

FINAL REPORT

ON THE

SURVEY AND SETTLEMENT OPERATIONS

IN THE

JALPAIGURI DISTRICT,

1906-1916.



CALCUTTA :

THE BENGAL SECRETARIAT BOOK DEPOT.

1916.

12. Darpa Deb Raikat (1758-1793).
13. Jayanta Deb Raikat (1793-1800).
14. Sarba Deb Raikat (1800-1847).
15. Raj Rajendra Deb Raikat, minor (1847-1849).
16. Makoranda Deb Raikat (1849-1852).
17. Chandra Sekhar Deb Raikat (1852-1865).
18. Jogendra Deb Raikat (1865-1877).
19. Jagadindra Deb Raikat, minor adopted son (1877-1885).
20. Phanindra Deb Raikat (1885-1895).
21. Prasanna Deb Raikat (1895)."

11. I would add to the historical information above given the fact that on two previous occasions the estate was under the Court of Wards, namely, between 1800 and 1812 A.D., during the minority of Sarba Deb, and again between 1857 and 1863 during the minority of Chandra Sekhar Deb. These facts were of importance during the present settlement operations in the settlement of fair rents under section 105, Bengal Tenancy Act.

From the earliest days of Jalpaiguri district the Raikat of Baikanthapur claimed the Tista river as a jalkar of his estate, and two cases were contested in the High Court on this point, one in 1882 and the other, which also went subsequently to the Privy Council, in 1897.

By the decision of 1897 the eastern bank of the Tista as shewn in Pemberton's map of 1858-59 was defined as the boundary between Baikanthapur and the Western Duars. There is reason to believe that Pemberton had only surveyed up to the Western bank and had merely sketched in the eastern bank by eye, showing approximately what size of river the Tista was. As the whole of the Tista river was included by O'Donel in his thakbust and Revenue Survey maps of the Western Duars, Pemberton had no reason for surveying the eastern bank unless the boundary question was raised by the estate. The estate had just been taken under the Court of Wards, so it is safe to assume that the question was not raised before Pemberton. The task of demarcating Pemberton's imaginary line was carried out by the Survey Department in 1900-1902, the work being tested and favourably reported on by Lieutenant. (Now Major) Hirst in the latter year; and it was primarily to settle the Tista char lands that the extension of the present settlement operations to Baikanthapur was requested. As a considerable portion of the line even in Lieutenant. Hirst's time fell in the river bed, and as the Tista of recent years has been working eastwards, it was inevitable that many of the marks had been washed away. In 1910 Mr. Hart, the Technical Adviser attached to this settlement party, relaid Lieutenant Hirst's line, and as a result certain minor re-adjustments of territory between the estate and the Government estate of Westerns Duars took place.

The Western boundary of this estate, as mentioned in an earlier paragraph, overlaps a little into Darjeeling at some points, while everywhere else it coincides with the district boundary. Along its southern boundary the Baikanthapur estate marches with the territories of the Maharaja of Cooch-Behar, the State itself at the east of the line and the zemindary along the rest.

A small block of land is separated from the main block by the Tista river and lies south of the Western Duars pargana of South Mainaguri.

12. The northern corner of the estate consists of some 71 square miles of compact forest. This forest contains much sal timber and will become a very valuable property when it recovers from the denudation which it suffered for many years. It was proposed in 1904 to extend the Forest Act to this forest and it was provisionally placed in charge of the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Jalpaiguri Division. At the time the Manager of the estate was strongly opposed to the transfer, and this opposition was maintained, till at last the Raikat clinched the matter by refusing to agree to surrender his forest.

