

CHAPTER: III

TRADE FAIRS IN ASSAM DUARS

3.1 Introduction

Since time immemorial, frontier trade has been an essential facet of human civilization. Historically, Assam, since the time of Ahoms, shared a boundary in the Northern direction with the Himalayan region of Bhutan and Tibet.¹ The Pre-colonial Assam was a subsistence-oriented peasant society where a family produced merely for consumption.² Rice was the staple crop of the province and was cultivated extensively by the people of Assam. This is affirmed by the Muhammadan historian Shihabuddin, who acknowledged that '*the chief crop of the country is rice and the soil is fertile whatever they sow, or plant grows well.*'³ William Robinson also confirmed that '*The richness of the soil of Assam is suitable for any cultivation.*'⁴ Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, wrote that '*in Kamrupa, albeit the land is low, but is productive and commonly cultivated.*'⁵

Besides, the cultivation Assam was acclaimed for the art of weaving, sericulture, working in metal, ivory, wood, leather, clay, cane, bamboo etc.⁶ This autarky of Ahoms was applauded by Rajput General Ram Singha, who acknowledged that he had not seen such resourcefulness in any other parts of India.⁷ While on the autarky of the Ahoms Tavernier, stated that '*the Ahom kingdom produced all the necessary things for human subsistence, without depending on foreign supply. The kingdom has a mine of gold, silver, steel, iron and a great store of silk.*'⁸

Assam has a long tradition of maintaining trade relations with Bhutan. On the trade of the Ahoms, Shihabuddin Talish stated that '*in earlier times annually, the Raja sent a group of people to trade on the frontiers of Gauhati, and in exchange for their products, they bought goods such as salt, saltpetre, etc., and other products.*'⁹

Bhutan being a hilly country, agriculture was limited and had to resort to the plains for the essential merchandise. The frontier trade relationship between Assam and Bhutan was maintained through the periodic markets, haats, and trade fairs established in the Duars.

These periodic markets, haats, and trade fairs helped the people of the plains and hills maintain the equilibrium of surplus and shortfall of necessities.¹⁰ Moreover, the nexus of trade relations promoted cultural exchanges, technology transmission, and the learning of arts of turning out new manufacturers.¹¹ Each of the Duars had a market affixed for trade-in fact entire quantity of trade was dealt and approved through the Duars. Besides haats or market places annual trade fairs were held at important sites of the Duars.¹² Bhutan also allowed passage to the Assamese traders to trade with Tibet and China.¹³ Trade Fairs customarily held in January and February provided Bhutia merchants with a prospect to trade with the plains of Assam. During every winter of the year the merchants of Bhutan, Tawang and the bordering areas used to arrive at the plains of Assam with their products through Assam Duars. The Bhutia traders were fond of plain products especially, rice and dry fish, and they bartered them for salt.¹⁴ These exchanges proceeded for around a quarter of a year. For the transportation of products in the hilly region, mules and ponies were generally utilized. In the plain locale of Assam, bullock carts were utilized for moving merchandise to markets and fairs in the Duars region. Moreover, goods were also schlepped on backs or heads by humans.¹⁵ Assam Duars were the indispensable region that gave impetus to trade relations between Assam and Bhutan. The Bhutias came down to the plains through the courses of Bijni, Sidli, Ripu and Guma prompting Goalpara, Darrang passes and Kamrup.¹⁶ The principal commodities of imports were rubber, wax and ponies and the exports were cotton cloth, yarn and silk.¹⁷

The annexation of Assam after the Yandaboo treaty in 1828 linked the British and Bhutan frontiers¹⁸ and brought about an astounding commercial revolution. The resources of Assam Duars became the source of the Colonial Government for the accumulation of surplus revenue. Eventually, after cementing their hold over Assam the Colonial Government in order to exert political control over Bhutan, encourage trade relations and popularize English goods organized official trade fairs at various places in the vicinity of Assam Duars.

The Chief Commissioner of Assam, Richard Harte Keatinge reported about the trade of Assam in 1877-78 stating that *'the trade is insignificant and limited in scope..... it is primarily confined to petty barter transactions at the large annual fairs..... any significant expansion can hardly be anticipated. The lack of communications between this Province and neighbouring foreign countries is a formidable impediment to the frontier trade's material development. Routes suitable for trading purposes across the intervening hills have yet to be discovered, and establishing regular commercial intercourse under such*

conditions will undoubtedly be a lengthy process requiring a great deal of patience and money.'¹⁹

3.2 Mode of transaction

The genesis of monetization under the Ahoms can be traced from the sixteenth century onwards with the thriving of trade.²⁰ The Ahom king struck the first batch of local coins in form of gold in 1543 followed by the Koch kings in 1555.²¹ This trend was then followed by the Kacharis and Jaintias. However, it was not until 1663 that the coins made of various metals of gold, silver and cowries became common among the Ahoms.²² As regards to cowries, it was only used as an alternative for copper coins to fulfil the need of petty trade.²³ In the early part of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century sicca rup, mohar kara or cowrie (Kari) came into circulation.²⁴ It was during the reign of Gaurinath Singha that the Ahoms started minting and circulating Ad-maha (one-eighth of a rupee) and charity (one-sixteenth of a rupee) which circulated along with Koch Narayani currency.²⁵ Albeit of the fact that the Ahoms started minting coins in the late eighteenth century but the extent of their use for trade is ambiguous. This might be perhaps due to the fact that the local coins were in limited circulation or perhaps never adapted by the people inhabiting the Assam Duars. Therefore, frontier trade transactions in Assam Duars adhered to the age-old system of barter transactions along with the limited use of cowries.²⁶ But the intervention of the colonial government-initiated cash transactions in addition to the existing usage of cowries and barter system.

3.3 Restoration and establishment of trade fairs

In the vicinity of Assam Duars, since the Ahom period, there were several trade fairs that had a long history of trade contact with Bhutan. But the Burmese invasion of Assam ceased these trade fairs.²⁷ The British who fought against the Burmese during the course of the Anglo-Burmese war witnessed the economic and commercial prospects of Assam Duars. The British realized that the Bhutias being economically deficient depended on the plains of Assam Duars to procure essential commodities. Moreover, in the absence of regular markets the Bhutias raided, looted and blackmailed the inhabitants of Assam Duars for essential commodities.²⁸

After the annexation of Assam married with commercial policy, the colonial government realized the importance of reviving the trade fairs held in the foothills of Assam

Duars as an effective weapon to realize revenue and exercise political control over the Bhutias. Additionally, the British felt that trade fairs would discourage raids and would foster close interaction between Bhutias and the inhabitants of Assam Duars.²⁹

To attract the participation of the Bhutias and to add glamour, the organisers of the Udalguri trade fair organised song and dance performances, games, and sports, including horse races.³⁰ Besides, the distribution of Posa payment in cash expensive European goods was also presented to the Bhutias. Over time the Bhutias developed an appreciation of money through their transactions at these trade fairs and were increasingly drawn into these trade fairs because of the lucrative prices fetched for their articles. When the trade fairs slowly and steadily became an indispensable part of their lives, the British used them as a tool to fulfil their colonial interest in the region. However, after 1865, the position of Bhutan as strategic importance gained the attention and interest of the British; after failing to establish trade contacts through Leh and Ladakh, the British attempted to open Tibet to British trade via Eastern Himalayas.³¹ However, since the region beyond the Assam Duars was inhabited by the hostile tribes and this proved neither jovial nor optimistic for her colonial interest. Therefore, the British turned their attention to Bhutan to open her gates for British trade to Tibet.

