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# **REVENUE HISTORY**

**OF THE**

## **SUNDARBANS**

**FROM 1870 TO 1920.**

**BY**

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# REVENUE HISTORY OF THE SUNDARBANS, 1870—1920.

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## PREFACE.

THE revenue history of the Sundarbans from 1765 to 1870 published by Mr. F. E. Pargiter, Commissioner in the Sundarbans, in 1885 constitutes a mine of information ; excepting the invaluable account of the Bākarganj Sundarbans contained in the late Major Jack's final report on the Survey and Settlement operations in that district, nothing has since been written to amplify the history of that period. The period dealt with by Mr. Pargiter was one of great complexity. Commencing with the original reclamation proposals, it covers a period of great experiments, largely failures, it is true, which culminated in the rules of 1853 ; these rules bequeathed to future revenue officers difficulties and intricacies, probably unknown in other parts of Bengal.

With that period this volume does not attempt to deal except in so far as explanations are necessary to introduce the history of subsequent developments. The period from 1870 is one of development ; unity of control in the hands of the Sundarbans Commissioner has been abandoned ; the different requirements of each district, the 24-Parganās, Khulnā and Bākarganj have been recognised. Agricultural and revenue experiments have been tempered by a recognition of physical and hydrographical problems. The lessons of the former period have been applied, and development is now proceeding upon foundations, well and truly laid.

I cannot claim for the facts presented in this volume the intimate knowledge, which Mr. Pargiter acquired as Commissioner in the Sundarbans. My local knowledge of the Bākarganj area I gained under the tuition of the late Major Jack, whose papers I have had the privilege of consulting. My knowledge of the area, as a whole, is due to my position as Secretary to the Board of Revenue at a time when the development of the Sundarbans was a prominent feature of the Board's administration. My special thanks are due to Mr. Addams-Williams, C.I.E., Superintending Engineer, for valuable information on the drainage and irrigation problems of the area ; to Khān Bahādur Qamaruddin Ahmad, Colonization Officer of the Bākarganj Sundarbans, for a careful resumé of the work done in the area under his control ; and to Babu Purna Chandra Chatterji, an Assistant in the office of the Board of Revenue, for his careful collation of the papers dealing with the subject. My apologies are due to the Collectors of Bākarganj, Khulnā and the 24-Parganās for the troublesome references that I have constantly made to them. Perhaps the trouble may be partly repaid, if this history may prove of assistance in the future administration of the Sundarbans.

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CALCUTTA ;  
*The 10th August 1920.*



## CHAPTER I.

### Introductory..

1. The date at which Mr. Pargiter closed his history of the Sundarbans is an arbitrary one, and does not represent any definite mark in the development of the area. Mr. Pargiter was a member of the Indian Civil Service. He arrived in India in November 1875 and on the 27th April 1879 was appointed to officiate as Commissioner in the Sundarbans, an appointment in which he was confirmed on the 12th November following; excluding two brief periods from the 10th May 1882 until the 31st October 1882 and from the 22nd October 1883 until the 6th November 1883 he retained the office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans until the 5th April 1884; he was subsequently placed on special duty in connection with the Sundarbans from the 16th May 1885 until the 5th February 1886. He retired from the service on the 14th March 1906 as a Judge of the Calcutta High Court. His extended period of service in the Sundarbans at a time when new rules for the grant of wastelands were being introduced afforded him an unrivalled opportunity of examining old records and collecting materials for the earlier history of the tract. Mr. Pargiter deals with the period from 1765 to 1870 with a few references to occurrences in the succeeding years under the following heads :—

Chapter	I.—Early History, 1765-1816.
„	II.—Establishment of the Sundarbans Commission and Preliminary operations, 1816-1821.
„	III.—Completion of the operations in the 24-Parganas, 1821-1828.
„	IV.—Final determination of the right of the State to the Sundarbans, 1827-1828.
„	V.—Definition of the boundary of the Sundarbans forest, 1828-1833.
„	VI.—Jurisdiction and Summary of operations, 1826-1836.
„	VII.—Resumptions, 1828-1836.
„	VIII.—Grant rules of 1830 and grants of forest lands, 1829-1836.
„	IX.—Settlement of resumed and other lands, 1828-1836.

- Chapter X.—Resumptions and collateral enquiries, 1834-1844.
- „ XI.—Settlements, 1836-1844.
- „ XII.—Forest grants, grant rules and boundary difficulties, 1836-44.
- „ XIII.—Abolition and re-establishment of the Sundarban Commissioner, 1844-1846.
- „ XIV.—Inquiries, surveys, resumptions and settlements in connection with lots 216-230, 1844-1857.
- „ XV.—Settlements and rights of settlement, 1845-1857.
- „ XVI.—Forest grants, 1844-1853.
- „ XVII.—Resurvey and adjustment of Sundarban boundary in the 24 Parganas, 1844-1856.
- „ XVIII.—Resumptions, enquiries, jurisdiction, etc., 1844-1857.
- „ XIX.—Revised Sundarban grant rules of 24th September 1853.
- „ XX.—Sundarban grants and the rules of 1853, 1853-1862.
- „ XXI.—Resumed mahals and the rules of 1853, 1853-1862.
- „ XXII.—Jurisdiction, settlements and rights of settlement, 1854-1868.
- „ XXIII.—Revenue and other surveys, boundary decisions and resumptions, 1852-1870.
- „ XXIV.—Schemes of Sundarban improvement and miscellaneous matters, 1853-1868.
- „ XXV.—Rules for the sale of waste lands free of land revenue and for the redemption of land revenue, 1858-1870.
- „ XXVI.—History of Saugor Island, 1811-1877.

The above synopsis shows that Mr. Pargiter's history contains an extraordinary mass of detail, but his attempt to include this immense amount of detail and to distribute it in strict chronological order has tended to obscure the principles involved and the causes that led to variations in policy. In continuing this history for the succeeding 50 years mass of detail has been sacrificed to explanations of administrative changes, but as a preliminary measure an explanation of the state of affairs at the arbitrary date 1870 is necessary. For by the year 1870, the threads of the administrative web had become entangled, and it is necessary to unravel the tangle before the further development of the area can be fully understood. This involves firstly an explanation of the area included in the Sundarbans and the administrative

system adopted in that area, and, secondly a *resumé* of the methods and results of development up to the year 1870.

2. Until the year 1828, the experiments in development had been carried on in an area described by indeterminate boundaries; it was recognized that "the uninhabited tract known by the name of the Sundarbans has ever been the property of the State, the same not having been alienated or assigned to *zamin-dārs*, or included in any way in the arrangements of the perpetual settlement." This definition of 1828 was not, however, strictly correct; a portion of the area was already inhabited, and this again had in part, especially in the 24-Parganās, been included in the permanent settlement. The western, southern and eastern boundaries of "the pestilential tract near Calcutta, which afforded a home for wild animals and shelter to smugglers and pirates" were admittedly the river Hughli, the Bay of Bengal and the river Meghna; the northern boundary was indeterminate. It is true that in the 24-Parganās area, a boundary had been laid down by Ensign Prinsep between 1822 and 1823; in 1814, a boundary had been surveyed by Lieutenant Morrieson, but this had not included the Bākarganj area, the northern boundary of which was undefined despite a rough delineation by bamboos, the *bānsgāri*, made by Henckell in 1786. By Regulation III of 1828, however, it was determined to fix the boundaries of the Sundarbans definitely on a legal basis by a detailed survey. In 1829 and 1830, during the Commissionership of Mr. Dampier, a map was prepared by Lieutenant Hodges, partly by fresh survey and partly by the aid of Morrieson's and Prinsep's surveys. On this map, the northern boundary was clearly defined by what is known as the Dampier-Hodges line, which with a few minor exceptions still constitutes the northern boundary of the Sundarbans, and it is generally with the area south of this line that this history deals.