The attitude of the Forest Department from the first was that unless continuous control over a long period of years could be guaranteed, it was useless to take over this forest. No guarantee could of course be given beyond the date of the ward's attainment of his majority, but it was anticipated that he would then agree to continue the arrangement. I was gazetted Forest

Settlement Officer in 1907, but on taking up the work I speedily found that so many encroachments, trespasses and alleged rights would be met with that nothing could be done until the cadastral maps were ready. I should add that the preparation of a map and record-of-rights in respect of this forest was one of the primary reasons adduced by Mr. Gruning, Deputy Commissioner at the time, for extending this settlement to Baikanthapur. In 1909 I took up the work on the spot, but progress was exceedingly slow owing to the necessity of investigating a multitude of claims, and as the estate had no one at the time to accompany me and present the landlord's side of the case, I postponed further work with the approval of the Director of Land Records. Meantime the Raikat formed definite opinions on the subject as stated above and was very anxious that the forest should not be reserved but should be left to his own management. In 1913 the Forest Department gave up their control of it—a control which, in the absence of the Forest Act and of any whole-hearted support from the Manager of the Estate, had never been effective, and subsequently in accordance with the Raikat's wishes all idea of reserving it was abandoned.

13. A series of parallel rivers, taking their rise in the north of the district, and running, more or less, due south, cut up this estate as well as the adjoining Chaklajat Estate into long narrow strips. The largest of these streams running parallel with the Tista on the east and the Mahanada on the west are the—

Karla	Jumna.
Talma	Karatoa.
Panga	Galma.

Only one of these rivers—Karatoa—is of any size. East and West communication by roads has hitherto been difficult, especially during the rains, but the District Board is gradually bridging all its roads. A bridge over the Karatoa at some convenient point is much required; and I understand that this project is under consideration.

14. Much of the land in Baikanthapur as also in Boda is high and sandy, though there are also very fertile stretches. The former would be of immense value were it nearer Calcutta, as a series of ideal golf-courses and general recreation grounds could be laid out thereon. But situated where they are, they are not a rich source of revenue to the landlord. The arable lands in the estate cover an area of 212,000 acres, of which some 150,000 acres or 71 per cent. are annually cropped. By far the most important crop is rice, which absorbs 85 per cent. of the cropped area. Juta accounts for some 9 per cent. only, tobacco for 1½ per cent., oilseeds 1 per cent., garden produce 1 per cent., miscellaneous food-crops 1 per cent., miscellaneous food-grains 1 per cent. and sugarcane ½ per cent. The paddy lands are mostly rich and fertile and cultivators are in general well-to-do.

15. The population of Baikanthapur consists principally of Muhammadans and Rajbansis, who profess Hinduism. The Rajbansi is really a Koch, but as the Rajas of Cooch Behar and Darrang were Koches the people instead of calling themselves Koches preferred to style themselves of the same family or "bans" as the Rajas.

At the time of the Census in 1911, a movement was inaugurated (or I should say more truly "revived", as the question had been mooted before) by a progressive section of the Rajbansi community to obtain recognition as Hindus of Kshatriya caste. The leader soon got a large following, and in 1912 many monster meetings were held in this and in adjoining districts at which the ceremony of taking the sacred thread was performed by thousands of Rajbansis. Although isolated cases of friction between orthodox and reformed Rajbansis occurred, the movement was in general quite peaceful and undemonstrative. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar, however, gave no encouragement and the Census authorities were not sympathetic, so beyond a number of changes of name by individuals and the adoption of certain caste prejudice, such as refusal to eat pig's flesh, the movement made but slight visible impression on the life of the community. The people do not live in villages but in scattered homesteads in the middle of their respective lands. Owing to the nature of the soil, population is unevenly distributed, in some

parts being exceedingly sparse. As in the rest of the district, education is backward and in agriculture there is much room for enterprise and improvement.

16. The interior of this portion of Jalpaiguri has in the past been seldom visited by the higher district officials, as with the exception of the police-station at Rajganj, there is nothing specific to visit. This is a pity as the country is really attractive and the people friendly and hospitable.