3.4 Trade fairs in Assam Duars of Darrang district

There were three routes leading from Bhutan into Darrang, Viz, Dhansiri, Lakshmi and Doimara routes.³² The most important of these routes was the Dhansiri route, used by the Bhutia traders to attend the Udalguri trade fair. At the start of the trading season, the Gelling Raja used to set up a chauki at Amratol, because a considerable number of Bhutias from Tawang and Tibetans visited the Udalguri trade fair via this Amratol route³³, where each of the Bhutia traders was levied a small amount of salt before leaving for the plains and an amount of rice about two seers upon return from the plains, as well as some betel nuts, dried fish, and other articles of food.³⁴ These articles are extracted for Raja, who resided in the higher hills.

3.4.1 Udalguri Trade Fair

Udalguri, a town in the Mangaldai subdivision of the Darrang district was situated at 26° 46 ° N. and 92 ° 7 ° E., close to the foot of the Himalayas.³⁵ The name '*Udalguri*' is a commonly used term for an area since the advent of the British in Assam. However, the

origin of the name '*Udalguri*' is shrouded in mystery. There is a variety of assessments with respect to the origin of the name Udalguri. It is believed that in ancient times in the eastern part of the area close to the Bhutan hills there was a jungle called *Udalakpuri*. And as Rishimuni Udalak mediated in the jungle *Udalakpuri*, the area in time came to be known as Udalguri. However, this is unacceptable to many scholars since there is no definite evidence or witness about him inhabiting the area.

Another consideration on the origin of the name Udalguri is Orkla + Gundri = Ordlagondri. Which is in fact the most acceptable view on the origin of the name Odalguri. Another belief on the origin of the term Odalguri is that in the past, the rivers Golondi, Khawrong, Dwisam, and Dhansiri that flows from Bhutan, inundated the area during the monsoon season and in the winter floodplains area covered with sand. Witnessing this scene probably the Bodos of the area named the area '*Ordlagundri*'.³⁶ (wide sandy place).

Udalguri was a forest area, filled with Odal trees, and various utilities of day-to-day life such as clothes, fishing nets, and ropes were prepared. In addition, odal trees were also used as firewood, for constructing houses and also on the floor of the clump of odal trees haats and rural justice (village panchayats) were convened. Hence, Odal trees were extensively used by the inhabitants of Udalguri in various works. From the extensive use of odal trees, the name Odalgudi came into existence and over time Odalgudi changed into Odalguri.³⁷

Udalguri trade fair was held at *Koriapara Duar* under Mangaldai Sub-division of Darrang district. The area was under the jurisdiction of Sath Rajas of Tawang, a tributary of Lhasa.³⁸ This trade fair was held in February or March about nine kilometers from the foot of the hills at the Bhutan-Assam border.³⁹ At the Udalguri fair, the prime article of import was blankets and ponies of Bhutan; close to it, salt was a well-known article of import. It is difficult to comment on the initiation of this trade fair but believed to have existed since the Ahom period. Even though in 1809, Assam was in a state of upheaval, the transactions at this trade fair amounted to two lakh rupees.⁴⁰ During the eve of the colonization of Assam, this fair was in a discontinued state owing to the Burmese invasion. Lieutenant Rutherford, in charge of Darrang in 1833, revived the fair.⁴¹ And from 1854 onwards, the records of this fair are being preserved.⁴²

Udalguri Trade fair, besides the people of the surrounding regions, this fair was participated in by the Bhutias of Bhutan, Tibetans, Khamtis, and Manipuris,⁴³ including the

Chinese and natives of Bengal.⁴⁴ L.W. Shakespeare in History of Assam Rifles wrote that *'the traders from Bhutan, Thibet, and areas beyond Lhasa assemble here during the fair, dressed in Chinese attire and resembling those from the Celestial Land.'*⁴⁵

On the importance of restoration of the Udalguri trade fair, Lieutenant Rutherford wrote that *'it is likely that, if resumed, this trade will flourish to a degree that it has never reached before, and will serve as a means of widely disseminating British goods throughout regions of Tibet and Bhutan.'*⁴⁶ The colonial government's primary motivation for restoring the fair was to promote trade while also establishing political ties with Bhutan.⁴⁷ The underlying validation is apparent from the letter of T.C. Robertson to the Government dated 6th December 1833, wherein he expresses his opinion on the significance of the trade fair in a statement that *'the Bhutias' interest in the produce of the plains was not merely to sustain, but to exchange Assamese produce through their industry or to procure and exchange from Bengal other articles for gold, of which metal it is presumed that the northern provinces of Bhutan lacked extensive amount.'*⁴⁸

The Bhutias frequented the trade fair through Doimara, Amtola and Bhairabkunda routes. On the significance of this route in 1913, Captain H.T. Morshead stated that *'the only significant trade route to India is from Lhasa to Tsetang and Tsona, where, it splits into two roads leading to Tawang and Udalguri in Assam Via Dirang Dzong.'*⁴⁹

The Bhutias descended from hills with merchandise on sturdy little ponies at Udalguri fair and then segregated to the encompassing country.⁵⁰ At this fair, the chief import items were blankets, cattle, sheep, miniature shaggy ponies, wax and musk, while exports were cotton twist and piece goods, rice and silk cloth.⁵¹ The most favoured variety of rice was sticky rice, including dried fish. Udalguri trade fair was a prominent place for the salt trade. In the plains of Assam salt was a rare commodity the Bhutias took the advantage of the rarity of salt and bartered it for the important commodities of the plains.⁵² B.C. Allen wrote that *'at Udalguri, the Bhutias bartered salt for rice at profitable rates'*⁵³

Agents of the hill tribes came down to the Civil Station in Udalguri during the fair days, which lasted three or four weeks, to receive their portion of the Duars' revenue, annuity, and other gifts granted to them by the government.⁵⁴ During the fair days, about 22 Km of the Street stretched from Orang to Udalguri remained crowded with the highlanders.⁵⁵ Thus, during the fair days, the military and police watches were conveyed to uphold law and order.⁵⁶

In 1838 Captain Vetch, Collector of Darrang proposed the instalment of posa in cash by ending the tradition of payment of instalments in kind, which continued since the Ahom days.⁵⁷ But the Bhutias being apathetic regarding this proposition, refused to surrender their privileges for cash payment.⁵⁸ The Bhutias demonstrated their aggravation over the proposal by the inhumane treatment of the plain people of *Koriapara Duar*, resulting in the abandonment of villages by the people; therefore, the British Government unified the Duars in 1839.⁵⁹ But when a police thannah was set up at Udalguri, a prosperous populace again developed in the Duar.⁶⁰ Additionally, to uphold strict law and order in the winter season, a fort at Udalguri was garrisoned by 46 officers and soldiers of the Lakhimpur military police battalion.⁶¹ This action attempted by the British Government effectively ended the persecution of the plains people of Assam Duars.⁶² Moreover, by 1841 the administrative measures embarked by the British Government proved effective in halting the raids of the Bhutias inside the British frontiers of Assam effectively.⁶³