**Definition  
of the area  
included in  
the Sundar-  
bans.**

3. Co-ordination of control was first effected in the Sundarbans by the appointment of a Commissioner with all the duties, power and authority of a Collector of Land Revenue under the provisions of Regulation IX of 1816. The Commissionership was still in existence in 1870, though the duties of the office had been considerably restricted. In 1829 the duty of collecting the revenue of the area was transferred to the Collectors of the adjacent districts, though the Commissioner

**Administra-  
tive  
control  
until 1870.**

remained responsible for collections in estates under attachment or settlement; the duties of the Commissioner were accordingly confined to resumption, forest grants, survey and settlement. In 1844 the office of the Commissioner was abolished, and each Collector controlled the operations in the area attached to his district. This method of administration proved unworkable, and in 1846 the office of the Commissioner was restored on its former basis with the exception that the whole of *parganā* Buzrogumedpur remained under the control of the Collector of Bākarganj, while permanently-settled *mahāls* were allocated to the respective Collectors. After some discussion between the years 1852 and 1857 it was decided that all resettlements of Sundarbans estates should be made by the Commissioner. In 1858 it was decided that all appeals against the Commissioner's orders in the 24-Parganās and Jessore (Khulnā) Sundarbans should lie to the Presidency Commissioner; appeals in the Bākarganj area in the case of settlements were heard directly by the Board, in the case of resumptions, as ruled in 1862, by the Dacca Commissioner. Such was the status of the Sundarbans Commissioner in 1870.

**Defects  
of the  
system.**

4. This unity of administrative control over the whole of the Sundarbans area is a fact of great importance in the development of the tract. The unity implied that the same rules and practice were applied to all parts of the Sundarbans, however different in character. This implication was true in practice; a proposal to distinguish between the rates of settlement in Bākarganj and the remainder of the area in 1853—a distinction based on irrefutable grounds—was negatived. The defects of the system are narrated with great lucidity, so far as the Bākarganj area is concerned, by the late Major J. C. Jack in the final report on the Survey and Settlement operations in the Bākarganj District, 1900-1908 (paragraphs 244 to 268). Published in the year 1915, the report gives a critical account of the administration of the Bākarganj Sundarbans, based on the unrivalled experience of a Settlement Officer, who had known the area intimately for 15 years, and had tackled its problems with an extraordinary degree of application and enthusiasm. "There can be no doubt, however," wrote Major Jack that the error would have been acknowledged much earlier had not the forests in Bākarganj been united with the forests of Khulnā and the 24-Parganās under a common management.....

Above all ignorance of Bākarganj conditions was abysmal, and as a result terms and conditions which may have been suitable to Khulnā and the 24-Parganās were forced upon Bākarganj, where they were not suitable at all." It is an undoubted fact that this fetish of unity of control retarded, even if it did not ruin the developement of the tract. How great the differences in conditions are, will be recounted below.

5. In addition to the lack of homogeneity between different tracts of the Sundarbans, the position was complicated by the different forms of leases and settlements in vogue over the whole area. It has already been stated that in 1846 permanently-settled tracts were excluded from the control of the Sundarban Commissioner. But the distinction is not merely one between a permanent and a temporary settlement; it is not merely the difficulty that while Henckell's *tālukes*, before the creation of the office of the Sundarban Commissioner, were treated in the 24-Parganās as permanently-settled estates, in Jessore as temporarily-settled and in Bākarganj as a mixture in which the idea of permanence finally predominated. The main distinction is based rather on the origin of the grant, a distinction which the administration prior to 1870 attempted to preserve rigidly with moderate success. The classification is a triple one.

Different  
types of  
settle-  
ments.

(a) **Resumed mahals.**—This class refers to areas that had been brought under cultivation before the permanent settlement ordinarily by the neighbouring *zamindārs* without the authority of Government. As a matter of fact, large areas of forest subsequently cleared were frequently included in these estates. Government did not avail itself of the right of dispossession but exercised the right of resumption; the claim of the *zamindār* was ordinarily ignored and settlement made with the *ābādkār*, ordinarily a substantial middleman, who usually acquired the rights of a permanent tenureholder holding at a variable rent. These resumptions were practically completed by Messrs. Dampier and Grant by 1836, settlements being made for a term of 20 years. During the Commissionership of Babu Umakanta Sen, the settlements were renewed ordinarily for a further period of 20 years; in some cases, however, a permanent settlement was made in error; while in others contrary to the orders of Government the settlement-holders were allowed to commute mainly in the 24-Parganās, under the forest grant rules of 1853, or purchase and

redeem under the revised forest grant rules of 1863. As a result the problems of the resumed *mahāls* are now extremely complicated. The following statement of the resumed *mahāls* of Bākarganj in 1870 will serve as an illustration\* :—

Num-ber.	Nature of re-settlement.	Area (acres).	Revenue.	Rental.
			Rs.	Rs.
9	Permanently-settled ...	17,006	26,940	1 31,551
29	Temporarily-settled with permanent right of re-nwal.	124,933	96,663	2,98,922
5	Temporary-settled with no right of renewal.	13,396	17,166	65,065
3	Held <i>khas</i> by Government	26,232	1,13,458	1,30,650
46	.....	181,567	2,54,227	6,26,188

In the period now under review, the problem of the permanently-settled areas disappears; in the remainder the problem is analogous to that of Government and temporarily-settled estates in ordinary areas, with due regard to any specific rights granted by the lease. The question of reclamation does not arise.

(b) **Forest Grants.**—These grants were based on leases specifically given by Government for the purpose of reclaiming forest and bringing it under cultivation. The important rules that governed these grants were those of 1817, 1830, 1853 and 1863. The great majority of the earlier grants were commuted under the rules of 1853, *i.e.*, the grantees were allowed under certain conditions to avail themselves of the generous terms of the 1853 rules, which accordingly are of very great importance in the history of the Sundarbans. They originated the notorious 99 years leases, containing specific provisions regarding the area of and period for clearance. In 1863 these rules were cancelled; leaseholders were permitted to redeem the revenue of grants already made, while new grants were to be given on fee simple tenure after sale by public auction. The rules of 1863 were not popular, and in 1864 the rules of 1853 were revived, as an alternative to those of 1863, permission to redeem at a subsequent time being given to the grantee. It

\* The figures of area and rental are obtained from the survey and settlement of the area, commencing in 1905. These figures do not show as under *khas* management estates of which Government has temporarily assumed management.

is true that of these forest grants a considerable number lapsed owing to the inability of the grantees to fulfil the clearance conditions. On the other hand instances do occur where resumed *mahāls* (e.g., South Tiākhāli in Bākarganj) were subsequently settled as forest grants. In the year 1870 the number of forest grants in the Bākarganj area was as follows :—

Num-ber.	Nature of grant.	Area (acres).	Revenue.	Rental.
			Rs.	Rs
21	Grants under rules of 1853	142,210	40,972	5,68,661
2	Fee simple grants ...	11,163	...	67,361
23	.....	153,373	40,972	6,36,022

Of the 21 grants under the rules of 1853, 7 had been granted previously under former rules and commuted; in Bākarganj no advantage was taken of the permission to redeem, the terms of assessment being too favourable.

The development of the forest grants is the backbone of the history of the Sundarbans subsequently to 1870, *viz.*, the difficulties in ensuring the execution of the terms of the previous grants, and the different expedients adopted to develop the clearance of the forest subsequently.

(c) **Alluvial Accretions.**—It is difficult to distinguish this class of land from the remainder of the Sundarbans. In Bākarganj the area due to alluvion subsequently to 1793 has been estimated at 87 square miles. In Khulnā and the 24-Parganās where the seaward extension of the delta is less pronounced the excess area must be considerably less. The most noticeable alluvial formations are Char Kukri-Mukri, Char Hare and Char Biswās in Bākarganj. A large portion of the alluvial area is still unsettled, portions have been included in resumed *mahāls* and forest grants, while other areas have been resumed in the course of *diārā* operations. This class calls for little separate mention.

6. It is only necessary at this stage to refer to two special schemes of development prior to 1870. In 1853 it was proposed, to develop a new port on the Matlā river in the 24-Parganās, known as Port Canning. It is unnecessary to refer in detail to the failure of the scheme. By the year 1870 a considerable number of lots in the neighbourhood had been resumed by

Special  
settle-  
ments in  
the  
Sundar-  
bans  
before  
1870.

Government and settled directly with cultivators; but the municipality which had been created was bankrupt and the idea of developing a port in the area had been abandoned. This scheme is referred to in Chapter VIII. The other scheme was a proposal by Mr. Ferdinand Schiller to float a company with a capital of £ 1,800,000 for the development of the unappropriated wastelands in the Sundarbans—an area of 1,854 square miles. Government agreed to the scheme, but the attempt to float the company was finally abandoned in 1868.

Land-  
marks of  
the period  
1870—  
1920.