Jalpaiguri and Siliguri are the only places of importance in the pargana. There is a thana at Rajganj. The only relic of antiquity worth mentioning, besides a few of the old tanks ascribed with very doubtful authenticity to Raja Lakshan Sen, the last Hindu King of Bengal, is the fort of Bhitargarh lying some 6 miles south-west of Jalpaiguri in which nothing remains to be seen but grassy ramparts and a heap of bricks. There are legends of secret passages but there is no surviving knowledge to bear out these legends.

17. **The parganas of Boda and Patgram**, always the most populous parts of the district, have changed but little since Babu Harendra Narayan Choudhury wrote his report. A new high school at Debiganj, a new road or bridge here or a new dispensary or rest-house there practically sum up the topographical alterations. Probably the most important change is the increase in the cultivation of jute, and the rise in the standard of living of the people due to the high prices obtained over a series of years for that crop. In prosperous years much money is wasted on the purchase of luxuries, such as English soap and scent and many cheap and trumpery gewgaws attractive to the eye but devoid of any practical utility. As an instance of the lengths to which this passion for novelties can go, the following occurrence is perhaps worthy of record. A resident of one locality, on a visit to Jalpaiguri, bought a guttapercha collar and went home wearing it. Soon he found imitators and the cult of the collar grew until an enterprising local shopman imported a supply. Then they were bought by every one, both by those who wore shirts and those who did not; so that the incongruous sight of a cultivator, clad in the scanty garments of his working hours but adorned with the guttapercha collar required by fashion, was not uncommon.

The lack of thrift is much to be deplored and it is to be hoped that the lesson of 1914 will not be entirely forgotten. In that year a slump in jute prices coincided with a partial failure of the winter rice crop. The cultivators seemed to have very inadequate reserves to fall back upon and there was some distress in places. Considering the large profits yielded by agriculture for many preceding years, this result was remarkable and indicated that the thriftlessness I have alluded to was not merely a recurring and temporary annual phase but had become habitual.

18. **The Western Duars**, as the strip of submontane country is called, which extends from the Tista to the Sunkos, bounded on the north by Darjeeling district and the State of Bhutan and on the south by the State of Cooch Behar, consists mostly of flat arable plains, but rises in the north to meet the first slopes of the Himalayas, which begin with a series of plateaus varying in elevation from 500 to 2,000 feet. Tea gardens cover these plateaus and spread down into the plains below them. The district is cut up by big rivers, mountain torrents, and great forests into distinct localities, the only permanent link between which has hitherto been the railway, and even that link is liable to frequent breaches. The heavy rainfall, varying from 130 inches in some parts to nearly 300 inches in others, is usually well distributed over a large part of the year. Famine and agricultural distress are unknown, and the country wears a mantle of perennial green. The cold weather lingers here long after it has forsaken the plains of Bengal, and it is a disappointing season which does not bring a grateful coolness early in October.

To the lover of natural beauty the Duars has much to offer: a land of forest and river, bold bluffs and deep ravines, with the mountains rising dominant above it in ever loftier ridges till they merge in the distant snows.

19. To the sportsmen the Duars is no longer the happy hunting ground of former years, but there is still a good deal of game, big and small, for those who are in a position to get at it. The clearing of jungle and reclamation of waste land, which have gone on rapidly in recent years, have restricted the areas where game is accessible practically to the fringes of the reserved

forests. The dense undergrowth and compactness of the trees render the inner recesses of the forest almost inviolable sanctuaries, and guarantees for future generations of Shikaries a constant supply of game though the development of the district outside will go on increasing the difficulty of getting it. The principal wild animals found in the Duars are:—Elephant, rhinoceros, mithun, buffalo, sambur, swampdeer, hog-deer, barking-deer, tiger, panther, black bear and a large range of wild cats: red dogs are unfortunately increasing: pigs are very common, but there are few places where they can be ridden: the birds comprise peafowl, greater and lesser florican, jungle-fowl, black-partridge, marsh partridge, imperial and many other kinds of pigeons, snipe, painted snipe, quail, button quail, black quail, a few callidre pheasants, and an occasional woodcock: duck of many kinds and geese are found in small numbers on the larger rivers and occasionally on the jheels—which are neither large nor numerous—but the larger flights of migratory birds pass over the Duars as though this strip of country were too near the hills to settle on: hares are fairly abundant in places.