In the winter season of 1843-44, the Sath Rajas, along with the delegates of Tawang Durbar, in an interview with Captain Gordon, who was then an assistant to the Governor General's Agent, officially consented to hand over all claim to the lands of Kuriapara Duar for a yearly instalment of Rupees 5000.⁶⁴ The site of the Udalguri fair, because of its convenient location, was used to distribute posa and annual stipends to the Raja of Tawang and Sath Rajas of *Koriapara Duar*, respectively.⁶⁵ However, the Sath Rajas' annual compensation made its way in the form of cotton and other products to Tawang and Lassa.⁶⁶ In 1852 the Government endorsed a proposition to move the gathering site to Mangaldai to make it convenient for Bengal and Assam traders. However, the choice was toppled, keeping in mind that such a choice would not make the fair popular.⁶⁷ Amratol was the site wherein the Bhutias of Kuriapara dwelled in the winter season and came down to Udalguri. At the Udalguri fair, a Mauzadar kept the records of imports and exports,⁶⁸ except in 1880, due to the engagement of Mauzadar in census work, a head constable was engaged to register trade.⁶⁹

In 1875, a native official assigned to collect data for the Udalguri trade fair calculated Bhutan's imports at Rs. 44,817, and Assam's exports at Rs. 35,432.⁷⁰ During the year, the estimated number of Bhutias who attended the fair in 1875 was under 2,000.⁷¹ About 3,600 Bhutias attended the Udalguri trade fair in 1876, with exports and imports totaling Rs. 50,425 and Rs. 25,712, respectively, and it is said that the Bhutias took away Rs. 24,713 in cash.⁷² In 1876 the importation of commodities, especially blankets, was Rs. 15,174, and the

importation of ponies was Rs.1,50,000, whereas the importation of salt was Rs. 9,945.⁷³ The Bhutias brought down various hill products such as Ponies, wax, yaks' tails, sheep, dogs, salt, a small amount of gold, blankets, etc. In exchange, imported English and Assamese cloths, thread, rice, betel nuts and other items.⁷⁴

In 1877 a tragic incident occurred at the Udalguri trade fair one Bhutia who attended the fair was attacked by smallpox, and the news, reaching other Bhutias who were on their way to the fair, stopped from proceeding to the fair. Therefore, only a few Bhutias numbering 590, attended the fair.⁷⁵ In the fateful year, the exports and imports amounted to Rs. Rs. 13,805 and Rs. 44,439 respectively. The fall in the value of exports was the grain sold in the weekly market held at *Kalaigaon*. At the same time, the importation of commodities witnessed a substantial drop, especially in the blanket and pony but a notable rise in the importation of article gold dust.⁷⁶ The British Government approved Rs. 300 in 1877, to construct the building at Udalguri and efficiently organise the trade fair.⁷⁷ Additionally, for surveillance of the Udalguri trade fair military personnel from the 44th Sebundy Light infantry including a police guard consisting of one head constable and ten constables were deployed.⁷⁸

The imports at the Udalguri trade fair in 1878 and 1879 were Rs. 1,16,189 and Rs. 81,694 respectively. Exports rose from Rs. 50,677 in 1878 to Rs. 61,492 in 1879.⁷⁹ The cholera outbreak in the Duars caused a drop in the value of imports in 1879. However, 1,018 people attended the fair in 1879, with 573 men, 259 women, 98 boys, and 88 girls.

The Deputy Commissioner received the Rajas from 8th to 15th February in open Durbar at the Udalguri trade fair in 1881 and paid them their allowances.⁸⁰ Imports totaled Rs. 51,970, compared to Rs. 87,069 the previous year, and exports totaled Rs. 36,767, compared to Rs. 22,573 the last year.⁸¹ The total number of Bhutias who attended this udalguri trade fair was 1,649, compared to 1043 the previous year.⁸² In addition to the Bhutias, the udalguri fair in 1881 was attended by 55 Europeans and all of the district's officials. The pony races and sports took place on February 10th and 11th of 1881. Wrestling, fencing, and chatty races were among the sports organised for the sepoy of the 10th regiment to compete in. The Chief Commissioner approved a grant of rupees 300 for the fair, of which 130 rupees were spent on building huts for natives, and the remaining rupees were distributed as prizes.⁸³

Figure No. 3.1

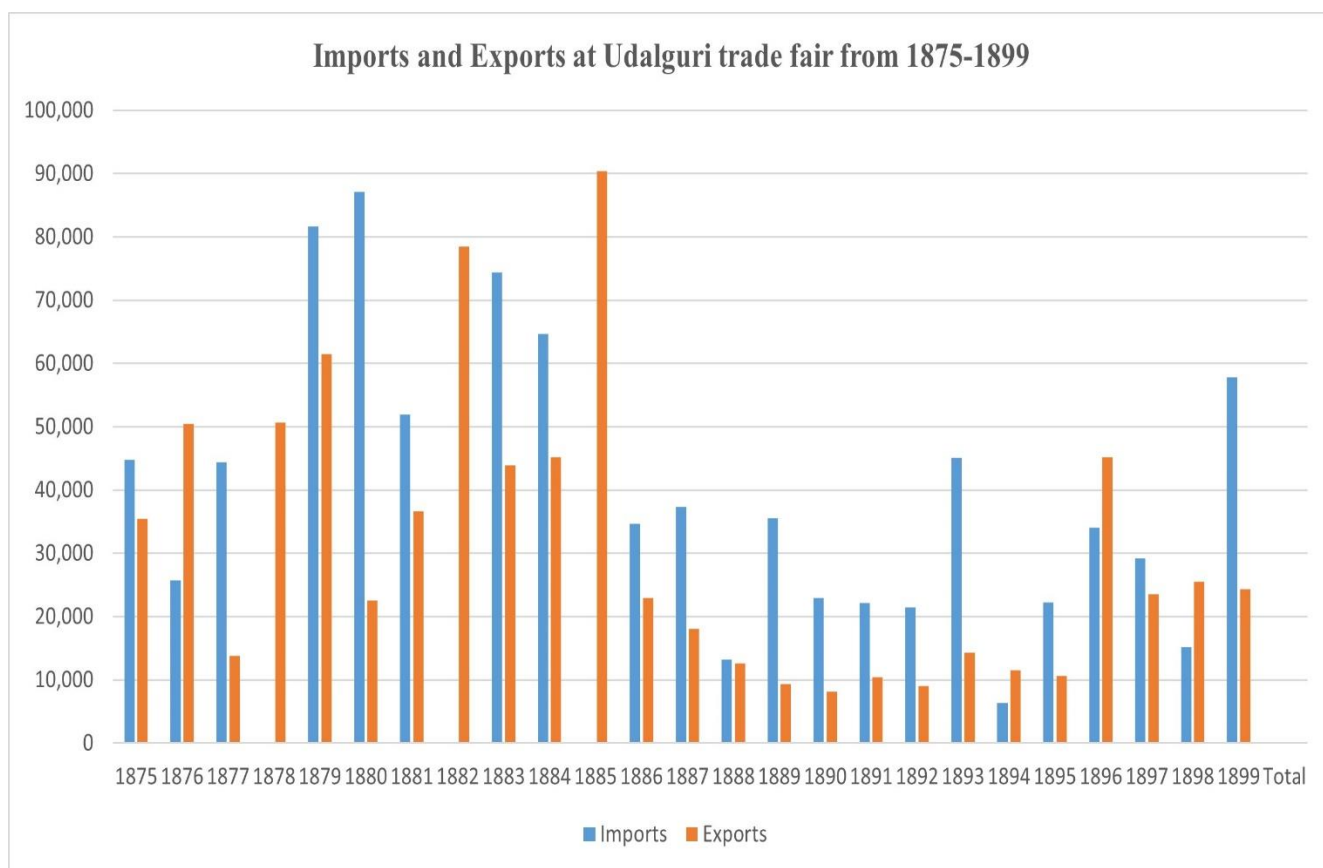


Table 3.1

Trade transactions statistics of import and export at Udalguri fair from 1875-1899