7. The period from 1870 to 1920 is divided into periods by two dates of great importance. In 1879 new rules for forest grants were passed which for the first time introduced into the sphere of practical politics the possibility of reclamation by small holdings. In 1905 the passing of Act I of 1905 finally abolished the office of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans; from that date development in each of the three districts commenced on lines presumed to be applicable to the special conditions of the area. A vigorous policy of *rāiṇyatwāri* colonization was adopted in Bākarganj; in Khulnā the claims of the Forest Department triumphed over the disciples of reclamation, while in the 24-Parganās, a policy, vacillating from *rāiṇyatwāri* settlements to development through capitalists, has finally set its sails according to the success of the Bākarganj system.

Arrange-  
ment of  
the  
history.

8. For facility of reference this history is divided into two self-contained parts. The first part, consisting of Chapters II to VI, describes the rules and regulations under which the Sundarbans were administered during the period. In the second part, namely, Chapters VII to XV, an attempt has been made to narrate the actual facts of the administration of the area and of its development under the rules in force from time to time.



## **PART I**

**Rules and administrative system from  
1870 to 1920.**



सत्यमेव जयते



सत्यमेव जयते

## CHAPTER II.

### Forest Grant Rules from 1870-1879.

9. The period from 1870 to 1879, when new rules for the reclamation of waste lands in the Sundarbans were issued, synchronises with an important stage in the development of revenue policy in Bengal; and it is the change of policy then effected that largely conditioned the new reclamation rules. Up to the year 1870, the rules of 1853 and 1863 had resulted in little additional reclamation, though considerable advantage had been taken of the right to commute the terms of old leases; the rules remained unpopular, and the area leased up to 1870, namely, 946 square miles, with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,77,458, had by the year 1880 decreased to 787 square miles with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,45,880. Only 5 fee-simple grants were in existence, covering an area of 27 square miles. If reclamation were to be extended, it would be necessary to adopt more suitable rules. The tenor of the rules, however, must depend mainly on the reformed revenue policy of Government. In the year 1859 it had been laid down by Government that the management by Government officers of estates held *khās* was more expensive and much less successful than the management of estates by private persons generally,\* and proposals were advanced for the sale of the proprietary-right of Government in all estates, petty estates to be sold free of revenue, larger estates at a revenue fixed in perpetuity. The redemption rules of 1863 were largely the result of this policy. In 1871 however the policy of Government was completely altered. Permanent settlement of Government estates was forbidden and *khās* management was encouraged,† wherever possible. In 1878 it was finally declared that it was generally the policy of Government to encourage *khās* management. These general principles were of a character revolutionary to those formerly accepted as binding on the revenue

Stagna-  
tion of  
existing  
reclama-  
tion rules.

\* Government Resolution No. 1174 of 12th May 1859.

† Ditto

No. 3156 of 21st August 1871.

administration of the province, and the revision of policy in the Sundarbans was based, not so much on the facts of past local experience, as on the revenue policy adopted for the province of Bengal as a whole. During the same period the policy to be adopted in the disposal of waste lands generally throughout the province was under reconsideration. The treatment of the Sundarbans was accordingly affected by problems of far wider extent than merely local interests.

**Rules  
in force  
in 1870.**

10. The rules of 1863 had contained two separate principles; of these the first authorised the sale of waste lands up to an area of 3,000 acres in fee-simple, free of all revenue demands at an upset price of Rs. 2-8 per acre, the payment of which might be spread over a period of 10 years. Only 13 such allotments were sold, of which 8 had by 1878 reverted to Government on default of payment of the purchase price; this portion of the rules was practically inoperative. The second principle authorised the redemption of the land-revenue in all previous grants at 20 times the ultimate land-revenue demand, subject to a minimum of Rs. 2-8 per acre, the amount due being similarly distributable over a period of 10 years. So lenient, however, were the rules of 1853 as regards assessment that outside the 24-Parganās, where conditions were peculiar, advantage of redemption was taken only in two instances. The rules of 1863 were inoperative, and it was found necessary to revive the rules of 1853, permission to redeem at a later stage being given. Even these rules were now dead as a method of disposing of waste lands; no advantage was taken of their revival, and the number of grants remained at 113 as in 1863. It is, however, necessary to know the conditions laid down by these rules; for despite the small number of new grants, practically all previous grantees had taken advantage of the permission given to commute the terms of their original leases to the conditions laid down in the new rules. In fact the rules of 1853 govern the whole of the forest grant area, leased and not held free of revenue, previously to 1879. The leases were for a term of 99 years; one quarter of each grant was exempt from assessment for ever; the remainder was held revenue-free for 20 years; at a revenue of 2 pice per standard *bighā* from the 21st year, 1 *ānnā* from the 31st, 1½ *ānnās* from the 41st and 2 *ānnās* from the 51st till the end of the term. The grantee was given a

proprietary status with the right to renewal at a moderate assessment; the area of each grant was unlimited. At the end of the 5th, 10th, 20th and 30th years one-eighth, one-fourth, one-half and three-quarters respectively of the area had to be cleared and rendered fit for cultivation; in default the grantee forfeited all his rights and interest in the land. "Short of granting *jāgirs*" wrote Major Jack "the terms of 1853 were the most generous possible." By 1870, however, only 787 square miles had been cultivated out of an estimated total area available of 5,519 square miles. Over 1,000 square miles of forest had been leased but were still unreclaimed; the remainder was still available for lease. It may be noted, however, that the area still available for lease in Bākarganj was only 134 square miles or 22 per cent. of the total Sundarbans area of the district; this might at the time have raised the presumption that difficulties of reclamation in the other tracts had as much influence on the tardiness of possible reclaimers as the drawbacks of the very generous rules of 1853.

11. The sale rules of 1863 had given a complete check to applications for waste lands in the Sundarbans, and in 1871 the Board of Revenue prepared a draft of special lease rules, the submission of which was stopped by the appointment by Government of a Committee to consider the subject of waste lands generally.<sup>1</sup> The Committee consisted of Messrs. Rivers Thompson, D. J. McNeile, C. E. Bernard and J. W. Edgar. It is not necessary to enter into the report of the Committee in detail;<sup>2</sup> the draft rules were in 3 parts, covering (a) Sales, (b) Leases and (c) Redemption of existing grants; the Committee proposed that the upset price should be raised to Rs. 5 per acre, and laid great stress on the advisability and possibility of settling direct with the cultivator. In January 1872 a copy of these rules was forwarded to the Board. In December of that year the Board<sup>3</sup> forwarded to Government a strong indictment of the proposed lease rules, framed by Mr. A. D'B. Gomess, Commissioner in the Sundarbans. He doubted the possibility of settlements direct with the cultivator, and pointed out that reclamation under the new rules would be far less likely than under the more favourable moribund rules of 1853; the comparative

**Proposals  
of the  
Committee  
of 1871.**

(<sup>1</sup>) Letter No. 2193 of 13th June 1871.

(<sup>2</sup>) Report of Committee of 26th July 1871.

(<sup>3</sup>) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 483A. of 12th December 1872.

attractiveness of the two sets of rules can be seen from the following table :—

Condition of lease.	1853 rules.	1871 rules.
Term ...	99 years ...	30 years.
Revenue-free period ...	20 years ...	3 years.
Maximum area ...	Unrestricted ...	3,000 acres.
Area exempt from assessment.	$\frac{1}{4}$ of total area ...	Nil.
Rate of revenue	21st-30th year $\frac{1}{2}$ anna.	4th-10th year $1\frac{1}{2}$ -9 annas. 11th-20th year, $4\frac{1}{2}$ —15 annas. 21st-30th year, 9 annas—Re. 1-8.
	31st-40th year 1 anna.	
	41st-50th year $1\frac{1}{2}$ annas.	
	51st-99th year 2 annas.	
	1-8th after 5 years 1-4th after 10 years $\frac{1}{2}$ after 20 years $\frac{1}{4}$ after 30 years	
Clearance conditions		Nil.

The table speaks for itself; the new rules presented no attraction except the last clause—an attraction which is probably the biggest defect in the rules, the object of the Committee having been to ensure clearance by assessing an extraordinarily high rate of revenue. The Board suggested that special rules should be framed for the Sundarbans. After a delay of 9 months the Board was informed<sup>1</sup> that no waste land sale or lease rules for the Sundarbans had been settled, but that Government would be prepared to consider any proposals that the Board might deem it advisable to make. By a notification, dated the 2nd February 1874 the Government of Bengal published the Waste land Sale Rules, based on the 1871 Committee's proposals. The Board<sup>2</sup> objected strongly to the upset price of Rs. 5 per acre, and again enquired whether special waste land lease rules had been or should be framed for the Sundarbans; to this enquiry no reply was vouchsafed. As surmised by the Board, no advantage was taken of the Sale Rules, and the history of the Committee of 1871, so far as it affects the Sundarbans, comes to a close.

