khetipuri with area 7474 acres
- (viii) Abulgaon with area 1094 acres
- (ix) Udhabgaon with area 1578 acres
- (x) Narikola Karipota with area 1531 acres
- (xi) Dhuliagaon Jhar with area 2590 acres
- (xii) Chaudharigaon Jhar with area 1403 acres
- (xiii) Kektibari with area 5864 acres
- (xiv) Chhotagaon Jhar with area 2928 acres
- (xv) Chedamari Dumrigaon with area 2907 acres
- (xvi) Patgaon Dhopguri with area 3839 acres
- (xvii) Pundibari Jhar (part of) with area 580 acres.

**Chirang Duar:** There were thirteen valuable *sal* forests in the Chirang *Duar*. These were as follows:

- (i) Laimati Jhar with area 19,678 acres
- (ii) Bhumigaon Jhar with area 25,253 acres
- (iii) Panbari Jhar with area 6340 acres
- (iv) Chikli Jhar with area 16,159 acres
- (v) Gandagaon Jhar (part of) with area 1775 acres

- (vi) Pakhihagi Jhar with area 9340 acres
- (vii) Kachubari Jhar Totpara with area 10,094 acres
- (viii) Banglar Jhar with area 4842 acres
- (ix) Singmajani with area 8520 acres
- (x) Sotaguri with area 69442 acres
- (xi) Gubdagaon Aphal ( part of) with area 11,130 acres
- (xii) Janagaon with area 8895 acres and
- (xiii) Janagaon Jhar with area 28,325 acres.

**Ripu Duar:** There were three main forests in the Ripu *Duars* which were as follows:

- (i) Sarigaon Jhar with area 7232 acres
- (ii) Natugaon Jhar with area 22,226 acres
- (iii) Kachugaon Jhar with area 12,177 acres

**Guma Duar:** The only forest in this *Duar* was the *Salbari* with an area of 15,779 acres.<sup>79</sup>

## **Transport and Communication**

One of the important economic features of the nineteenth century was the introduction of the steam engine, land transport and the railway. The application of these new means of communication system facilitated to travel long distance within a short period of time. It also privileged the people to carry the commodities at a very cheap rate irrespective of any climatic condition. When the British occupied Assam, the condition of transport and communication in the province was not up to the mark, most of the areas were covered by dense jungles stretching for hundreds of miles throughout the steep hills and deep valleys. Therefore, the inhabitants only prepared boat, elephant and *palki* (palanquin) for the means of communication. Railways were unheard at that period.<sup>80</sup> Describing the means of communication H.K.Barpujari had stated that ponies or pack-bullocks were unknown and even a single bullock cart was not seen till the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Assam.<sup>81</sup> Again D.P. Barooah mentioned that the travelers used horses, ponies, elephants, bullock drawn carts, palanquins, country boats and rafts for the means of communication. The horse was used for both royal messenger and ordinary travelers. In the early times the palanquin and the chariot (*rath*) was used

by the royal families. Till the early part of twentieth century the palanquin was most commonly used by the people of the district as a means of conveyance.<sup>82</sup>

From the very ancient past the district of Goalpara had a close trade and cultural relations with the rest of India and the neighbouring foreign countries. The district has been geographically favouring since the mighty Brahmaputra river flows through it and paved advantage for the natural waterway to the other country and its tributaries used for various internal trade and commerce. The *Duars* or the passes on the northern part of the district namely Bijni, Sidli, Chirang, Ripu and Guma *Duars* were important outlets to Bhutan to Tibet and China. In the medieval period one of the important roads constructed during the reign of Koch king Naranarayan in 1547 was known as Gohain Kamal *Ali*, which stretched from Koch Bihar to Narayanpur in the Lakhimpur district of Assam. In 1837, M'Cosh observed that the most frequent route from Assam to Calcutta was down the river Brahmaputra *via* Jennai to the Pabna and then to the Ganga and finally to Calcutta through the Matabanga or the Jellingi. In those days the journey from Goalpara to Calcutta took from 25 to 30 days, while for the round up journey it took 8 days longer.<sup>83</sup> Observing the importance of communication system, Captain Jenkins had realized that development of the province of Assam entirely depended on the improvement of the communication system. With this view as objective he sought to set apart a certain percentage of revenue for the repair and construction of roads.<sup>84</sup>

