

THE
COOCH BEHAR STATE
AND ITS
LAND REVENUE SETTLEMENTS

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SETTLEMENT SAIB AHILKAR, COOCH BEHAR

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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DEWAN OF THE STATE



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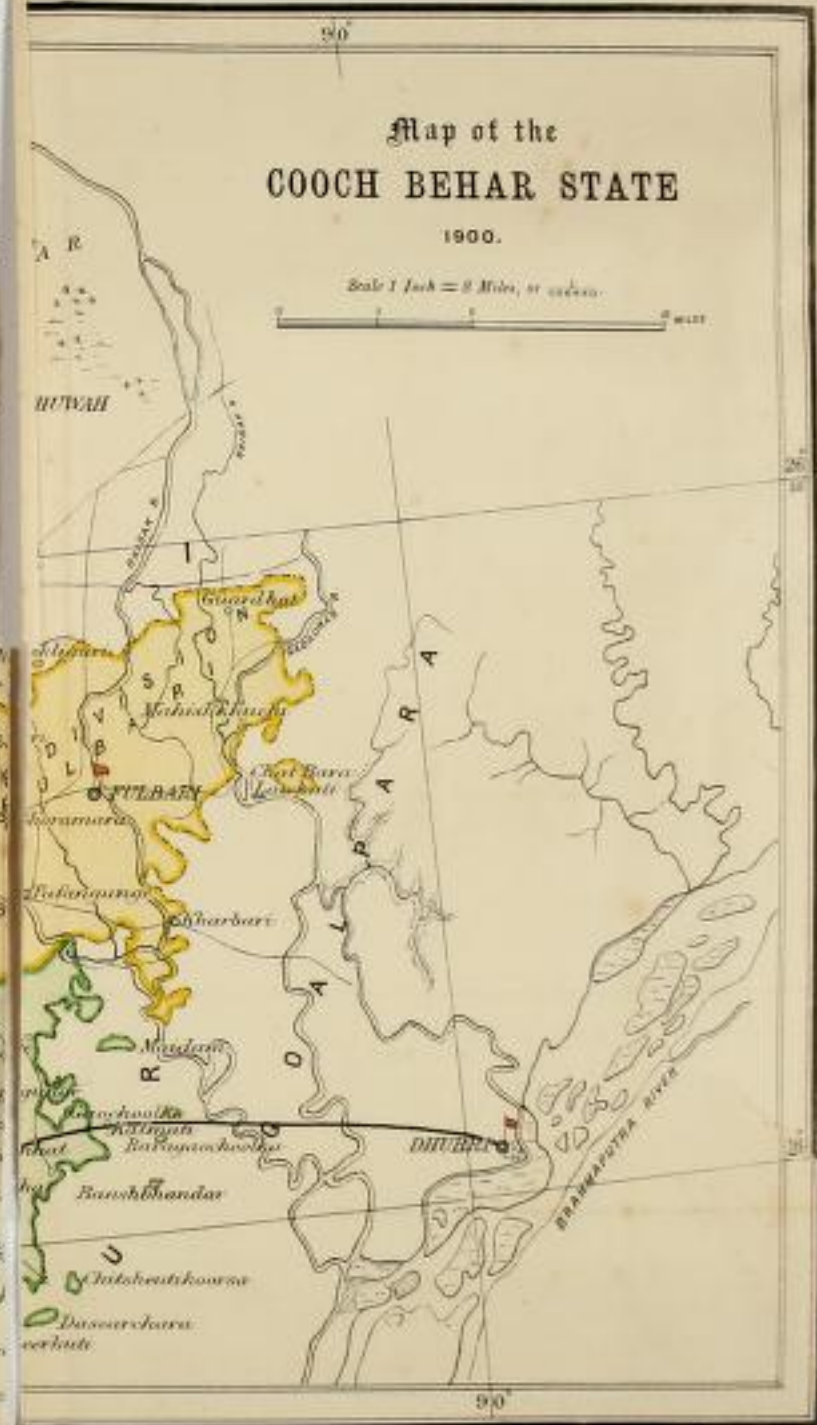
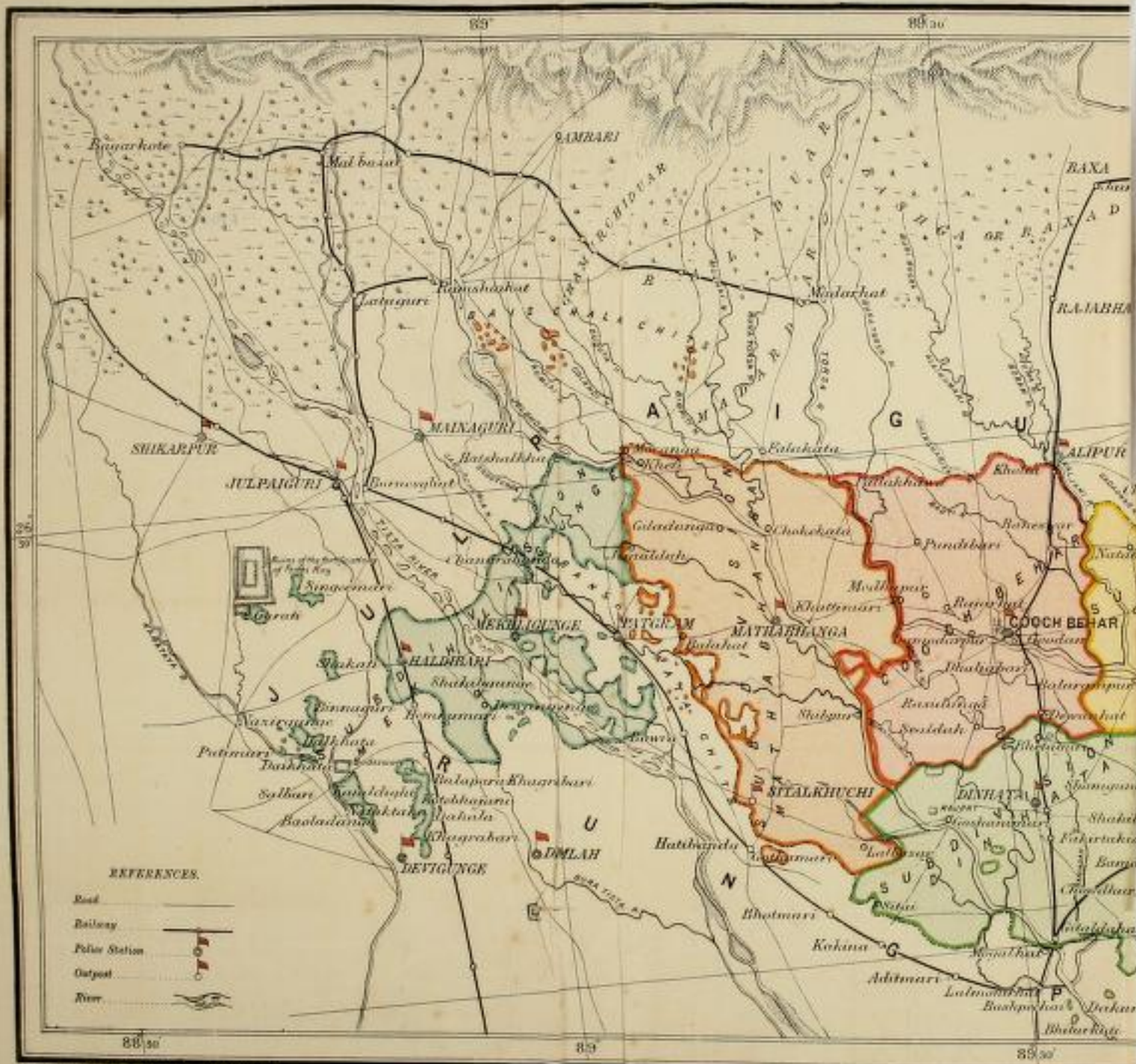
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Map No. 50, Survey of the Cooch Behar State.—1900, 12.—50.