12. A period of stagnation now ensued; for all practical purposes there were no rules in force in the Sundarbans; the stagnation was intensified in 1874 by a declaration of policy by Sir Richard Temple<sup>3</sup>, the

**Policy of  
Sir Richard  
Temple.**

(1) Government to Board No. 2514 of 19th September 1873.

(2) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 183A. of 21th March 1874.

(3) Minute, dated 12th September 1874.

Lieutenant-Governor, after a tour through the Sundar bans. He decided that the tract should be preserved as a source for the supply of wood, timber and fuel for Southern Bengal. "Reclamation" he wrote, "is not wanted there. In some places the substitution of rice-fields for jungle may be desirable. But in this particular case the ground already bears produce, which is more valuable to Bengal than rice." He merely supported reclamation to the extent required to make the forest tract accessible for human use. Sir Richard Temple's policy resulted in the creation of the Reserved and Protected Forest in Jessore (now Khulnā) and the 24-Parganās (*vide* Chapter VII), and not unnaturally the Board of Revenue suspended its endeavours to formulate suitable reclamation rules. By 1877, however, the limits of the forest reserve had been fixed, and as a considerable area of wasteland had been excluded and was still available for reclamation, the Board again applied itself to the task, and under their instructions a draft set of rules was submitted by Mr. Gomess, the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, on the 22nd September 1877. The rules of 1853 had been discarded, and the new rules were based on the draft rules of the Committee of 1871; they are the origin of the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879.

13. With some modifications Mr. Gomess' rules were forwarded by the Board to Government<sup>1</sup> in May 1878. It was pointed out, that in view of the altered circumstances since 1853, the increase in population and the rise in the value of land, material alterations from the system of 1853 had been proposed. These may be summarised as follows :—

Mr. Gomess' rules.

- (1) The revenue-free period was reduced from 20 to 10 years.
- (2) Only one clearance condition was proposed, namely, one-eighth of the area leased by the end of the fifth year.
- (3) A uniform rate of assessment was abandoned in favour of different rates for different areas, all showing an increase on the former standard.
- (4) The term of lease was reduced from 99 to 40 years, renewable for periods of 30 years.
- (5) The maximum area of a grant was to be fixed at 10,000 standard *bighās*, the minimum at 200.

(<sup>1</sup>) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 349A. of 20th May 1878.

The Government of Bengal<sup>1</sup> was not however prepared to accept the rules as drafted; as practically the whole of the available waste land had been declared 'protected forest' in this year, it insisted on a reference to the Conservator of Forests before leases were granted, in order to prevent sporadic reclamation; it was suggested that 5,000 *bighās* would be a more suitable maximum area. The most important point raised by Government however was the omission to provide for leases to cultivators, as recommended by the Committee of 1871. Thousands of acres had been reclaimed in Bākarganj and Jessore by *rāiyats* and Government desired, in accordance with the newly adopted policy of *rāiyatwāri* settlements, to encourage direct relations between itself and the cultivator. In January 1879 the Board submitted revised rules to Government<sup>(2)</sup>, accompanied by new rules for settlement with cultivators, drafted by Mr. Gomess—the basis of the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879; these rules were with slight modifications accepted by Government and were finally published in the *Calcutta Gazette* on the 12th November 1879. By a circular order of January 1880 the Board published the approved forms of lease and a table showing the detailed rates of assessment. As these rules remained in force with a short period of suspension nominally throughout the greater part of the Sundarbans for 40 years, it is necessary to explain their terms in detail.

**The Large  
Capitalist  
Rules of  
1879.**

14. The Large Capitalist Rules introduced important new principles, gained in part from the experience of the obsolete rules of 1853; these important changes are noted before a detailed description of the new rules is given. The first important change was the limitation of the area of a grant to 5,000 *bighās* with a minimum of 200 *bighās*; the unlimited grants of 1853 had merely opened the way to the speculator, and rendered the fulfilment of any clearance conditions practically impossible. On the other hand the clearance conditions of 1853 had been admittedly very severe; in order to relax this severity a single clearance condition of one-eighth of the area by the end of the fifth year of the lease was inserted, but to ensure early clearance the revenue-free period was reduced to 10 years, and the succeeding rates fixed at higher standards. Under such conditions a term of 99 years

(1) Government, Revenue Department, to Board, No. 833 F. of 12th July 1878.

(2) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 39A. of the 14th January 1879.



was clearly impracticable, if clearance were to be considered a matter of importance, and the term of lease was accordingly reduced to 40 years. Sales in fee-simple and redemption of the land revenue were definitely forbidden for the future. The detailed provisions of the rules were as follows :—The rules were made applicable to the whole of the Sundarbans, excluding reserved but including protected forests, provided that the opinion of the Conservator of Forests should be taken on all proposed leases, and that leases for the reclamation of protected forest should only be given, where the land was adjacent to other reclaimed blocks. Government reserved to itself all rights to minerals and its proprietary rights, giving to the grantee what was termed an 'hereditary and transferable occupancy-right'—in fact the rights of a permanent tenureholder. All lots applied for must be compact, and, if touching a navigable river the river frontage should not exceed half the depth of the land applied for. The necessity of a survey was left to the discretion of the Sundarban Commissioner; demarcation was insisted on—all costs of survey and demarcation being borne by the applicant. If there were only one applicant, the grant would be sold at an upset price of Re. 1 per acre (compared with Rs. 2-8 of the rules of 1853 and Rs. 5 as proposed by the Committee of 1871). In the case of more than one applicant for the same land, the sale was decided by auction amongst the applicants. Twenty-five per cent. of the purchase-money was required to be paid at once the balance within one month. One-fourth of the total area was forever exempted from assessment as an estimated allowance for unassessable land; the balance was leased free of assessment for 10 years, and thereafter at the following rates :—

AREA.	Rate in annas per standard <i>bighā</i> .		
	Year - 11th—15th.	16th—20th.	21st—40th.
24-Parganās, west of Kālindi River.	1 to 2	2 to 4	4 to 8
24-Parganās, east of Kālindi River and Khulnā.	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1	1 to 2	2 to 4
Bākarganj ... ..	2 to 4	3 to 6	6 to 12

On failure of fulfilment of the clearance conditions (*viz.*, one-eighth of the total area by the end of the fifth year) Government retained the right of re-entry or of

resettlement on special terms with the grantee. On expiry of the term of 40 years, the grantee was entitled to resettlement for 30 years, the rate not to be higher than the rates paid by cultivators in the neighbourhood, less 30 per cent. for profit and collection charges, calculated on three-fourths of the total area. As Government did not confer any proprietary title, it follows that the grantee is not entitled to *malikānā* on refusal to accept the terms on resettlement. Provisions were also entered regarding rights of way, the right to timber, the erection and maintenance of boundary pillars, etc.

The Small  
Capitalist  
Rules of  
1879.

15. While the Large Capitalist Rules merely attempted to reconcile the rules of 1853 and the proposals of 1871 with the results of experience, the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879 were an attempt to plough virgin soil. It is true that the Committee of 1871 had strongly advised settlements direct with the cultivator, but their proposals had not been translated into practice; and, excepting Henckell's plan of settlement with *rāiyats* in 1783, a plan which had in practice become a *lāhukdāri* settlement, there was no precedent, and there could be no appeal to experience. It is accordingly not unnatural that the rules failed to be a complete success. It had been realised that it would be impracticable to institute *rāiyatwāri* settlements in areas, where expensive works were required for reclamation, and where embankments might be necessary over an extensive area; the rules were accordingly made applicable only to specific areas; in the 24-Parganas the area was vaguely referred to as 'those parts of the Protected Forest area in which no embankments or other expensive works are required, provided that no lease will be given here without the consent of the Conservator of Forests'. As surmised by Mr. Gomess no leases have been granted in this area. In Khulnā the ungranted portion of lots 216 and 224 were made available, and in Bākarganj the area included Dhaluā, Bargunā, Karāibāriā, Kālāmeghā (part), Chhotā Nishānbāriā, Abuganj and Mithāganj, corresponding with some exceptions to the modern colonization area. Applications were limited to areas of 200 standard *bighās* or less; possession was given for 2 years, at the end of which the applicant was entitled to a lease for 30 years of the area brought under cultivation by him, the lessee being entitled to continuous renewals for periods of 30 years; rights were heritable, and, subject to notice