Years	Import Rs.	Export Rs.
1875	44,817	35,432 ⁸⁴
1876	25,712	50,425 ⁸⁵
1877	44,439	13,805
1878	1,16,189	50,677
1879	81,694	61,492
1880	87,069	22,573
1881	51,970	36,631
1882	2,35,308	78,504
1883	74,436	43,891
1884	64,689	45,153
1885	1,20,792	90,380

1886	34,709	22,895
1887	37,393	18,054
1888	13,242	12,564
1889	35,563	9,375
1890	22,893	8,104
1891	22,115	10,437
1892	21,418	9,073
1893	45,133	14,280
1894	6,390	11,536
1895	22,290	10,575
1896	34,098	45,206
1897	29,173	23,506
1898	15,202	25,517
1899	57,765	24,301
Total	17,41,883	9,89,809

Source: *Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the years 1874-75 and 1875-76*, Chapter: I, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1877, p.9 and Dwipmani Kalita, *Trade and commerce in the Brahmaputra valley in nineteenth century Assam*, Unpublished Thesis, Gauhati University, 2017, p.331

At Udalguri, fair demand for the ponies was consistently high, the value of which was approximately Rs.79 in contrast to 66 in 1883-1884, and the demand for the blankets had multiplied from Rs. 13,852 in 1884 to Rs. 30,648 in 1885.⁸⁶ Until 1885 trade transactions at the Udalguri trade fair was prosperous; however, the decrease in the cost of salt prompted the decay of the Udalguri fair.

The Bhutias had a salt monopoly at the Udalguri fair. But the improved means of communication and the availability of Liverpool salt in the Kachari Mauzas proved to be a threat to the salt monopoly of the Bhutias. Moreover, the traders of Tezpur who frequented the Udalguri and Orang to buy rice with their carts gave a severe blow to the value of salt by enhancing the price of rice which the Kacharis previously traded with the Bhutias for 15 seers⁸⁷ of rice against one seer of salt.⁸⁸ The outcome of the rise in the exchange standard of rice brought about exactions of the Bhutias; accordingly, based on protests made by the locals at a Durbar held in 1886, the swapping scale of rice and salt was fixed at Rs.8 to 1 per seer

respectively.⁸⁹ The swapping scale for rice and salt was decreased to 6:1 in 1887; besides, in 1889, the conversion standard was fixed by the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang at 4:1.⁹⁰

In a Durbar commenced at Udalguri on 19th February 1886, the Commissioner of Assam Valley Districts alongside the Assistant Commissioner of Mangaldai delivered a *posa* of Rs.5000 together with seven pieces of broad clothes and 54 bottles of rum (along with six bottles as present) to the delegates of Towang.⁹¹ The Sath Rajas-Garpa, Lamaringhsha, Gumansena, Guonwang, Pema, Darangshoo, and Kesang attended the Durbar, and the District authority to maintain harmony and serenity for the people of the frontier regions conducted a pony race.⁹² In 1887 the Assistant commissioner of Darrang reported that *'the issue of salt was the cause that prompted the decline of the Udalguri trade fair. This was partly due to rumours in Bhutan that no salt would be permitted inside British territory, so the traders did not bring their supplies. The salt trade was hampered by low profitability, despite the hearsay being vague. The Sath Rajas and Sangpo of the Kampa Deb attended several sub-darbars organised by the Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, respectively, preceding the great Durbar of the 12th February, which was attended by the Commissioners of Kamrup and Nowgong, including the Gelengs, who graced the occasion by their appearance for the first time to collect Posa. Before this event, Narpas, Sangpo, Premgambo, and other Bhutia chiefs were dispatched to collect Posa. The issue of salt was brought up at this time, and an agreement was reached, with the price set at 6 sers of rice for one ser of salt. The agreement was recognised because the negotiators were Gelengs themselves, as opposed to the previous year, when the negotiators were people with no power to act, resulting in a dispute between villagers and Bhutias. Furthermore, since the Gelengs were in charge of negotiations this year, there had been few disagreements. Due to the appearance of some Dewangiri Bhutias in Sopojar, there have been a few complaints of exactions. On the 15th of March, as directed by Commissioner, I went to Amratol and asked them to let me in up to Tawang or as far as Thaklung Jong, but the Bhutias refused my entry request to either anyone of the place. The denial could be linked to the Darjeeling mission episode.'*⁹³

The Darbar of February 1888 commenced at Udalguri and was expected to resolve the issue of salt, but the Darbar' remained confined to trading.⁹⁴ The Kacharis dwellings in the frontiers were innovative and best cultivators who produced better crops.⁹⁵ Rice was one of the primary items the Bhutias imported in the Udalguri fair, which they bartered for salt. But when the Kacharis learned the weakness of the Bhutias towards rice, they instantly enhanced

the exchange rate of rice. The Bhutias were against the sharp rise in the demand value of rice and obliged the Kacharis to barter 15 seers of rice for 1 seer of salt, which proved non-negotiable to the Kacharis.

In the winter of 1888-89, the Bhutias exhibited their disappointment by leaving a sack of salts at the houses of the people at the time when the men were busy working in paddy fields, demanding 12 or 15 times its weight in rice; this act annoyed the people.⁹⁶ On 6th February, when the Deputy Commissioner visited Udalguri 200 Kacharis in a group griped about the demonstrations against Bhutia traders, the Deputy Commissioner promptly reacted and summoned the head of Bhutia men who spread gossip. Due to the lack of rice in Bhutan, they were obliged to dispose of their salt at the old rate; the Deputy Commissioner accordingly retorted the Bhutia traders that the British Government gets no profit from the salt trade, but the British Government did not urge the value of the ponies, blankets, etc. to be fixed nor the Kachari peasants.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the Deputy Commissioner enlightened that the payment of posa to the Deb Raja of Tawang would be made as per the arrangement of 1844.⁹⁸ On 16th February, at Durbar commenced in Udalguri to resolve the matter, the Deputy Commissioner declared in the presence of the Bhutia traders to educate the Geleng and Deb Raja of Tawang that the British Government would stop the payment of posa unless they concur to the accompanying terms.

1. To sign an agreement of apology for illegal exactions.
2. To agree on the exchange rate ratio of four to one for rice and salt, respectively.
3. To consider themselves accountable for any failure to abide by the agreement.⁹⁹

On a Durbar of 16th February 1889, the Geleng arrived with presents and offered his friendship, but he refused to accept posa payment without signing the agreement. This visit of Geleng was witnessed by Mr. Lyall, Commissioner of Assam Valley District, along with Mr. Gait, Assistant Commissioner and European planters, and the Deputy Commissioner taking advantage of the opportunity warned to adopt stern measures against the Bhutias found guilty of exactions from ryots.¹⁰⁰ The Geleng pleaded for the rectification of the terms, but the Deputy Commissioner paid deaf ears, and after an intense squabble, the Geleng finally decided to sign the document of agreement. The Gelengs begged an apology for the trouble

previously incited by the Bhutias on the ryots of British India and promised to follow the exchange rate of 4 seers against one seer of salt.¹⁰¹

Though the Udalguri fair sustained the trade declined considerably since the export rate of salt fixed on 16th February 1889 was not remunerative to the Bhutias.¹⁰² The lucrative trading opportunities of the Daranga and the Subankhata fairs in Kamrup drew their attention.¹⁰³ Moreover, the increasing numbers of permanent haats in the bordering areas were also partly responsible for the decline of the Udalguri fair. By 1902 the import figure at the Udalguri fair declined to Rs. 8,280 and export to Rs. 8,598.¹⁰⁴ The decline in trade resulted in the shifting of the Udalguri trade outpost to Bhairabkunda bordering Daifam town in Samdrup Jonkhar district of Bhutan.