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mound of earth which had been raised in the reign of his father. This mound still exists. It was enclosed by ramparts or small earthen walls, within which a *mandir* was built for god Hari, and the place soon grew into a small town. Damodarpur has now lost its days, and has an abandoned look. The *shelāite* of this *dhām* are the Medhis of Bykuntapur, whose ancestor was a disciple of Damodar.

Since the diversion of the Torsa in 1890, the river has been flowing by the south-west of the *dhām*, a considerable portion of which has already been cut away. The river may any day engulf what now remains of the last resting place of the renowned Bāishnava preacher.

CHAPTER VII.

NATURAL PRODUCTIONS.

SECTION. I.

Fauna.

Fauna of large varieties.

The Fauna of Cooch Behar is large, and almost all the animals found in Lower Bengal can be met with here. The birds are very numerous and are of a large variety. Situated as the country is almost at the foot of the Himalayas, it is naturally expected to be the abode of the wild beasts. And so in fact it was formerly. Large clearances have been going on of late, not only in this country but also in the western Duars which stretch from its northern borders to the Bhutan Hills, and the shelter necessary for the growth of wild animals is fast disappearing. These animals are therefore moving higher up the country. Formerly the ravages from the wild beasts were very great, especially near the northern borders, where many a tiger and rhino have been shot by His Highness and the Deputy Commissioners. Wild game has now become almost scarce, and the Maharaja has to hold his annual shoot in the Duars. It was chiefly owing to this reason that two large tracts in the north of Parganas Cooch Behar and Tufangunj which contained good jungle, had lately to be constituted into Reserve Forests for the preservation of the big games for the shoot of His Highness, who is famous for his love of sport and is a first rate shot.

Wild beasts gradually becoming scarce.

Big games.

Among the big games may be mentioned rhinoceros, tiger, leopard, wild buffalo and black-bear. They used to infest the country around Patlakhawa, Pundibari, Guard Hat and Mahis-khuchi; and, although owing to the spread of cultivation and human habitation in those tracts, the bigger games have now become rare, leopards and black-bears are still to be found in these

parts in large numbers. The black-bear inhabits the ant-hill by digging caves, and is very ferocious when hungry. The leopard which is called by the people *Hakrá*, from the sound it makes, is a very wily and audacious animal, and comes out of its lair in the bush and loiters about hamlets and villages in the night. It some times enters the villager's cowshed, and decamps with such prey as it can seize. The native *shikari* some times makes the cage-trap even in a part of his cattle shed; but more often it is erected near a jungle, where, decoyed by the bleating of the sheep and mistaking the bamboo structure for a fold, it stealthily creeps in, and as surely becomes a prisoner to be killed in the morning. It also does havoc among the village dogs. The leopards are annually shot or caged in large numbers. The State gives a reward of Rs. 10 for each beast killed, the rate for tigers being Rs. 20 per head.

Wild pigs are numerous in the jungly tracts, where they are a sort of pest to the cultivator's crops. They live in grass jungle in cavities and strew grass over the mouth of the same to conceal their existence. They attack men if found in their way, in the morning and evening, and are dreaded by the people more than any other wild animal.

Smaller
game.

The deer is equally harmful to the peasants' crops. Three different species of deer are generally found in the state,—the antelope, *bara-khateya* or spotted deer, and *khateya* or hog-deer. The *krishna sár* or black deer is also sometimes met with; but it does not seem to be strictly indigenous to the country. The natives kill the deer in this way:—

They have got strong cord-nets with meshes about 6 inches either way, some 8 feet in breadth, and about a thousand in length. When the deer is to be netted the whole village turns out with their nets and spears and long stout bamboo-clubs, and surround the patch of jungle where the animal is suspected to be on three sides, the fourth side being kept open. The ends of the nets are strongly tied to trees or poles firmly driven into the earth, and the nets are spread out and fixed like walls with loose bamboo stays. They then commence beating the jungle, and sometimes set fire to it, at the open side. Thus driven the animal rushes forward and, in its attempt to escape, dashes against the nettings and manages to dislodge the bamboos, so as to bring the net clear upon its head. It now struggles hard, and, in its frantic efforts to break loose the cords, is only the more entangled. The *shikaries* now come up and kill the animal with spears and *lathies*. Wild pigs are also netted in this way. In fact deer and pigs are sometimes caught together from the same bush. It is not, however, very often,

How natives
net deer and
pigs.

that this attempt is successful; sometimes the animal spies the nets from a distance, and with a mighty bound steers clear of the net, and escapes to another bush in safety. The people (Rajvansis) partake of the meat, both of deer and pig, and eat it fried. The skin and antlers are preserved, but there is no traffic in them. They are not sold, and can only be had for a *baksis*.

