



Government of Bengal

Final Report on the
Survey and Settlement Operations
in the District of Malda
1928—1935

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it rarely overflows its banks. The process of building has therefore gradually persisted along the bank, but the country in the interior has not received any deposit of silt. The result is a shallow low-lying basin containing a series of beels. The largest of these is Beel Bhatia in the north of Bholahat police-station. This vast beel covers an area of over nine square miles. A scheme was started to drain it and regulate the water level, so that the whole area might be brought under paddy, but this had to be abandoned owing to lack of funds. At present boro paddy is grown round the edge of the beel.

9. Soil.—The natural division of the district into two halves separated by the Mahananda river, serves to distinguish the two principal varieties of soil. East of the Mahananda, the soil of the Barind is the red soil of old alluvial formation, which is found in the neighbouring districts of Dinajpur and Rajshahi and other Bengal districts. It is composed of stiff clay, containing iron and lime, and becomes extremely hard in the cold weather. Even a heavy shower will not do more than make it slippery on the surface. It produces winter rice and a variety of rabi crops.

West of the Mahananda the soil is a light loam called do-ash. It is a later alluvial formation, and consists of an admixture of clay and sand. On the eastern side the proportion of clay is greater, but the further west one goes towards the Ganges, the greater becomes the proportion of sand. Along the Ganges itself, the chars and other areas which are liable to inundation, are often covered with a thin deposit of silt over the sand, locally known as Chama. The do-ash type of soil is the most fertile in the district, and produces jute, aus paddy and a large variety of rabi crops and vegetables. It is also the most suitable for mango gardens.

A third kind of soil is found in the low-lying areas, beels and valleys. This is a dark loam called matial. In the Tangan and Purnabhaha valleys this soil is also found, but it has a greater admixture of clay. It is fertile and produces chiefly aman or boro paddy, according to the level of the land, and rabi crops.

10. Flora and fauna.—Among the fruit-bearing trees, the most common is the mango, for which the district is famous. The orchards are distributed

all over the part of the district west of the Mahananda river, with the exception of a strip along the Ganges. Jack fruit trees are fairly common, and plantain trees are commonly grown but the fruit is not of particularly good quality. The lichi and custard apple are also found but not in any number. Among the trees of economic value the most common is the date-palm. It is grown generally along the sides of roads, or on ails and is tapped during the cold weather for its juice, from which gur is produced. The supari (areca nut) is not so common, and the cocoanut palm, so commonly found in most Bengal districts and so useful to the settlement staff, is conspicuous by its absence. The lack of any saline element in the soil seems to be the reason why the cocoanut palm will not produce any fruit.

Bamboo clumps are commonly found in almost all villages, and amongst other trees mention may be made of the nim and tamarind, and in the diara area of the babul and the boir or plum tree. In the Barind, trees are scanty, especially in the north, where, apart from the village sites, there are only occasional nim, pakur or simul trees and patches of sal wood. In the south, however, there are date palms and tal trees in some numbers.

Malda used to be famous for its big game. Today there is practically none, though as far as small game is concerned the district has still several attractions to offer, which are not to be found in most other districts. Hunter observes, "The ruins of Gaur and Pandua are the favourite haunt not only of tigers, but of every other beast, bird and reptile which frequents the isolated jungles of Bengal. The Katal (Barind) also which is estimated to cover about 150 square miles in this district, particularly that portion between the Tangan and Purnabhaha rivers, is almost entirely given up to wild animals. The jungle is too dense in many cases to admit even the passage of an elephant and consequently the larger beasts of prey breed almost undisturbed." Among the list of big game he mentions tiger, leopard, wolf (rare), ox, rhinoceros (very rare), wild hog, wild buffalo, large swamp deer, hog deer and spotted deer. The description is that of the sportsman's paradise. Nowadays the jungle has been almost entirely cleared, and the construction of railways has cut off most of the large game and confined it to the jungles under the