3.4.2 Kherkheria Trade Fair

The site of Kherkheria is now popularly known by the name “Corramore”.¹⁰⁵ Corramore stands for “Corrie”, meaning cleft and “Mor”, meaning big.¹⁰⁶ Corramore is the Gaelic name of Logan farm in Lanarkshire, Scotland.¹⁰⁷ Kherkheria site, which is about 7 Kilometres away on the north of Ghograpara, was included in the Corramore tea estate in 1920 when Superintendent Wynham reported on approximately 500 acres located between Kherkheria and the political boundary.¹⁰⁸ Today Corramore Tea Estate is owned by Williamson Tea Assam Limited.

The site of the Kherkeria Trade fair was situated at the foot of Bhutan hills, close to the Lakshmi Nadi, to the front of British territory.¹⁰⁹ The Bhutias used the Lakshmi route to come down to the Kherkeria trade fair. The Dumpa Raja levied a small salt duty on all Bhutias who travelled down this route to the Kerkeria trade fair and collected grain from each trader upon his return at the end of the season.¹¹⁰ However, no money duties were levied, and more valuable items such as clothing, brass pots, and blankets were exempt from duty. The salt and grain were calculated per adult, not on the volume of goods exported or imported by man or family.¹¹¹

According to the official records, the Chief of Killing Duar initiated Kherkeria as a trade hub in 1874, twenty years later compared to the establishment Udalguri trade fair. The Raja of Kherkeria was an official of Deb Raja of Punakha¹¹²; this fair was initially held in February and March,¹¹³ but in 1876 this fair was held at Khagrapara,¹¹⁴ and about 162 Bhutias attended this fair.¹¹⁵ The Bhutias of Bhutan popularly participated in this trade fair,

and the people of Darrang and the adjoining districts; transactions in the form of barter and cash were exercised.¹¹⁶ The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, R.B. Macabe, in July 1889 commented that the Kherkheria trade fair gained prominence at the expense of the Udalguri trade, which became unpopular among the Bhutias because of the decline in the rate of exchange of salt.¹¹⁷

The imports of merchandise at the Kherkeria Trade fair in 1875 and 1876 were Rs.17, 226 annas 11,¹¹⁸ and Rs. 19,897¹¹⁹ respectively. While the estimated value of exports at the Kherkeria Trade fair in 1875 and 1876 were Rs. 16,078 annas 12 paisa 6¹²⁰ and Rs.9, 669.¹²¹ In 1877 the Kherkeria Trade fair was held at Khagrapara, within the Inner Line, nearby Bengbari. The value of Bhutan imports and Assam exports was calculated to be Rs. 19, 897 and Rs. 9,669 respectively.¹²² If we see at the trade statistics, the exports have decreased significantly compared to the 1776 figures of Rs. 16,078; however, the Deputy Commissioner believes this was due to the failure to register the export goods. In 1877 this trade fair was attended by many hill people, numbering 324 as compared to 1876.¹²³

In 1878 an arrangement was made by the authorities for the accommodation of the Bhutias from Bhutan at the Kherkheria trade fair. The exports in 1879 amounted to Rs. 23,740, against Rs. 16,110, in the previous year, and the imports amounted to Rs. 21,828, against Rs. 16,542 in 1877-78.¹²⁴ This fair in 1879 was attended by the local people along with about 400 hill people. In 1880-81 Kherkheria fair was attended by entirely Bhutias, who numbered about 621; the figure shows an excess of 311 participants in contrast to 1879. The import and export show a decline of Rs.1784 and Rs. 7254 respectively in comparison to the previous year.¹²⁵ According to the Deputy Commissioner, the drop in exports and imports was caused by incorrect registration.

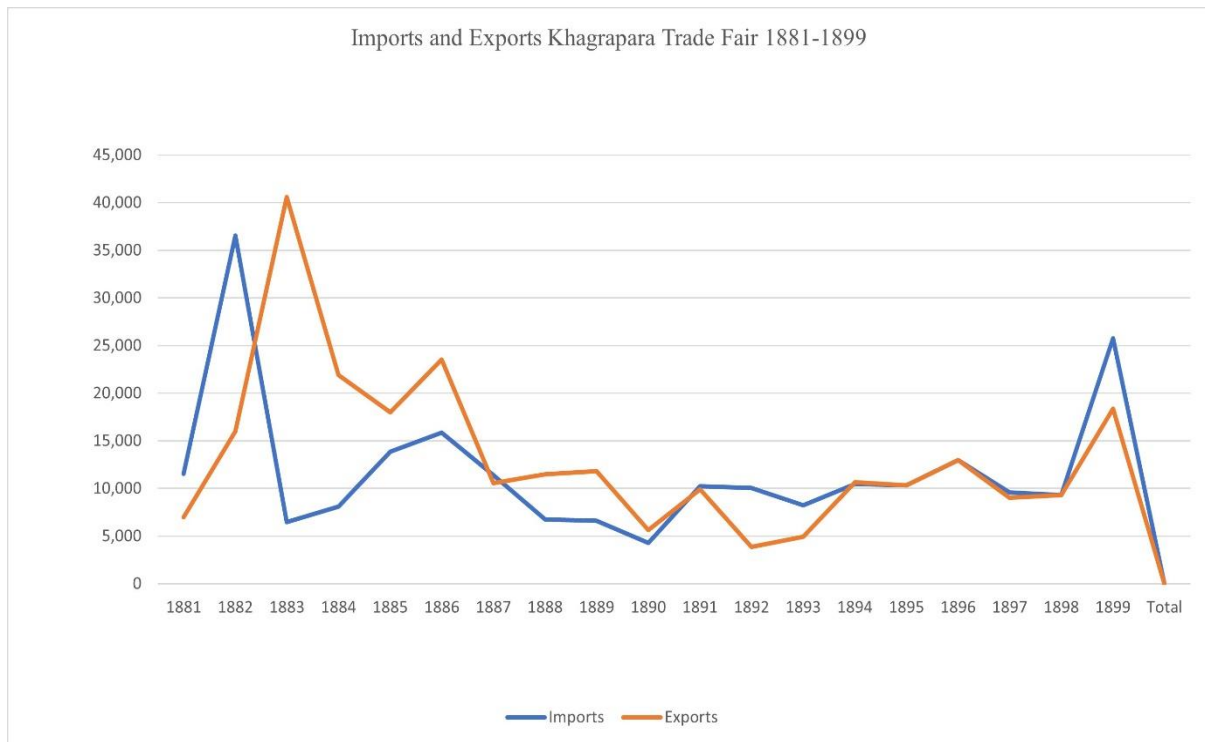
The table below furnishes the imports and exports assessment at the Kherkeria fair after the site was shifted to Khagrapara (1881-1885)