Monkeys are found in Barakodali in Pargana Tufangunj. They are short-tailed creatures, very wily, and are a pest to vegetables of every description. The animals are, however, considered sacred, and no body would ever think of killing them.

Other wild
beasts.

Foxes and jackals are numerous. The former live in holes on *dangas* or high lands among sand. They are great thieves of the farmer's poultry and young sheep.

Hares, both grey and white, are found. They are called by the people *shasha*, which is only a corrupted form of the Sanskrit *shashaka*. They are caught in traps and offered for sale. The flesh of the hare is relished by the people.

Khatash or tiger-cat, and wild cat also kill birds. The *neel* on the other hand does havoc to fruits, especially mature and ripe plantain.

Of the other wild animals the chief are the porcupine, otter, mongoose, mouse, rat, mole, and the comon bat. The otter is not used in fishing, as in the Southern Districts of Lower Bengal.

Reptiles.

Of the reptiles, snakes of different kinds are found in the State. The species of poisonous snakes is, however, rare. The furious cobra, brown and black, though sometimes met with, is not common. Death from snake-bite is not also very common. The number of cases reported to the Police stations during the last decade came up to about 31 on an average every year.

Crocodiles are commonly found in the big rivers, basking in the sun on the sands. They are very shy, and it is hard to approach them. At the faintest noise they take alarm, and, rushing over the sands with great speed, plunge into the water never to rise again in good half an hour. Sometimes they can be seen floating past with the current, when they look more like driftwood than a living thing. The man-eater with a snout on the head, is not to be met with in the Cooch Behar rivers. The species known as *gharial* with long jaws, which subsists upon fish, is very common.

Gosap, lizard, *anjana* and *kaklash* or chameleon are very common. Lizards of two kinds, small and large, are generally met with.

Frogs of three varieties are usually found. The small creatures of a dirty brown complexion are very numerous during the rains.

The *kola beng* or yellow frog, weighing full half a pound and more, frequents the skirts of beels and pools of water, and makes a rumbling, gurgling noise. It goes on creaking at the sight of rain-clouds, and is very noisy on a rainy day. Its instinct tells it when it will rain, and its creaking prognosticates coming shower. Of course this happens only during the rainy season. Two small pouches, dark blue in colour, come out one on each side of its throat at every sound whenever it creaks. The *katkate-beng* with long legs lives under ground, or in a cleft under a weight. It has a flattened shape and spiteful look, and is considered ominous by the people.

Birds.—Of the birds of prey the vultures, kites, *hargila* or stork, and *baj* or hawk, are the chief. Two kinds of vultures are met with,—the *sakuni* or the ordinary vulture, and the *gridhini*, which has two ruddy pouches hanging down from its neck. There are three distinct species of kites,—the ordinary kite, the *shankha-chil* or white-breasted kite, and the *gang-chil* or the fishing kite, which last is smaller in size than the other two species. Birds of prey

The principal of the big game-birds are *deshantari*, *kadma* and wild geese. Although not as big as the vulture, the *deshantari* or foreign bird is a heavy bird with black wings, big tail, pale white body and neck, and long legs. The flesh is tough, but otherwise good eating. The *kadma* is the Indian crane. These are found in low paddy fields during the rains, and also after the harvest has been gathered. They also frequent the marshy lands. The snow-white wild geese are met with in large flocks on the *chars* of the big rivers, especially in the upper section of the Jaldhaka or Mansai. Big game-birds.

Of the smaller game-birds pea-fowl, wild duck, teal, wild fowl, red and black partridges, quail, snipe, golden plover, pigeon, dove, *harital* and *titir* are the chief. Peacocks are found in large numbers in the jungles. Its flesh is tough but is much liked by the Meches and the Garos. They are very shy, and it is difficult to come within range with them. They pass the day in the thickets, and get upon the tree in the night. The best time for shooting them is little before dawn, and again after sun-set. Smaller game-birds.