Of the large mammals the only varieties which can be said to be present in abundance are elephants, panthers, both large and small, and in a lesser degree tigers and bears. Efforts have been made in recent years to reduce the number of elephants, but the various kheddahs have not been very successful, and these interesting creatures are still as big a nuisance as ever. With the staunch conservatism which is characteristic of superior intelligence—in the jungle—they resent the innovations of Philistine humanity, and mark their disapproval by knocking down telegraph posts, overturning houses, and damaging railway bridges. At the beginning of this settlement they took strong exception to the traverse survey—an attitude of mind shared by many of their more civilised fellow-citizens—and strangely enough their disapproval vented itself in the same manner, namely, the uprooting of pegs. Clearly they shared the initial popular delusion that traverse pegs were a misguided attempt to mark boundaries, for their own forest boundary marks they leave alone.

Panthers swarm all over the district. There is never a bit of jungle so small that it does not from time to time afford a home to a panther. Two distinct varieties are found—ignoring the black panther the rare specimens of which have been shot here being undoubtedly instances of melanism—one of which attains the size of a small tiger, while the other is a little beast seldom much exceeding 6 feet in length. Though very numerous, these panthers are not such a scourge on the cultivator as might be supposed. It is only when several congregate in one place and begin to kill on a large scale that he will take the trouble to invoke the assistance of the district authorities, which assistance is readily given.

Tigers are numerous but much less frequently shot than heretofore. This is due to the clearing of jungle. A tiger will not stay in a small patch, but will wander out to kill and usually return to his heavy forest. The tiger-infested areas are restricted practically to the reserved forests and their outskirts, and it becomes annually more and more difficult to get at them.

Bears in the same way are less ubiquitous than they are. A bear must have an impenetrable thicket to live in such as a cane-break if he is to be a settled inhabitant, and as such shelters are cleared away, the number of bears in evidence diminishes.

On the other hand, rhinoceros, mithun and buffalo, which for the past fifteen years or so have been strictly preserved, are steadily increasing in numbers, though it will be many a year before they recover from the lawful slaughter which almost brought them to extinction.

The rivers of the Duars afford excellent mahseer fishing, having been redeemed within recent years by the exertions of several local fishing clubs and the co-operation of the Forest Officers from the ruin to which dynamite and unrestricted netting and trapping had well-nigh brought them. Outside the limits of the mahseer reserves much might be done to develop and improve the fisheries. With such a wealth of streams it is absurd that the Duars should be so inadequately supplied with fish.

20. To the man of scientific bent the Duars offer a splendid field for exploration. Butterflies, beetles, spiders, moths, new and rare specimens,

reward the entomologist ; while the snakes and smaller mammals have by no means been exhausted. The forests contain many varieties of orchids, some being rare and valuable.

To the best of my knowledge no exhaustive geological or mineralogical survey of the Duars has been made, and there are not wanting indications that valuable discoveries are within the bounds of possibility. Among the phenomena of purely scientific interest that might be explained by a geologist is that which is known locally as the "Tista Guns." In rainy weather, especially about the month of May, these loud booming reports, emanating, as far as the ear can judge, from the river-bed, occur with great frequency usually in salvos of two or sometimes three. Similar but less intense manifestations occur in other Duars rivers, notably the Torsa. These detonations are often exceedingly loud and of great volume, like the report of a big gun some distance off. I have made repeated and fruitless attempts to locate the sounds and have often questioned boatmen and adjoining residents about them, but no one whom I have met has ever claimed to have seen the phenomenon occur. If it were an explosion of any kind, such as pockets of air or gas bursting under accumulated pressure—a plausible *prima facie* explanation inasmuch as the rivers run very largely underground in this part of the world, and in rainy weather will contain a larger percentage of air in solution—some visible manifestation would accompany the sound. It therefore seems probable that the sounds are not so local as they seem, but are heard over the whole area at the same instant, giving to each listener an impression of nearness but indefinite direction of origin. It is probable that the "Barisal Guns" are identical with them, and I believe similar phenomena occur in Java. I have been told that in the Rajshahi and Pabna districts also these sounds are heard, but have not myself heard them there. That these places are all situated above a known geological "fault" may be a mere coincidence.