to the Sundarban Commissioner, transferable. For the first two years of the lease no rent should be charged ; thereafter and at all future settlements the rate should be fixed with reference to rates paid by *rāiyats* to grantees in surrounding estates. The lease should ordinarily include an additional area equal to the amount brought under cultivation, and the grantee was entitled to bring under cultivation any adjacent unoccupied land. Measurement of the grant was permissible at periods of 5 years, when excess cultivation could be assessed. Two forms of lease were prescribed, the one a cultivation lease, the other a *hāolādāri* lease ; the former would presumably give the status of a *rāiyat*, the latter that of a permanent tenureholder. The only actual difference in the terms of the leases was that the latter gave the power to sublet to cultivators though not to create undertenures, while the former gave no such right. There appears to be no reason why anyone entitled to the *hāolādāri* lease should have been content with the cultivating lease. The *hāolādāri* form was, however, essential to cover the case of a grantee, who had cultivated his 200 *biḡhās* within two years, and was accordingly entitled to an additional 200 *biḡhās*, and of lessees, who cleared and cultivated lands outside the area leased, as permitted by the rules. It is just these provisions that make the rules, as an experiment in *rāiyatwāri* settlements, defective ; they open the way to extensive holdings, and accordingly must tend to become in fact *tālukdāri* grants. The great omission in the rules is the failure to realise, that even a *rāiyatwāri* settlement must require external financial assistance—a fact not realised for 25 years.

16. It is, however, a mistake to consider that the Small Capitalist Rules were really intended to introduce a *rāiyatwāri* system of reclamation. It is true that such was the intention of the 1871 Committee and of Government in directing the rules to be framed ; it is equally true that Mr. Gomess, who drafted the rules and whose draft was accepted by the Board and by Government, contemplated that they should be what their name implies—viz., an attempt at reclamation through the smaller middleman—an attempt to open up what might eventually be an extensive clearance by gradual means, avoiding the necessity of frequent inspections and consequent resumption, cancellation or resettlement of grants already made. No *rāiyatwāri* system is possible under rules, which permit of the

**Comparison of the rules for Large and Small Capitalists.**

area of the grant being limited only by the ability of the grantee to clear without specifying the means employable. It does not appear that this fact was realised by Government, which did in fact accept the rules as *rāiyatwāri* in principle. In Bākarganj, where alone the rules could be expected to be operative, a large number of grants was taken up with no little measure of success to the extent of 40 square miles; but they were not *rāiyatwāri* in principle. Major Jack has criticised these rules as being less lenient than the rules applicable to large capitalists, but his criticism is based mainly on the hypothesis, that they were intended to apply solely to cultivators. This, however, was, as has been shown above, emphatically not the case; the rent-free period was in fact four years from the date of the *āmalnāmā* against ten years in the large capitalist grants; but the difference is justified by the extent of improvement works required in the larger grants; similarly a longer period of lease, namely, 40 years, would be necessary for the larger grants, if clearance to a large extent were to be expected. As regards the rate of rent alone was the large capitalist unduly favoured, his rent being scarcely more than one-third of the *rāiyati* rate against the full rate payable by the smaller capitalist—a difference that could only be justified on the supposition that the small capitalist was the actual cultivator. And yet in Bākarganj, where alone both systems were applied to any extent, the small capitalist system was the more popular; the area taken up was twice that taken up under the Large Capitalist Rules; the revenue under the former rules was more than eight times that under the latter. Under the Small Capitalist Rules 86 per cent. of the area leased has been cleared against 55 per cent. under the Large Capitalist Rules. The results certainly prove that the system of large leases was defunct, and it is surprising that 25 years elapsed before the lessons of the 1879 rules were learned. The great defect of the Large Capitalist Rules, however, was the fact that they made no provision for the maintenance of embankments, and thereby the tenants were placed entirely at the mercy of the grantees or *lotdārs*. It is very doubtful if, in the conditions then prevalent, such a clause could have been enforced, and it is this fundamental difficulty which ultimately turned the balance in favour of a *rāiyatwāri* system of reclamation.

### CHAPTER III.

#### Forest Grant Rules from 1879-1902.

17. The revenue revival of the seventies, which had resulted in the revision of the Sundarbans grant rules as a part of the new revenue policy, and which culminated shortly afterwards in the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act, was followed by a period of quiescence in the Sundarbans. The actual effect of the rules of 1879 in practice is described in chapters IX, XI and XII; they remained in force without alteration, except in one particular detail, which is illustrative of the development of the area, and in one particular tract, namely, Sagar Island, until the whole system of Sundarbans development was revolutionised by the convening of a second Sundarbans Committee in 1903.

The period  
of  
quies-  
cence.

18. The detail of the rules, which came under revision, did not affect the actual terms of settlement but only the conditions of sale; it is important not so much in its effects, but rather as an illustration of the increasing demand for land in the Sundarbans and of the excessive lenity of the terms of settlement under the Large Capitalist Rules. Under those rules the upset price of a grant of land had been fixed at Re. 1 per acre; auction-sale was only permissible where more than one application had been received for the same area before the survey and demarcation fees had been deposited—a necessary requirement before a sale notification could issue. It appears that this rule was not strictly observed in practice, but it clearly gave opportunities for carrying into practice the principle of ‘bounce’; a speculator who chanced upon a particularly favourable lot could by the early deposit of fees forestall competition, and obtain the grant below its real market value. In 1893 these facts were reported by Mr. P. Ross,<sup>1</sup> the Commissioner in the Sundarbans; he pointed out that where unrestricted auction had been allowed, the sale price had risen in lot 240 in Khulnā as high as Rs. 3-8-1 per acre; on the other hand, a grantee, who had purchased in another case at

Alteration  
in  
conditions  
of sale.

<sup>1</sup> Sundarban Commissioner to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 97 of 21st August 1893, and No. 114 of 7th September 1893.

the upset price of Re. 1 per acre for Rs. 1,487-9-7, had immediately subleased the grant for a premium of Rs. 2,500, had reduced the rent-free period for his lessee from 10 to 6 years and had increased the rates of rent from *annas* 1, 2 and 4 to *annas* 3½, 4½ and 6 ½ per *bighā*. Government was clearly suffering a heavy loss; but if the facts as stated were typical, it is obvious that not only the conditions of sale but the terms of the lease also were defective. The Commissioner and the Board of Revenue<sup>1</sup> both recommended that auction should be open to all who applied before the date fixed for sale, the Board further recommending that if the original applicant's bid were highest, he should be granted a rebate of 10 per cent. on the amount of his bid. The Government of India<sup>2</sup> refused to agree to the rebate, but otherwise sanctioned the change proposed; amended rules were issued accordingly in 1894.<sup>3</sup>

Effects of  
the  
alteration  
in the  
rules.

19. From the point of view of the development of the Sundarbans this change in the rules may not appear to be of much importance, but the effects of the change prove conclusively the inadequacy of the rules of 1879, the value of the land and the enormous competitive demand that existed then for the better lands available. In 1893<sup>4</sup> before the issue of the new rule, the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th portions of lot 225 of Khulnā, 24,900 *bighās* in area, had been sold provisionally under the restricted auction rules for Rs. 15,524 at the rate of Re. 1-14-2 per acre. The sale had been set aside by Government, and on resale under the revised rules had fetched the very high sum of Rs. 1,68,514, or an average of Rs. 20-7-6 per acre. It is unnecessary to point out that the rules of 1853 and the proposals of the 1871 Committee had prescribed rates of Rs. 2-8 and Rs. 5, respectively. It is clear that a purchase under the rules of 1879 was a profitable investment, and it is only surprising that Government did not realise at the time that it would have been a sounder course to raise the rates of rent and not to sacrifice its revenue for 40 years for the doubtful results of speculative auctions, which at the best formed an imperfect method of capitalising the revenue demand.

<sup>1</sup> Board of Revenue to Government, Revenue Department, No. 1102A. of 12th October 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, to Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, No. 178—370 of 18th January 1894.

<sup>3</sup> Revenue Circular No. 2 of February 1894.

<sup>4</sup> Sundarban Commissioner to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 219 of 10th March 1895.