**Waterways:** During the early days of the British intervention in the province of Assam the means of communication with the outside world was usually prepared by the water ways.<sup>85</sup> It was obvious that being the riverine province the country made boat was used as the principal mode of transportation and the river Brahmaputra became the great traffic for waterway. Besides the river Brahmaputra, other rivers such as Kallong, Subansiri, Dihing, Dhansiri, Dikhou and Manas were all navigable during the rainy seasons for the purpose of carrying internal and external trade.<sup>86</sup> In the Eastern *Duars* some of the major navigable rivers were Manas, Dalani, Pakajani, Aai, Kana-Makra, Champamati, Gaurang, Saralbhanga, Gangia, Gurupala and Gadadhar or Sankos. These were navigable only in the rainy season by the country made boats of about 100 *maunds* or 4 tons of weights.<sup>87</sup> At that time Brahmaputra was the only route which enabled to connect the province with the rest of Indian provinces. There was no single government

steamer in the province to ply on the river. Therefore the tea companies and the traders had to rely largely on the private country made boats. The native boats capacity of carrying was only 300 *maunds* and its cost was Rs. 250 each.<sup>88</sup>

The traditional mode of transportation continued till 1848 when the government steamer began to ply between Calcutta and Gauhati (present Guwahati). The experiment was successful and usually in 1860 the India general Steam Navigation Company made a contract with the government to regulate a pair of vessels every six weeks to Assam. After two decades a daily service of mail steamer was started from Dibrugarh to Dhubri in 1884. Likewise, a steamer plied from Dhubri to Jatrapur which had been connected by rail with Calcutta in 1884. Dhubri, Bilasipara, Goalpara and Dalgoga were the ports in the district of Goalpara. In 1905, a round up journey steamer carrying the mails ran every day from Dhubri to Gauhati. Large cargo steamers with attendants visited the ports of the district, but the freight charge was naturally high.<sup>89</sup>

The river system and its services to the province played an important role in maintaining the means of communication between Assam and the rest of India. Two major routes such as Assam-Calcutta and Cachar-Calcutta were primarily used to operate the transportation. Of these two the Assam- Calcutta route was main water transport route stretching from Dibrugarh to Calcutta passing through Goalpara, Jogighopa and Dhubri in the Goalpara district and east Bengal (present Bangladesh). Meanwhile, most of the articles such as tea, mineral oil, jute and timber in large quantity were exported from Assam through this route.<sup>90</sup>

**Roadways:** In 1879, W.W. Hunter mentioned that under the management of the Public Works Department (PWD) the only portion of the Assam Grand Trunk Road which entered from Kamrup Dhupdhara and in Habraghat *pargana* was found as the main road in Goalpara. Till 1871, Assam Trunk Road was completed up to Agia in the Mechpara *pargana* of Goalpara district. But, after the formation of the Chief Commissionership of Assam, it was subsequently constructed to join the Bengal system of road. Other roads in the district under the management of Public Works Department were road from Goalpara to Singimari with a distance of 64 miles in length and from Dhubri to Kerbari with a distance of 26 miles which joins the Koch Bihar road beyond the river Sankosh. The other roads under the District officer of the period were from Goalpara to Karaibari,



Goalpara to Jira, Goalpara to Lakshmipur, Jogigopha to Datma, Bijni to Raha in the neighbouring district of Kamrup. The conditions of these roads were considerably poor. Besides that another road extended from Jogigopha to Bijni. Moreover, other pathways of the district were from Damra to Dhupdhara, Damra to Salmara, Goalpara to Nibari, Kitkibari to Jira, Jogigopha to Raha, Salmara to Bijni, Jogigopha to Salmara, Jogigopha to Bilasipara *via* Salemcha and Hakma and Bilasipara to Gauripur which joined the road from Dhubri to Kherbari. The road from Raha to Bijni was further extended to Haldibari in the western *duars*. Based on the category of road towards the end of 1875-76 there were 46 miles of first class, 34 miles of second class and 300 miles of third class roads in the district of Goalpara.<sup>91</sup> As described by the B.C. Allen there were two main trunk roads which passed through the district. In the north the trunk road started from Dhubri, turning towards west and then to east which passed through the Kachugaon nearly 50 miles away. There were inspection bungalows at the places of Balajan, Paglarhat, Dingdinga, and Kachugaon and from there the road turned sharply to the east and passed through the eastern *duars* to Raha in Kamrup. The other inspection bungalows were at Saralbhangra, Garubhasa, Sidli, Papragaon, Bijni, and Raha. There was another route which passed to Dhubri to Bilasipara and thence through Chapar and North Salmara to Raha. Two roads from Bilasipara joined the trunk road a bit to the west of Patgaon or Saralbhangra and the eastern branch met at Garubhasa. Another road passed from Jogigopha through north Salmara which met the trunk road at the point at river *Aai*. To get access into Bengal there were two roads- one from Kachugaon and the other end from Pratapganj. To the South of the river Brahmaputra the trunk road ran from Dhupdhara on the border of the Kamrup to the Fakirganj opposite to Dhubri through the Lakhipur, Langrabhita, Baida, Agia, Krishnai and Rangjuli. Goalpara town was connected with this trunk road and by roads that met at Agia and a little point to the west of Krishnai. In 1904 there were 256.6 kilometers road maintained by the Public Works Department and 572.8 kilometers of road maintained by the Local Board altogether in the district of Goalpara. The roads in the district were not metalled at that time and the bridges were built of the wooden materials.<sup>92</sup>