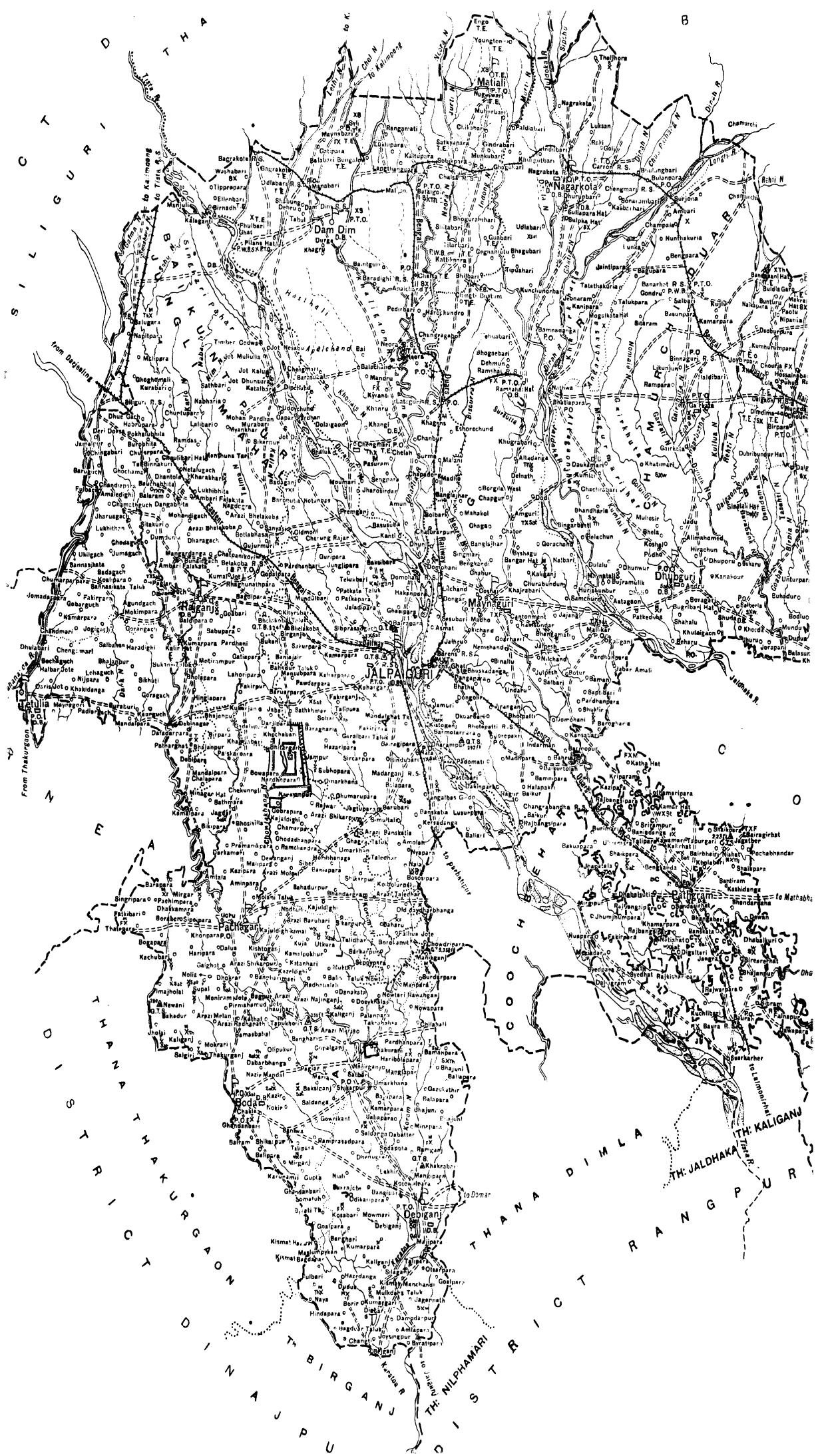
Among other practical branches of scientific study for which unlimited facilities unfortunately exist in these parts are malaria and obscure fevers and a variety of important plant-blight. These problems have been the subject of much research, but they are very far from being solved and done with.