20. The changes in the rules of 1879, so far as they affect Sāgar Island, are of great importance, as they illustrate the first definite realisation of the fact that different rules and different treatment are required for different portions of the Sundarbans. It must be remembered that Sāgar Island lies in an exposed position at the mouth of the river Hughli, and that its original reclamation had been undertaken to afford a haven for ship-wrecked mariners. Up to the year 1895 six grants under special conditions had been made, namely, Mud Point, Ferintosh, Bāmankhālī Trowerland, Sikārpur and Dhobelat; these were held free of revenue demand, subject to the construction and maintenance by the grantees of protective works, including tanks measuring 200 feet by 150 feet with banks at least 16 feet in height, as refuges for cultivators in case of storm waves. The area available for lease still amounted to 135,674 *bighās* or approximately 71 square miles; the area was excluded from the operation of the Small Capitalist Rules, and the Large Capitalist Rules had superseded the rules of 1863, under which fee simple grants had been possible. It was a recognised fact that, in addition to the refuges, extensive embankments were necessary to keep out the sea from the reclaimed lands, and that considering the position of the island these embankments must be stronger and involve more expenditure than in other parts of the area. Until 1894 the rules of 1879 had remained inoperative in Sāgar Island.

**Conditions  
prevalent  
in Sagar  
Island till  
1894.**

21. In 1894, however, two applications were received for grants in Sāgar Island, and in accordance with the recommendation of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans the Board of Revenue proposed certain alterations in the terms of the rules of 1879, in consideration of the fact that the erection and maintenance of protective works must be insisted on<sup>1</sup>; they suggested that the rent-free term should be extended from 10 to 15 years, and that the rate of rent should be *annas* 2 instead of *annas* 4 per *bighā* from the 16th to the 20th year, and *annas* 4 instead of *annas* 8 from the 21st to the 40th year. The proposals of the Board were not fully understood by Government<sup>2</sup>, who failed to notice the distinction between the special protective works and protective embankments; as applications had already been received under the existing rules there appeared to be no actual

**Proposed  
revision  
of rules  
for Sagar  
Island**

<sup>1</sup> Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 461A, of April 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Government, Revenue Department to Board, No. 945T.—R. of 31st April 1895.

necessity to reduce the rates, but if a case could be made out for reduction, Government was prepared to consider it. It was essential to include clauses for the erection and maintenance of protective works, including the penalty of forfeiture on failure, and accordingly a complete set of new rules should be framed. The Commissioner in the Sundarbans proceeded to explain the nature of the protective works<sup>1</sup>, he pointed out that as the existing grantees were holding free of revenue, none would accept settlement under the same obligations, unless the conditions of the rules of 1879 were considerably relaxed. He accordingly proposed:—

- (a) that the grant should confer a proprietary right,
- (b) that the lease should be granted without sale
- and (c) that failure to clear should be punishable by fine and not by forfeiture or resumption.

The Board<sup>2</sup>, accepted the second concession only, but proposed a further concession, allowing to the grantees a profit of 50 per cent. on resettlement instead of the 30 per cent. permissible under the rules of 1879. The Government of Bengal<sup>3</sup>, however, declined to accept the advice of the Board; they accepted Mr. Ross' third condition substituting a fine instead of forfeiture in case of failure to clear, and met his second condition by reducing the upset sale price to *annas* 8. A draft set of rules was then prepared by Mr. Ross, and submitted to Government in June 1896<sup>4</sup>, the only material alteration was the raising of the maximum area of a grant from 5,000 to 10,000 *bighās* in view of the expenditure involved in protective works. The rules were accepted by the Government of India subject to two important modifications, namely, the addition of the penalty of forfeiture to that of fine on failure to observe the clearance conditions, and the reduction of the periods of resettlement to 20 years in accordance with the general policy then in vogue. The revised rules were published in March 1897<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Sundarban Commissioner to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 89 of 3rd August 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 945A, of 12th September 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Government Revenue Department, No. 819A., of 26th October 1895.

<sup>4</sup> Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 538A., of 19th June 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Notification No. 1377L.—R. of 29th March 1897.



22. The new rules were based on the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879, and it is only necessary to indicate the important differences :—

Comparison with the rules of 1879.

Conditions.	Rules of 1879.	Rules of 1897.
Maximum area ... ..	5,000 <i>bighās</i> ... ..	10,000 <i>bighās</i> .
Rent-free period ... ..	10 years ... ..	15 years.
Rates of rent :—		
11th—15th year ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 2 } ... ..	Nil } per <i>bighā</i> .
16th—20th " ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 4 } ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 2 } per <i>bighā</i> .
21st—40th " ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 8 } ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 4 } per <i>bighā</i> .
Period of settlement ... ..	30 years ... ..	20 years.
Upset sale price ... ..	Rupee 1 per acre ... ..	<i>Annas</i> 8 per acre.
Protective works ... ..	Nil ... ..	<i>Vide infra</i> .
Penalty for failure to observe clearance conditions.	Forfeiture or re-entry on new settlement.	Forfeiture or penalty of <i>annas</i> 4 per acre each year of default.

The provisions regarding protective works are important. Within four years of the execution of the lease the grantee was required to construct a tank 200 feet in length, 150 feet in width and 8 feet deep, surrounded by embankments 16½ feet high and 5 feet in breadth at the crest, as a refuge in case of a storm wave; the details of the works were further prescribed. The tank was to be connected with all habitations by embanked roads at least 5 feet in height, and no habitation was to be permitted at a distance greater than one mile from the protective work, unless constructed on a plinth 16½ feet above the level of the surrounding country. The site for the original protective work was to be shown on the map, and as cultivation and habitations increased, further protective works were to be constructed. The penalty for failure to erect such works or to maintain them in a satisfactory condition was forfeiture of the lease, though in alternative the works could be constructed by Government at the cost of the grantee. It is interesting to note that, as in the rules of 1879, no conditions were laid down enforcing the construction and maintenance of outer embankments, on which the security of the cultivators must depend.

23. The period from the passing of the rules of 1879 until the meeting of the Committee of 1903, shows little development in the adoption of rules more suitable to the area. The alteration in the rules of 1879 merely saved Government from a certain amount of loss; it imposed no new conditions or liabilities, it conferred no new privileges. The ~~Sāgar Island~~

Resume of the period.

rules of 1897 conferred certain new privileges and concessions, which were barely counterbalanced by the new and peremptory obligations imposed; the failure of the rules is recounted in Chapters VIII and XIV. In the development of this period, however, there is nothing to suggest that new principles were in contemplation, that Government might treat the Sundaibans as a commercial asset worthy of development by means of its own capital. Strong indications existed that land values had greatly increased, and the demand for land in the area was more insistent. The rules of 1853 and 1863 had been more attractive to the grantee, and it was not the stiffening of the rules but a naturally increasing demand for land that resulted in the extension of grants during the period.



## CHAPTER IV.

### Forest Grant Rules.

#### Period of transition (1902—1905).

##### (a)—The introduction of the *raiyatwari* system of leases.

24. The history of Sundarbans development does not furnish an example of continuity of purpose in abolishing defective systems. It is true that the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879 had raised faint hopes of an attempt at reclamation directly by the cultivator; the attempt however had been faint-hearted and doubtful at the outset; for, as has been shown, the rules required possibly in the circumstances with some justification, a longer period of self-support from the cultivator than the sister rules demanded from the benevolent capitalist. By 1903, after 25 years of travail 165 acres in one estate had been leased under the rules in Khulnā, 1,187 acres in two estates in Bākarganj, and nothing in the 24-Parganās. Reclamation had reached the alarming momentum of 54 acres per year. Had the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 or the Sāgar Island Rules of 1897 proved effective, an excuse might be found for relegating the Small Capitalist Rules to the pigeon-hole. This, however, was emphatically not the case. "It is stated" wrote the Government of Bengal (a) in 1903 "that in Bākarganj the system of auction has sometimes led to the land being let to men who are unable to spend much capital on experiments, and that this system is objectionable for two reasons. The first is that it opens a way to land-jobbers and mere speculators who purchase for the purpose of reselling; secondly, that it involves a heavy initial drain on the capital of the person to whom the lease is granted, with the result that the grantee is left without capital to put into the land, and in order to recoup his outlay he has to sublet to smaller lessees in return for a cash payment. The same process is carried lower down the chain with still smaller men, and, in the end, as a matter of fact, the land is reclaimed and cultivated

Defects of  
the system  
in force.