The singing-birds are the cuckoo, *bulbul*, *daiyal* and the *bau-katha-kae* birds. *Tiyas* or parakeets, *salik*, *go-shalik*, *gang-shalik* and *ram-shalik*, which have ordinarily a harsh note, may be classed among the talking birds. When taught they can speak pretty well. Singing birds

The crow, raven, *finga*, owl, night-owl, *dhudum*, *khanjan*, *halde-pakhi*, *chatak* or skylark, *chakor*, wood-pecker, king-fisher, *babui*,

Khanjan

Jatra ceremony.

sparrow, *manua* and *tuni*,^r with the birds mentioned above almost exhaust the feathery kingdom of Cooch Behar. The *khanjan* is considered sacred by the Hindus. The black spot on its white breast is regarded as emblematic of the *salgram* idol, and its sight is regarded to be very propitious for a journey if the bird happens to be facing towards a particular direction at the time. There is a very old custom in the ruling family of Cooch Behar of seeing the *khanjan* on the morning of the Vijaya-Dasami day. The Jatra ceremony is held in front of the Palace when the Duar-Buxi gets on the *Pat* elephant, and, taking a bird in his hand, rests it for a moment on a lotus leaf spread on the head of the elephant, and then releases it. The spectators have a momentary view of it as it darts away. The former Maharajas used to be present at the ceremony; now only the Rajgans and the Hindu officers of the State attend it. As the bird is not easily caught, there is a man who has to supply it on the Dasami day. He holds a jaigir for this service.

Worms and Insects.—The common flies, some of which have shining bodies and wings, and butterflies of various sorts, the bee, hornet, wasp, beetle, cricket, grass-hoppers and locusts are largely met with. Spiders of different sizes are also common. The fire-flies or glow-worms are very numerous, and on a dark night the bushes and thickets become simply ablaze with these shining insects. The common gnat is not rare, and is not less troublesome than in the Southern Districts of Bengal. The *dansh* or the large gnat is met with in the jungly tracts, and so severe is its sting that the inflammation becomes really painful, and does not subside for days together. The *suya*, *bickha* and *chella* become very troublesome during the hot and rainy seasons. The red *kelloi* is very large here; worms even seven or eight inches long and proportionally thick are not rare. A smaller species, about an inch long and of a dull brown colour, which moves in packs like the ant, is very common. The lumious *bickha* is another species, and it glows like the fire-fly. Ants of different sorts are largely met with. The large ants are called *dai* and *mejeli* or *kath-pipra*; the former is larger in size, but bite of the latter is more painful. Of the smaller ants two different species are found, namely, red and black. The red ants bite, but the black ants do not. White ants are almost a pest here. In the jungly tracts, amongst reeds and long grasses, ant-hills sometimes eight or ten feet high are to be found. The white ant is a favourite food with the bear which generally lives in the hill by digging a cave in it. The bug is as much a nuisance as it could be. Leeches, both large and small, called *mashe* and *chhinna*, respectively, are met with. Small oyster shells and snails of different sizes and varieties are found in the marshes. The *Jugis*

prepare lime by burning the shells which is used by the people with *pa* and betel-nut. Earth-worms and worms of some other kinds are very common. Silk-worm grows wild, and is nurtured for eudi-silk. It feeds on casteroil and *makai* leaves.

Fishes.—Fishes are numerous in the rivers and *beels* of Cooch Behar, and large varieties are met with. The people exceedingly love fish which is eaten both fresh and dried. The dried fish is called *sutka*, and has been nick-named *padma kashtra* or sandal wood, by the people of Lower Bengal, from its very offensive smell. It is generally imported from places near the Brahmaputra, where the drying process is carried on a very extensive scale. Dried fish called *padma kashtra*.

Men of almost every caste, with the exception of the Brahmins, catch fish for their own consumption. The fishing castes are, however, the *Jaluis* or *Machuyas*, *Sikaries*, *Bajaris*, *Tiyaris* and Garos. Fishing castes.

Rod fishing is very common, especially during the rains. The other fishing instruments are the *jakai*, *palo*, *thosa*, *daru*, and *ramdaru*, all made of bamboo. The commonest mode of catching fish in *beels* and *nalas*, is by erecting a fixed engine going by the name *jan*. To do this, an embankment is thrown across a *nala*, or the narrowest part of the *beel* through which the water generally flows out, leaving a small opening in the middle about four or five feet wide, for the passage of the water. A *pata*, which may be likened to an immense sieve, made of bamboo finely split and woven with rope, is then spread against the current, touching the water at the gap in the embankment, the other end being kept a little high. The space between this contrivance and the bottom of the *nala* is at the same time closed through the water with a second *pata* so as to bar the progress of the fish. Now, as the fish comes with the current and finds an obstruction in the *pata* across the *nala*, it leaps up and falls on the sieve spread in front of it, and is at once caught by the men who lie in waiting. In this way the engine works automatically, and large numbers of fish are caught every day. As a rule net is used by the professional fishermen. But they have no large nets, like the *berjal* in use in the Padma and the Brahmaputra, and netting is not always very successful. The art of fishing cannot be said to have much advanced in this country. Fishing implements.
The Jan.