Table 3.2**Khagrapara Trade Fair Imports and Exports Assessment (1881-1899)**

Year	Import Rs.	Export Rs.
1881	11,526	6,974
1882	36,561	16,009
1883	6,461	40,568
1884	8,089	21,878
1885	13,867	17,997 ¹²⁶
1886	15,837	23,522
1887	11,415	10,537
1888	6,743	11,504
1889	6,593	11,805
1890	4,292	5,630
1891	10,216	9,886
1892	10,030	3,848
1893	8,241	4,930
1894	10,473	10,664
1895	10,328	10,318
1896	12,972	12,960
1897	9,580	9,043
1898	9,300	9,310
1899	25,770	18,347
Total	2,99,926	3,16,937

Source: Dwipmani Kalita, *Trade and commerce in the Brahmaputra valley in nineteenth century Assam*, Unpublished Thesis, Gauhati University, 2017, p.332

Figure No. 3.2



3.4.3 Doimara Trade Fair

The establishment of the Doimara fair dates back to the period of Ahom rule.¹²⁷ Doimara trade fair is sited at the base of foothills in West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh¹²⁸ and is separated from Udalguri by a distance of about 25 miles.¹²⁹ This fair drew a large number of attendees primarily the Bhutias, including the rayats of the British territory.¹³⁰ The Bhutias sold items like salt, chillies, spices, and so on at the Doimara fair and took away products of the plains.¹³¹ Sath Rajas came down to Tezpur to receive annuities and presents during the fair days, including an allowance of £250 conferred by the British Government for the Duars.¹³² The total worth of imports at Doimara Trade fair 1875 was Rs.7452 annas 8.¹³³ Whilst total value of export in 1875 was Rs. 5636 annas 14.¹³⁴ In 1876, the imports from Bhutan were estimated to be Rs. 7,452, and the exports from Assam were estimated to be Rs. 5,636.¹³⁵ Assam exported rice worth Rs. 4,84,400 and sold endi cloth worth Rs. 1020.¹³⁶

In 1877 trade fair was held at Doimara. The imports and exports were Rs. 3,727 and Rs. 11,833 respectively.¹³⁷ In the same year, the paddy was sold for Rs.1 per maunds, total

maunds of paddy sold was 6,998, while 654 maunds of rice fetched Rs. 2155 and 139 numbers of endi cloth were sold at Rs. 1,668.¹³⁸ In the following year i.e., 1878, Assam exported 2499 mounds and 20 sers of paddy valued at Rs. 2,500, 861 mounds and 40 sers of rice valued at Rs. 19,418 and 124 numbers of endi cloth valued at Rs. 1117-91.¹³⁹

If we see the figures for Imports are decreasing, but exports are increasing significantly. In 1879 the import at the Doimara Trade fair was Rs. 4,992 which shows a decline of Rs. 2,332 as compared to Rs. 7,324 of 1878, similarly the export trade statistics show a decline of Rs. 1662 in 1879 as compared to the exports of 1877-78, which is Rs. 5,684.¹⁴⁰ The cause of fluctuations in imports and exports was due to the restrictions imposed by the Inner Line Regulation, which prohibited free cross-border trade.¹⁴¹

In 1880-81, the imports at the Doimara trade fair declined in salt and blankets with the only exception of Rubber, which was imported 103 maunds worth Rs 5,600 as compared to the previous year's importation of 50 maunds worth Rs 2,500. The export articles were rice and paddy, which were 50 maunds and 1,477 respectively, compared to the previous year's exportation of 965 maunds of rice and 5,477 maunds of paddy. In 1880-81 the total value of exports was Rs 1,350, compared to Rs 8,740 in 1879-80.¹⁴² The downfall in imports and exports was due to the inability of Brahmees to come down at the Doimara trade fair because of the subsiding of the large hill.¹⁴³

Table 3.3

Merchandise Imported and Exported at the Doimara Trade Fair in 1876 are

Imports

Articles	Quantity	Value
Rubber	85 maunds	Rs.2720
Dye	375 maunds	Rs. 1,875
Salt	225 maunds	Rs. 1,125

Table prepared from W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Volume-1, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1998, p.145

Exports

Articles	Quantity	Value
paddy	3737 mounds	Rs.3, 373
rice		Rs.4, 84,400
endi cloth		Rs.1020 ¹⁴⁴

Table prepared from W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Volume-1, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1998, p.145

Table 3.4

In 1877 the exports of commodities at the Doimara Trade Fair were:

Articles	Quantity	Value
paddy	6,998 mounds	Rs. 6,998
rice	654 mounds	Rs. 2155
endi clothes	139 numbers	Rs. 1,668 ¹⁴⁵

Table prepared from Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.45

Table 3.5

In 1878 the exports of commodities at the Doimara Trade Fair are stated below:

Articles	Quantity	Value
Paddy	2499 mounds and 20 sers	Rs. 2,500
Rice	861 mounds and 40 sers	Rs. 19,418
Endi cloths	124 nos.	Rs. 1117 annas 91 ¹⁴⁶