(a) Government Revenue Department, to Board No. 660, dated the 7th February 1903.

by small cultivators, just as if it had been leased under the rules for grants of class (b) (Small Capitalist) the only difference being that Government has to allow in perpetuity to several useless grades of middlemen a rebate of 20, 30 or 40 per cent. on the rental." It is surprising, however, that the inception of a system of reclamation through *rāiyatwāri* settlements should have been due not to direct recognition of the defects of the existing system but to the proposal to extend settlement operations into the Sundarbans area of Bākarganj and to abolish the office of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans.

Initials  
proposals  
for a  
raiyatwari  
settlement.

25. In March 1893, Mr. H. Le Mesurier, as Collector of Bākarganj had pointed out that the system of reclamation then in force was not successful; it was true that Government gained an immediate sale price and an immediate revenue, but it discounted the future; the whole system teemed with abuse. Mr. Le Mesurier's remarks achieved no result, but on the 6th September 1902 Mr. (now Sir Nicholas) Beatson-Bell, in advocating, as Settlement Officer of Bākarganj the extension of survey and settlement operations to the Sundarbans, again brought to the notice of Government the extraordinary defects and abuses of the existing system. Government considered <sup>(1)</sup> that the system was "inconsistent with modern ideas as to the advantages of *rāiyatwāri* settlement". The Board was accordingly requested to consider whether the time had not come for a change of the existing system of settling wastelands and especially for the abolition of the system of settling large blocks. These suggestions, it must be realised, were intimately connected with the proposals to abolish the office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans area of Bākarganj. In September 1903 the Board of Revenue forwarded its opinion; <sup>(2)</sup> they pointed out that under the existing system 1,704 square miles had already been leased in Bākarganj and the 24-Parganās out of a total available area of 3,046 square miles. In the former district some advantage had been taken of the Small Capitalist Rules; in the latter where heavy embanking was essential, the small capitalist had done nothing, though 574 square miles had been leased under the Large Capitalist Rules. *Rāiyatwāri* settlements, would be feasible in Bākarganj, if Government were prepared

<sup>(1)</sup> Government Revenue Department, to Board No. 660, dated 7th February 1903.

<sup>(2)</sup> Board, to Government Revenue Department No. 7399A., dated the 19th September 1903.

to incur the necessary cost—in the 24-Parganās the Board deprecated any change from the existing system. Except in Bākarganj, the Board does not appear to have accepted the advice of the local officers. The Collector of Khulnā had pointed out that “instances are not rare ..... where a Sundarbans *ābād* has become a bye-word for land disputes, riots and villainy of all sorts. Mr. (now Sir Charles) Stevenson-Moore, as Collector of the 24-Parganās, while insistent on the evils of both the Large and Small Capitalists rules then in force, pressed strongly for a revised form of *rāiyatwāri* lease. Mr. Sunder, the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, alone fought for the continuance of the existing system. “To Mr Sunder’s report” wrote, <sup>(1)</sup> Mr. Savage the Commissioner of the Dacca Division. “I think, I need make no further reply than that he mistakes *what might be* for *what is*. The administration of the Sundarbans in the past has, to say the least, not been a success, and unless there be a radical reform, there is no probability it will be a success in the future”. The suggestions made by the Board <sup>(2)</sup> were indeterminate, and Government decided to appoint a Committee to consider the whole question of the form of leases to be adopted and the principles of settlement to be followed in future; the existing system, it was admitted, afforded very little protection to the actual cultivator, allowed of the introduction of numerous middlemen and made no provision for the maintenance of the embankments upon which the cultivator so largely depended. Principles according to which leases should be given were to be formulated, and after the principles had been approved, the existing rules should be revised.

26. The Committee consisted of the leading revenue officers of the province, Messrs. L. Hare, H. Savage, P. C. Lyon, C. J. Stevenson-Moore, S. L. Maddox, N. D. Beatson-Bell with Mr. Sunder, the Commissioner of the Sundarbans; their conclusions were recorded in the proceedings of a meeting held on the 11th December 1903. The Committee decided that it was essential to abolish the system of leases to capitalists, large or small, and to proceed by direct settlement with cultivating *rāiyats*; the capitalist system involved heavy loss to Government both during the period of the original lease and thereafter

**Scheme of  
the Com-  
mittee of  
1903.**

<sup>(1)</sup> Commissioner, Dacca, to Board No. 1657 L.—R., dated 11th September 1903.

<sup>(2)</sup> Government Revenue Department, to Board No. 2877 T.—R., dated 29th October 1903.

in perpetuity on renewal; it further involved all the evils of subinfeudation with the consequent danger of rack-renting; the existing leases were incurably faulty. The Conference accordingly recommended the following principles of settlement for all lands either unleased or which might revert to Government :—

- (a) No further leases to be issued under the rules of 1879.
- (b) All future settlements to be made directly with cultivators on a *rāiyatwāri* basis, holdings to average 50 and not to exceed 75 *bighās* in area.
- (c) Government to undertake the cost of making exterior embankments, tanks and other necessary improvements and to make advances to *rāiyats*.
- (d) *Rāiyats* to be encouraged to reside on their holdings with their families.

The Conference further recommended that Government should invest capital in schemes of reclamation by *rāiyatwāri* settlements in Bākarganj and the 24-Parganās. In the latter the cost to Government was estimated at Rs. 6 per *bighā* while the terms of settlement would be two years rent-free, two years on half rent, and thereafter at the rate of Rs. 2 per *bighā*. In Bākarganj a more elaborate estimate was prepared for a standard area of 4 square miles to contain 150 settlers as follows :—

#### Expenditure.

	Rs.
Four tanks at Rs. 1,000 each	... 4,000
Embankments	... 1,000
Miscellaneous improvements	... 2,500
Advances, first year at Rs. 100 per head	15,000
„ second year at Rs. 80 per head	... 12,000
„ third year at Rs. 20 per head	... 3,000
Total	... 37,500

Loans were to be repayable in 10 years and the rent would rise by annual increments from two annas per *bighā* the first year to Re. 1 in the 10th year, when the rental would be Rs. 7,500, *i.e.*, equivalent to the net initial outlay by Government, excluding advances.

27. So convincing were the arguments of the Committee that the Board of Revenue accepted its conclusions *in toto*; it was only by means of *rāiyat-wāri* settlements that the existing evils could be counteracted and a contented and prosperous tenantry established in the area. For the 500,000 *bighās* available for lease in Bākarganj, the Board recommended an annual expenditure of Rs. 50,000 for fifty years to complete the work of reclamation; for the 24-Parganās, where it was admitted that much of the area was still unfit for reclamation, the Board recommended experimentally a grant of Rs. 50,000 or Rs. 75,000 for 4 or 5 years; in the area the cost of reclamation had been calculated by Mr. Stevenson-Moore at Rs. 23,044 per square mile, while the ultimate rental after 5 years would be Rs. 3,292 for the area. Government accepted the proposals of the Board and recommended (a) to the Government of India that the Capitalist Rules of 1879 and the Sagar Island Rules of 1897 should be suspended, and that the necessary grant for reclamation should be made. It was further pointed out that, if the experiment proved successful, it would be advisable considerably to increase the annual grant of Rs. 1,00,000 now asked for. In the meantime the Government of Bengal (b) instructed the Board of Revenue to frame draft rules for the proposed *rāiyat-wāri* settlement and subject to confirmation by the Government of India allotted Rs. 50,000 a year from 1904—05 to each of the districts of Bākarganj and the 24-Parganās for reclamation work. The Government of India accepted the proposals and suggested (c) that residence on or near the land should be made a condition of the grant, and that the rights conferred should be heritable but not transferable or liable to be burdened by any mortgage or other charge.

**Adoption of  
rāiyat-  
wāri  
system.**

28. The adoption of the *rāiyatwāri* system was far more than a decision to deal directly with the cultivator instead of through middlemen or chains of middlemen. The elements of such a system were contained in the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879. The great innovation was the recognition by Government of the failure of private capital and enterprise and the decision to treat the area as a commercial asset

**Real  
meaning  
of the new  
system.**

(a) Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, to Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, No. 1875, dated the 22nd March 1904.

(b) Government Revenue Department, to Board of Revenue No. 1605, dated the 14th March 1904.