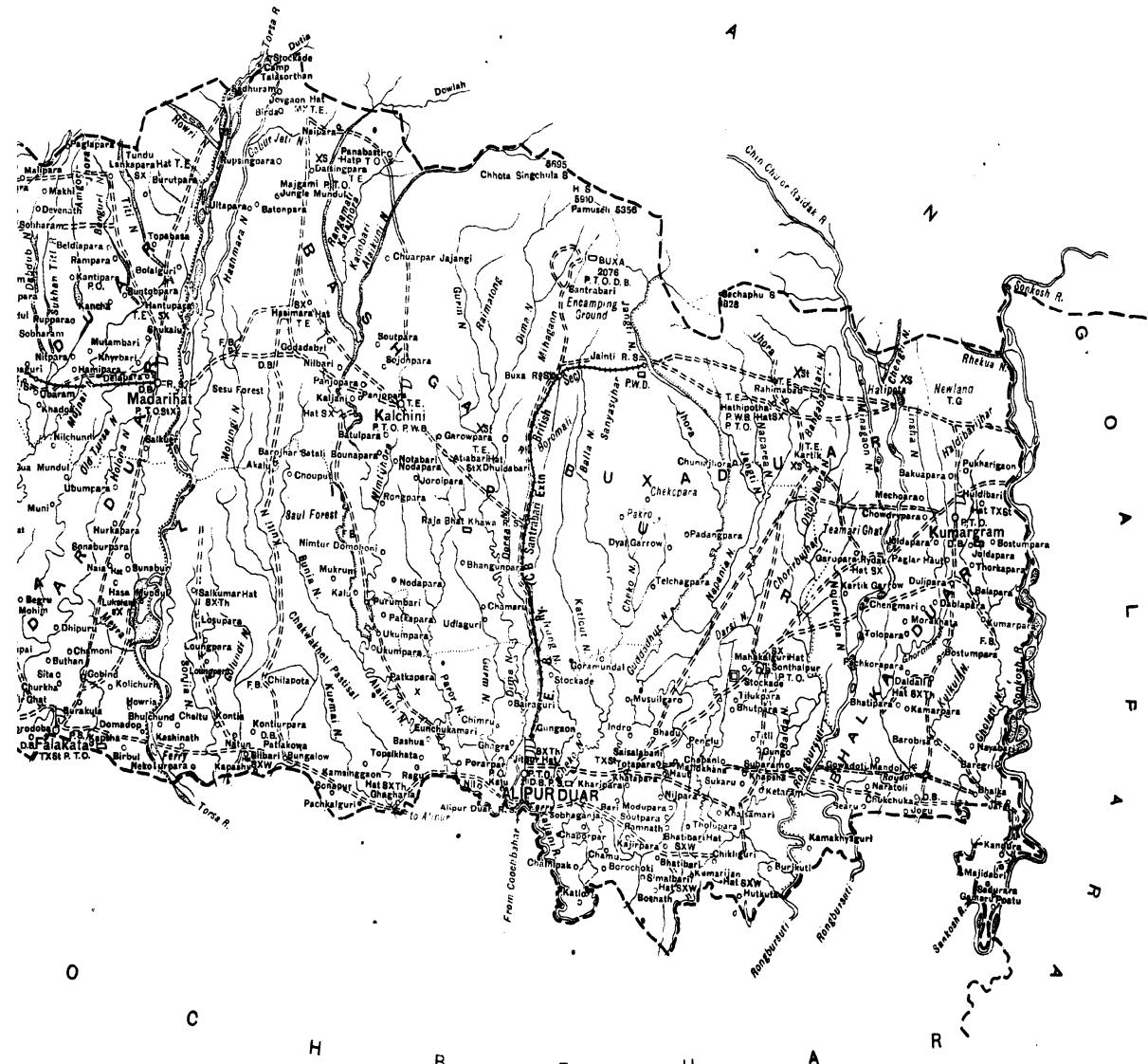
The movements of rivers and the art of training them so that they perform their allotted tasks without hindering the reasonable and legitimate enterprise of mankind is a study the importance of which has only been realised in very modern times. A river is an entity, a living thing with a personality and purpose. It has a definite work to perform and when that work is complete it dies. But the life of most rivers so immeasurably exceeds the life of a man, that no one man can hope to read the riddle of the river's life. Only by ceaseless and sustained observation over a long period can the problem be mastered. In the Duars a thousand and one riverain problems occur—some important, in that valuable lands in which capital has been sunk are involved, others of lesser immediate importance from the financial standpoint but of an ultimate importance in no degree inferior. Of this matter more will be said later on in this Chapter. It is a subject which will increasingly engage the attention of Government who, having prohibited every form of private enterprise in the training of rivers, will frequently be called upon for help and technical advice.