Source: Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.45

Figure No. 3.3

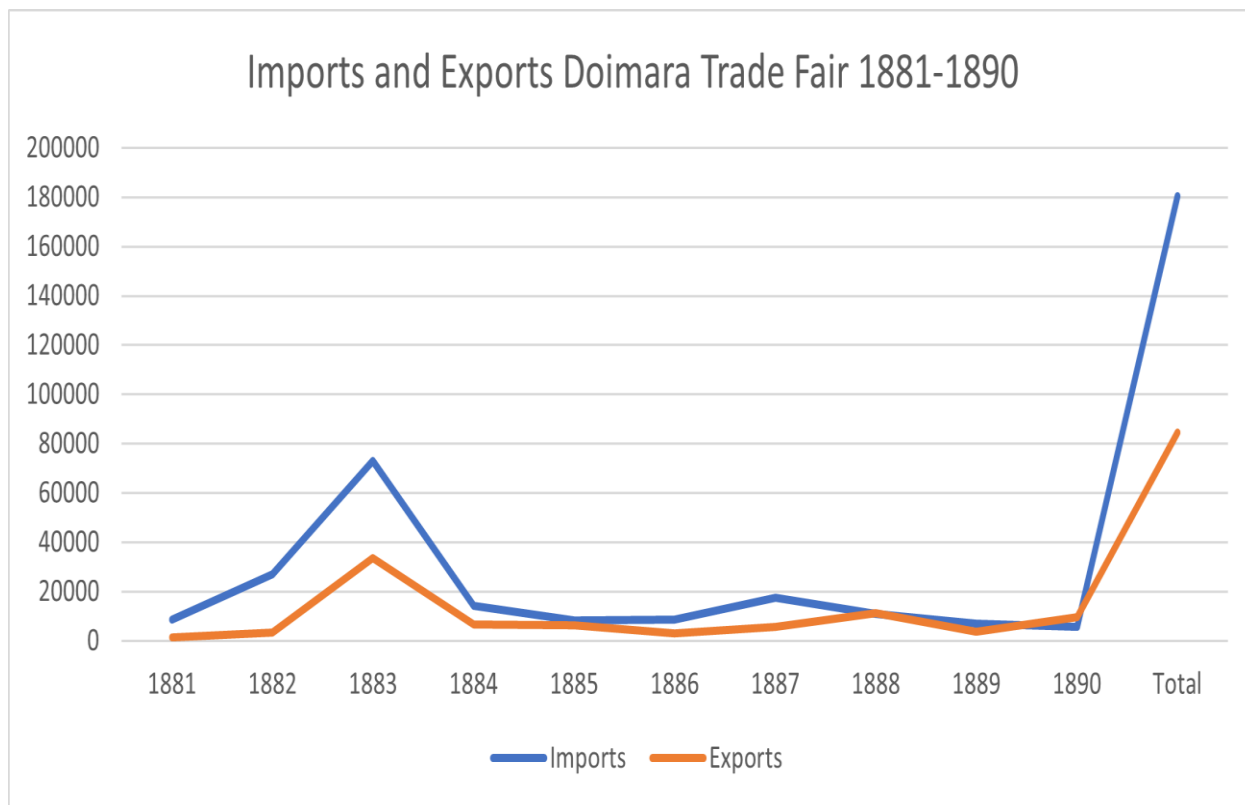


Table 3.6

The Assessment of Imports and Exports at the Doimara Fair from 1881 to 1890

Year	Import Rs.	Export Rs.
1881	8554	1350
1882	27057	3357
1883	72,923	33644
1884	14,077	6801
1885	8,423	6438 ¹⁴⁷
1886	8,567	2,971
1887	17,397	5,568
1888	10,904	11,257
1889	7,143	3,805

1890	5,540	9,487
Total	1,80,585	78,240

Source: Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.45 and Dwipmani Kalita, *Trade and commerce in the Brahmaputra valley in nineteenth century Assam*, Unpublished Thesis, Gauhati University, 2017, p.332

The above table 3.6 presents a glimpse of the decline in trade, especially in 1884 and 1885, respectively. The root cause of the decline was primarily concerned with stipulations of the price between highlanders and rubber Mahalders.¹⁴⁸

3.5 Trade fairs in Assam Duars of Kamrup District

The routes through which the Bhutia traders made their way into the Kamrup district were Darranga and Deea routes. The Darranga route connected Eastern Bhutan to Dewangiri via Benka, while the Deea route connected Western Bhutan.¹⁴⁹ The Bhutias transported their goods to Dewangiri and the Deea pass entrance, establishing depots.

At Kumarikhata and other frontier villages, the Marwari merchants and other traders from British territory stored their wares. The Bhutias brought down whatever goods they have to dispose of to these villages and neighbouring settlements. Where they remained for approximately four or five days and nights, bartering blankets, salt, and other goods for rice, cotton, and silk. After they amassed a certain quantity of goods, they transport them to their depots and seldom do they return back to make a new purchase.

At Dewangiri buying and selling took place on a limited scale. The Bhutia traders of Bhutan erected stalls and remained with their goods through the winter until they deposed their products either through barter or sale. Dewangiri was visited by Bhutias and Tibetan traders starting from the month of December to March. Lac, musk, oranges, yak tails, ponies, mules, and asses were among the items brought down by the traders. The Bhutia traders either exchanged their items with ryots for silk cloth, rice, dried fish, betel nuts, and brass plates or exchanged their items with Marwari Merchants for hard cash.¹⁵⁰ In 1879, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup inquired whether Bhutanese authorities exacted any duties on the Bhutia traders entering or exiting British territory. Colonel Lamb reported that *'I've had a special inquiry made to see if any duties are levied in Bhutan if that's possible.' I am unable to obtain information from Bhutan traders during this season when they are not present in the plains. The mouzadars have made careful inquiries in the border villages, and it appears*

that a light duty is levied on the traders' return to the hills, based on some of their reports..... A toll is levied on traders passing through, but this is not the same as a duty on goods, and it is neither a cess on the commodities they may be carrying. This "toll" is most likely nothing more than a form of obligation'.¹⁵¹

3.5.1 Darranga Trade Fair

The Darranga trade fair or mela is located in Tamulpur, Assam, under the Baksa district of BTR. This fair was initiated in 1883-84 and held in January- March. 800 Bhutanese attended the Darranga fair in 1898-1899 and in 1900, this fair was attended by 300 Bhutanese,¹⁵² and about 7000 Bhutias participated at this fair in 1908-1909; the attendance of the Bhutanese as compared to the preceding year shows the multiplication of 4,500 attendees. Besides the Bhutanese, this fair was attended primarily by the Kayas (Marwaris) of Rangia and the people of the encompassing region. The kayas used to reside for a month in the huts in order to barter their goods because the Bhutanese on their journey from their depots Dia or Dewangiri arrived at Darranga by the noon and bartered their goods with plains goods until evening and at the dawn, the Bhutanese traders started their journey for the plain's villages. During the cold weather of 1899-1900 guards consisting of one writer-constable and one constable of the Civil Police, and one havildar and 29 sepoy of the detachment of the 43rd Gurkha rifles, were stationed at Darranga¹⁵³ for the swift functioning of the trade fair. Transactions at the Darranga fair were generally conveyed through the traditional system of barter¹⁵⁴ and the occasional use of money.

Figure No. 3.4

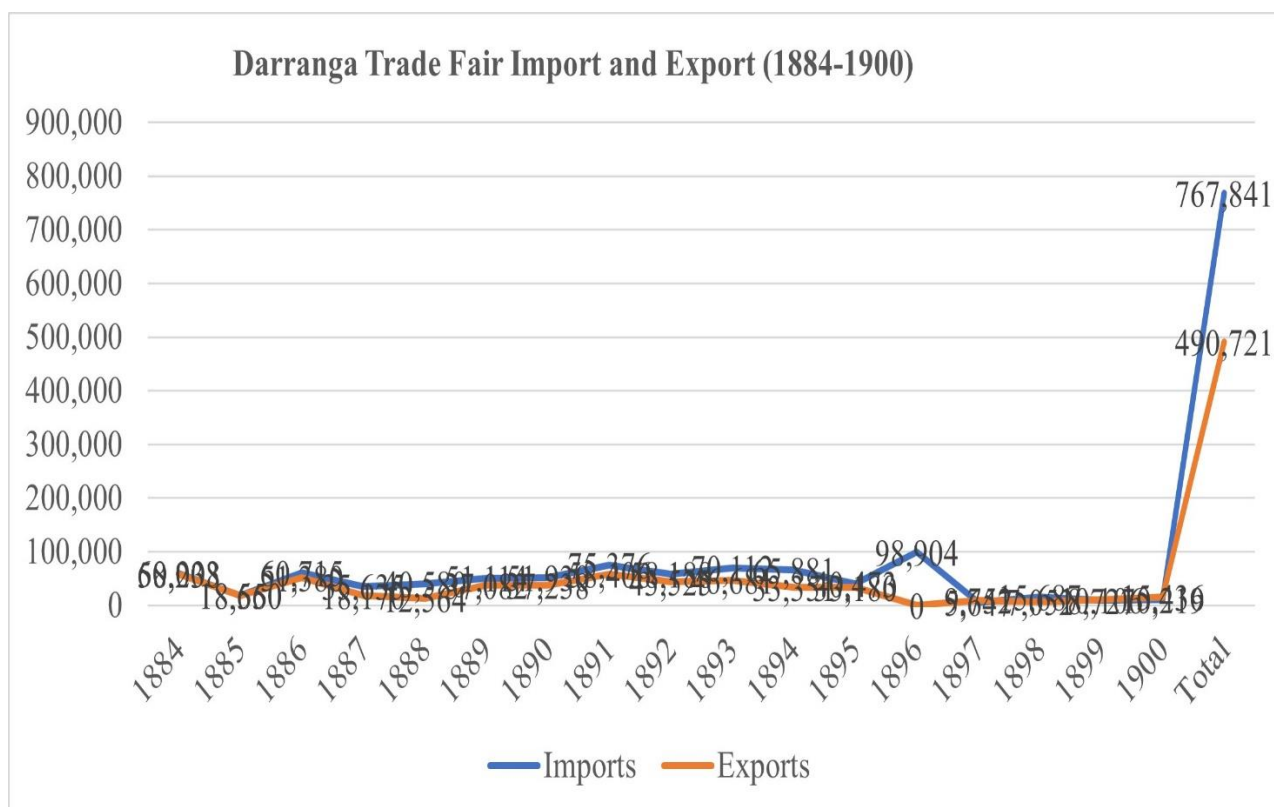


Table 3.7

The Import and Export of the Darranga fair from 1884 to 1900.