In catching the *ilish* fish, the fishermen often erect what is called *jhil* in a running stream. Long bamboo poles with their heads split in two are driven into the bed of the river in a single row from either bank, and an open space is left in the middle where a net is spread. The bamboos are placed 8 or 10 feet apart and 3 or 4 feet of them remain out of water. They are continually shaken by the force of the current, and their parted heads go on striking each other, and thus serve to give a continual alarm to the Jhil

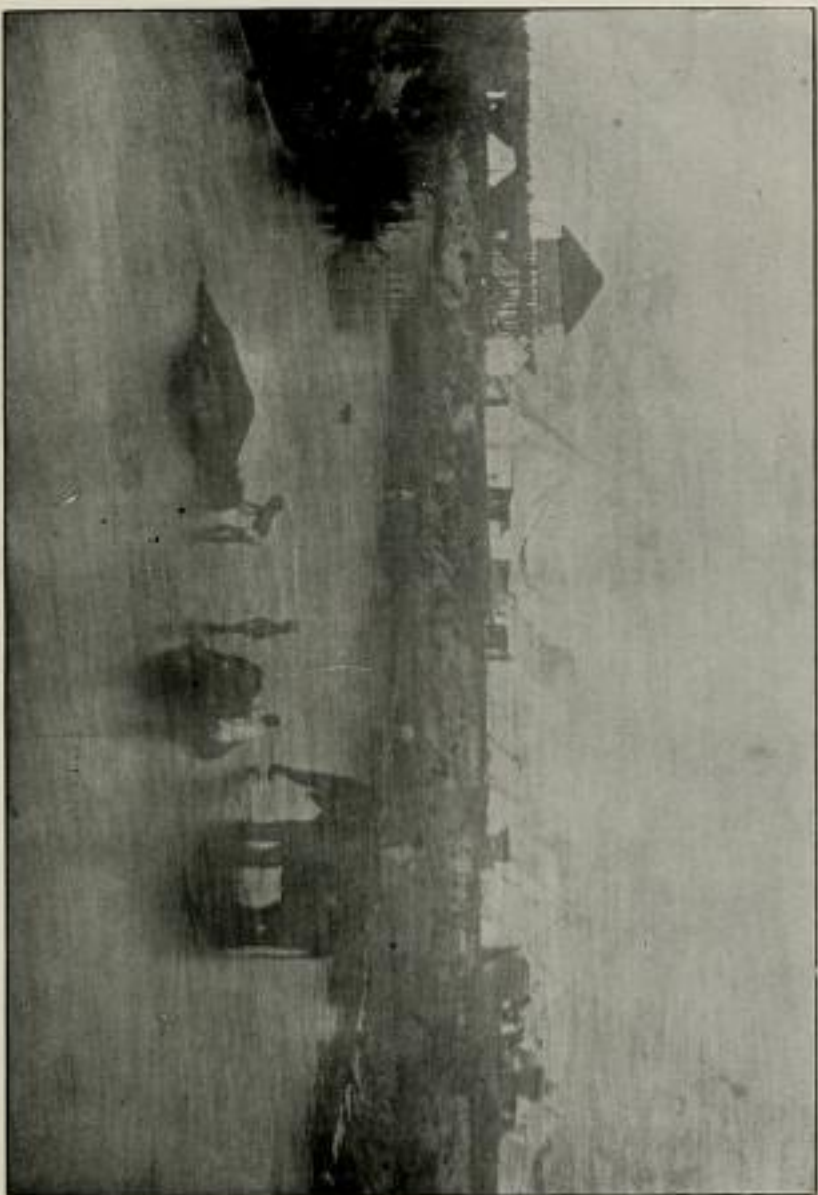


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SHOOTING CAMP—Page 420.

Shooting at India, Oona, February, 1908