21. The Western Duars has not experienced many administrative changes of importance since Mr. Sunder's time. A few modifications in thana boundaries, the creation of a new outpost at Atiabari, the establishment of the headquarters of Damdim Thana at Mal, some changes in the boundaries of reserved forests, sum up the geographical side of the case.

In 1912 a member of the Indian Civil Service was for the first time appointed as Subdivisional Officer at Alijor Duar. In the same year the Duars Labour Act was passed, providing for the regular inspection of tea gardens in the interests of sanitation and public health by the Deputy Commissioner and the Civil Surgeon.

22. These administrative changes reflect important economic developments in the Western Duars. A glance at the coloured map, which prefaces Mr. Sunder's report, will show that east of the Torsa river the greater part of the country was unsettled waste land or forest, and from the figures given





REFERENCES

No. 1559 L. R., dated Calcutta, the 11th February 1920.
From—THE HON'BLE MR. M. C. McALPIN, M.A., I.C.S., Secretary to
the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department.
To—The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of
Revenue and Agriculture.

I am directed to forward, for the information of the Government of India, a copy of the final report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Jalpaiguri (1906-16) together with a copy of a review of the report contained in a letter, No. XXV—13-4670, dated the 27th June 1919, from the Director of Land Records, with which the report was submitted to Government.

2. The report has been prepared by Mr. J. A. Milligan, I.C.S., the former Settlement Officer, and was completed during the time that he has held the post of Vice-President of the State Council, Cooch Behar State. The Governor in Council considers that it is a matter for regret that Mr. Milligan was unable to submit the report earlier; but is of opinion that he has done good work amidst numerous difficulties. His report is an interesting and readable record of that work and of the curious conditions of the district of Jalpaiguri. One result of the proceedings has been an increase of revenue in the Government estates of the Western Duars from Rs. 4,43,038 to a sum which will eventually amount to Rs. 6,10,495. The Director of Land Records has drawn attention in his review to the principal features of the report, and therefore His Excellency in Council does not consider it necessary to cover the same ground.