Year	Import Rs.	Export Rs.
1884	60,003	58,238
1885	18,650	18,560
1886	60,715	51,380
1887	35,635	18,170
1888	40,580	12,564
1889	51,114	37,082
1890	51,930	37,238
1891	75,376	58,406
1892	58,188	43,525
1893	70,112	46,681
1894	65,881	33,351

1895	40,473	33,180
1896	98,904	1,13,228
1897	5,647	9,752
1898	15,687	7,052
1899	8,727	10,106
1900	10,219	15,436 ¹⁵⁵
Total	1,80,585	78,240

Source: Assam Secretariat, Administration, Department: River Borne Trade Report of the Province of Assam, 1884- 1900, Shillong.

3.5.2 Subankhata Trade Fair

The initiation of the Subankhata trade fair is unknown. Still, it was one of the most important trade fairs held in Kamrup Duars attended by the Bhutanese merchants of Pemagathshel and Samdrupjongkhar. The Bhutanese merchants used to camp at Subankhata and traded their products, potato, ginger, etc., for the plains products. From 1898 to 1899, about 4000 Bhutanese attended this fair; in 1900, only 400 Bhutanese participated in the fair.¹⁵⁶ During the trade fair held in 1899-1900, guards consisting of one writer-constable and one constable of the civil Police and one Jemadar, one havildar, and 69 sepoy of 43rd Gurkha Rifles were stationed at Subankhata¹⁵⁷ for smooth functioning of the fair. This trade fair existed until the 1990s, but this trade fair was halted owing to security concern.¹⁵⁸ The import and export of the Subankhata fair in 1899 and 1900 were as follows.

Table 3.8

Import and Export at the Subankhata fair in 1899 and 1900

Year	Import	Export
	Rupees	Rupees
1899	2,875	2,602
1900	3,213	3,899 ¹⁵⁹

Source: Table prepared from Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam 1899-1900, p.13

The importance of trade fairs held in Darranga and Subankhata started deteriorating from 1900 onwards. The Bhutia traders started attending local markets held at Nalbari, Rangia, and Gauhati for the lucrative deal. Some of the Bhutanese traders started transiting to the surrounding villages of the locality. Moreover, the multiplication of imports in these fairs was due to the demand for ponies and caoutchouc. At the same time, the increase in exports was primarily due to the demand for eri cloth, European manufactured goods, and other articles. However, in recent times the government of Assam has taken steps to renovate the frontier trade fairs of Darranga and Subankhata by initiating new trade policies and opening a trade centre at Darranga and Indo-Bhutan Friendship Organisation in 2011 onwards started organizing friendship Mela at Subankhata.

3.6 Trade Policy of Colonial Government

The Colonial Government was well informed about the commercial possibilities of Tibet through Bhutan before they set foot on the soil of Assam.¹⁶⁰ The annexation of Assam enlightened the prospects of extending her commercial interest toward central Asia. But there were several obstructions to accomplishing her commercial dream. Therefore, to make their commercial dream a reality, the colonial government devised a policy that facilitated the Bhutias to play an intermediary role for the Colonial Government. The British government changed the existing system of *posa* payment under the Ahoms made to the Bhutias. The colonial Government used the trade fairs to distribute *posa* to the Bhutias. These trade fairs served their intention of popularizing English goods; several British products, bottles of rum, wine, cigarette, tobacco pipes, handkerchiefs, etc., were distributed as complementary to the Bhutia chiefs. This caused obsession among the people who purchased the same products at the trade fairs. *Report on the trade between Assam and the adjoining countries of 1890* testify to the extent of obsession that resulted in the growth of trade due to the growing demands for English goods.¹⁶¹ Besides, the trade fairs served the purpose of monetization and a hub for English goods,¹⁶² including a platform to put forth political pressure on Bhutan and, in the process, to find an outlet to Tibet and secure her objectives of a commercial dream. Therefore, the British organized several official trade fairs in the vicinity of Assam Duars. Some of these trade fairs existing since the days of Ahoms were in continuation during the colonial period.

The trade fairs ceased after the Burmese invasion of Assam was restored by the British in Assam Duars. The prime objective behind the restoration of the trade fairs was to

advance trade and in the process enforce political control over the Bhutias. The British interest in extension of trade to Tibet necessitated the political dominance of Bhutan. The objective was endorsed through the restoration of the trade fairs. Moreover, the British authorities by the restoration of the trade fairs could successfully halt the raids of the Bhutias on the plains of Assam Duars. As the British debarred the raiders from taking part in the trade fairs. This condition infused a sense of alarm in their minds as the trade fairs had become an essential part of their socio-economic lives.

Moreover, the introduction of monetary policy in the trade fairs created a platform for their future endeavours of establishing commercial relations with Bhutan as the Bhutias were made familiar with the cash transactions. But the prime objective of expanding British trade in Tibet and thence to Central Asia presented when the British defeated the Bhutanese in the Duar war and subsequently the signing of the Sinchula Treaty in 1865 provided her with a platform to use the strategic advantage of Bhutan to expand her trade to Tibet.

The trade fairs restored by the British had some optimistic and pessimistic effects on Assam Duars. No doubt, the trade fairs served as an effective measure in halting the raids of the Bhutias in the plains Assam Duars. But the introduction of a monetary economy in the trade fairs and the duty that the Bhutias were required to pay for the entry of commodities created a socio-economic disparity. Such a step proved advantageous to specific groups, especially Marwaris and Europeans. Besides, the introduction of liquor and opium in the trade fairs negatively affected society. Moreover, the introduction of European mill made merchandise such as handkerchiefs, clothes etc., attracted the attention of the Bhutias while depreciating the sale of products of indigenous goods and over time this policy of the British obliterated the indigenous industry and crafts.

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1879-1880				
Imports				
Articles	Quantity/Number/Maunds	Rs.	pais	anna
horse pony and mule	8 number	625	8	0
caoutchouc	16-39-0 maunds	557	0	0
munjit	9 maunds	282	0	0
spice other kinds	5-25-0 maunds	84	0	0
wax	7-4-0 maunds	276	4	0
other articles of merchandise	value-10	2	4	0
yak tails'	4 number	12	0	0
blanket	535 numbers	2,677	8	0
timber	992 number	3,764		

1880-1881				
Imports				
Articles	Quantity/No	Rs.	paisa	anna
caoutchouc	102-14-4 maunds	4,901	2	3
twist and yarn Indian	1 piece	20		
wax	3-3-8 maunds	143		
other articles of merchandise	value	22		

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