**Railways:** The Bengal Railway Company was formed in 1901<sup>93</sup> and in the same year Dhubri was connected with Calcutta by rail of the Eastern Bengal State railway branch. The line entered the district at the Bishkhowa *nadi* and ran through the stations of

Golakganj, Balajan and lastly Gauripur to Dhubri. The Eastern Bengal railway further extended a new line from Golakganj and ran through the district of Goalpara and Kamrup to Brahmaputra at the opposite point of Guwahati, the Assam Valley branch of the Assam Bengal Railway. In 1905 the intermediate stations extended in Goalpara district such as at Basbari, Tipkai, Sisapani, Fakiragram, Kokrajhar, Basugaon, Abhayapuri and Bijni.<sup>94</sup> Since then no new lines had been extended in the district till the partition of the country while the creation of Pakistan disrupted the communication of railway links with the Calcutta. In 1948-49 a project of Rs. 8.9 crores had been taken up with an objective to link up railway between Assam and rest of India. Thus, a line from Alipurduar in the North Bengal to Fakiragram in Goalpara district had been extended. The line entered the district through the west of Srirampur, Gossaigaon, Chautara and to Fakiragram.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, the Bodo economy during the colonial period was one of self sustenance but in the later period with the onset of the industrial revolution the finished products yielded through modern technology began to flood the Indian markets hampering the small cottage industries. The role of the money lenders also brought havoc to the Bodo economy as they were not customized with the system. These developments ruined the Bodo economy.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>7</sup> S. Endle, *op.cit.*, pp. 12, 14.
- <sup>8</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol-II*, B.R. Publishing corporation, New Delhi, 1982 (Rpt.), p.54.
- <sup>9</sup> B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara*, The Government of Assam, DHAS, pp. 64-65.
- <sup>10</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
- <sup>11</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- <sup>13</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
- <sup>16</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 55.
- <sup>17</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 67
- <sup>18</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 55.
- <sup>19</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-75.

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- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-70 & W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 59-60.
- <sup>21</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 69.
- <sup>22</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 77.
- <sup>25</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 58-59.
- <sup>26</sup> D.P. Barooah, *Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara District*, Govt of Assam, 1979, p. 240.
- <sup>27</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 61-63.
- <sup>28</sup> Rabindra Nath Mosahary, *Social History of the Boros of Assam*, Unpublished thesis, NEHU, 1986, p. 123.
- <sup>29</sup> D.P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, p. 241.
- <sup>30</sup> Mohini Mohan Brahma, "Economic problems of the Bodo Kacharis and the role of village Mahajans versus financial institutions" in B.N. Bordoloi, *Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness*, TRI, Assam, 1986, pp. 23-25.
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- <sup>32</sup> C.S. Mullan, *Census of India, 1931, Volume III, Assam, Part I – Report*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1992, p. 124.
- <sup>33</sup> Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1999, pp. 27-28.
- <sup>34</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 74, 131.
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- <sup>40</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 85.
- <sup>41</sup> H.K. Barpujari, Vol-V, *op.cit.*, p. 95.
- <sup>42</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 84.
- <sup>43</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 117.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>45</sup> D.P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, pp. 177-178.
- <sup>46</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.
- <sup>47</sup> Meghnath Mosahary, *Boro Somajari Swdwmshri*, Kokrajhar, 2019, p. 25.
- <sup>48</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.
- <sup>49</sup> Ajanta Brahma, "Socio-Economic Life of the Boros and the Role of Women thereof" in *Basiram Jwhwlaio*, Souvenir, 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, BSS, Odalguri, 2011, p. 34.
- <sup>50</sup> D.P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, p. 177.
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- <sup>52</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 81.
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- <sup>55</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
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- <sup>58</sup> H.K. Barpujari, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>59</sup> D.P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, pp. 228-229.

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- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 75.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
- <sup>64</sup> C.S. Mullan, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
- <sup>65</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.
- <sup>67</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, & B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>69</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
- <sup>70</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 117.
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- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.
- <sup>78</sup> Rajen Saikia, *op.cit.*, pp. 134-135.
- <sup>79</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.
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- <sup>82</sup> D.P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, pp.247-248.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>84</sup> H.K. Barpujari, Vol-IV, *op.cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>85</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>86</sup> H.K. Barpujari, Vol –IV, *op.cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>87</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>88</sup> Priyam Goswami, *op.cit.*, pp.144-145.

<sup>89</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>90</sup> D. P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>91</sup> W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>92</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>93</sup> H.K. Barpujari, Vol-IV, *op.cit.*, p. 320.

<sup>94</sup> B.C. Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>95</sup> D. P. Barooah, *op.cit.*, p. 259.