(c) Government of India, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture, to Government of Bengal, Revenue Department No. 1040—194—1, dated the 26th July 1904.

suitable for the investment of Government capital. The Bākarganj estimate showed that the capital cost of reclamation and settlement would be fully repaid in 10 years, after which an annual profit of Rs. 1,875 per square mile would accrue to Government; in the 24-Parganās the capital cost would similarly be repaid in 10 years, after which Government would receive an annual income of Rs. 3,292 per square mile. An outlay of Rs. 50,000 in each of the two districts would be recovered in full within 10 years, after which the rental would be approximately Rs. 17,000 per annum. The scheme was sound financially; it prevented the intervention of the middleman, the speculator and land-jobber, his lack of enterprise and the chains of uncontrolled, even if unrecognised, sublessees who followed in his wake; and, finally it laid on Government the full responsibility for securing the welfare and contentment of the peasantry. The innovation was revolutionary.

**The  
scheme of  
1905.**

29. In accordance with the orders of Government a notification was issued in November 1904 suspending the operation of the Capitalist Rules of 1879 and the Sāgar Island Rules of 1897, and the work of drafting rules for the revised system commenced. The work of drafting detailed rules which could be applicable to areas so dissimilar as the Bākarganj and 24-Parganās Sundarbans proved to be laborious. In September 1905 after a draft set of rules had been circulated and subjected to varying criticism, in view of the impending partition of the province of Bengal, the Government of the parent province decided to ignore the criticism received from Bākarganj and to issue the rules for use in the Khulnā and the 24-Parganās Sundarbans. The rules were issued almost immediately. The Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, however, proceeded with greater caution and it was not until February 1907, when a definite line of policy had been adopted, that rules were published. The history of the rules in each area is quite distinct and separate, largely affected by the line of policy adopted. The carefully thought-out policy of the Eastern Bengal and Assam administration has resulted in an almost complete continuity of the rules in force; the less thoughtful effort of the older Government has resulted in great changes in the rules, and it remained for the administrative changes of 1912 to impress on Bengal the value of the Bākarganj methods and a consequent reversion to that system.



The history of the development of the rules in each area is separately recounted.

**(b).—Determination of rights of leaseholders.**

30. In addition to the question of introducing a system of reclamation by *rāiyatwāri* settlements, the Committee of 1903 considered the very important problem of the terms under which existing leases should be renewed. They advised that the Legal Remembrancer should be consulted with reference to each class of lease as to the power of Government to impose fresh conditions upon the renewal of the lease. The difficulties of the problem in practice are noticed in detail in the account of the settlement operations in Bākarganj (*vide* Chapter IX), but it is important to remember that not only had different forms of leases been adopted in resettling resumed estates but that the different rules in force for forest grants from time to time had conferred different rights on the grantees. It had been held by the Advocate-General (a) (Mr. Woodroffe) in 1902, that the proprietary right in the Sundarbans belonged to Government, but that Government could transfer and under the rules of 1853 had actually transferred its proprietary right to the grantees, and that section 6 of Art. V of Regulation I of 1793 was no bar to such action. On a further opinion (b) obtained from the Advocate-General in March 1903 the Board held (c) that the leases of 1853 did not confer a full proprietary right on the grantee and that the right conferred was not the same as the proprietary right conferred by Regulation I of 1793. They accordingly adopted a middle course and directed that the grantees should be described as lessees under the rules of 1825, 1829, 1853 or 1879, as the case might be. Each grant was, however, to be treated as a separate estate in the Collector's registers. It had, however, been definitely decided that leases under the rules of 1825, 1829 and 1879 were only tenures. This opinion was substantially accepted by the Legal Remembrancer of Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1907 (d). The details of the problem were left for decision at the time of resettlement of the estates, as the leases fell due.

Status of  
lease-  
holders.

(a) Opinion dated the 26th November 1902.

(b) Opinion dated the 23rd March 1903.

(c) Board to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 3892-A., dated the 15th May 1906.

(d) Legal Remembrancer, to Board, Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 1118, dated the 23rd July 1907.

## CHAPTER V.

### Forest Grant Rules from 1905—20.

#### (a) Bakarganj.

Issue of  
the  
raiyyatwari  
rules of  
1907.

31. From the birth of the province the reclamation of the Sundarbans occupied a prominent place in the administration of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The actual history of the inception of the colonization scheme is narrated in Chapter X, and it was not until the appointment of a Colonization Officer had been sanctioned in March 1907, that rules for *rāiyyatwāri* settlements were issued. The Bengal rules of 1905 had been under examination and in April 1906 the Board had suggested (a) their adoption with a few modifications; Government asked (b) for certain explanations, and the rules were finally published (c) "as an experimental measure" on the 19th February 1907. They were applicable to "all lands ungranted and unoccupied at the disposal of Government, or those which, from any cause or under any circumstances whatever, revert to Government in the Sundarbans of the district of Bākarganj, and which have not been declared either a reserved or protected forest under the Forest Act, VII of 1878". As these are the first *rāiyyatwāri* rules, to which practical effect was given and as little change has subsequently been made in them, it is necessary to explain their provisions in detail.

Rights  
reserved  
by  
Govern-  
ment  
(Rules  
4-11).

32. Government reserved to itself its full proprietary rights, rights to all minerals, and rights of fishery with the control of channels and streams subject to the exercise by the settlers of the privilege of fishing for their own use. A tow-path 25 feet wide, was to be reserved on the banks of all navigable streams for the use of the public. Government retained the right to lay down conditions for the use of common lands and

(a) Board to Chief Secretary, Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 32 W.-L.-G., dated 2nd April 1906.

(b) Chief Secretary, Eastern Bengal and Assam, to Board No. 5296-C. D., dated 26th May 1906.

(c) Notification No. 1919-C., dated 19th February 1907.

to resume free of cost any lands required for a public purpose, subject to payment of compensation for improvements and a proportionate reduction in the assessment. All leased lands were to be liable for the payment of all legal cesses in force in addition to the rent assessed. These rules do not call for any special remarks.

33. The rules then proceeded to lay down the principle that the intervention of middlemen was to be avoided. Subject to the observance of this principle the rights conferred were declared to be heritable; transfer was permitted of holdings in whole or in part to resident cultivating *rāiyats* only, subject to the previous consent of the Collector and to limiting the area tenable in the estate by the transferee to 100 *bighās*; exchange of lands was permitted on similar conditions. The right to sub-let was refused and Government retained the right to resume any lands illegally sub-let. The drafting of this portion of the rules had been subject to considerable discussion regarding the question of transfers and sub-leases.

**Rights  
conferred  
on the  
raiyat,  
(Rules  
12-16).**

34. Every *rāiyat* was required to reside permanently on or near his holding and to construct a suitable residence within two years of the commencement of the lease. Government retained the right to resume any lands of the holding that had not been cultivated within five years. While Government erected and maintained the outer embankments of each estate, the *rāiyat* was required to maintain all inner embankments and boundary marks. The punctual repayment of loans was to be insisted on. No specific provision was laid down regarding the assistance that might be given by Government in jungle-cutting; as a matter of practice it has been left almost solely to the lessee.

**Duties  
of the  
raiyats,  
(Rules  
17-22).**

35. Detailed rules were prescribed for administering the work of colonization and reclamation. The area was to be blocked out into estates of convenient size, and a scheme and estimate prepared for necessary protective works; the number of holdings suitable for the estate was to be calculated, and a lay-out prepared for holdings, homesteads, tanks, markets, paths and common lands. The detailed lay-out should be shown on the estate map. Rules were laid down for selection of tenants and distribution of sites; the maximum area of a grant was laid down at 75 *bighās*, the minimum at 10 *bighās*. Allotments were to be properly demarcated and surveyed on the maps. Provision was made for the

**Administra-  
tion, etc.,  
(Rules  
23-37).**

grant of loans free of interest, either in cash or in grain, to new settlers, subject to a maximum of Rs. 200 per family, payable Rs. 100 the first year, Rs. 80 the second year and Rs. 20 the third year; repayment was to commence in the 5th year and to be completed by the 11th year of the lease. The rate of rent fixed generally under the rules was rent-free for 3 years, 4th and 5th year 2 annas per *bighā* rising gradually to Rs. 2 per *bighā* from the 21st year. General rules were laid down to cover the duties of the officer in charge of the colonization work.

Effect  
of the  
rules of  
1907.

36. The rules of 1907 were a complete innovation; and it is difficult to compare them with the Small Capitalist rules of 1879. They were framed with the object of securing colonies of *bonā fide* cultivators resident on their holdings; the clearance conditions were severe but Government had now determined to give practical help in the way of important works necessary for habitation and reclamation and of loans to tide over the clearance period of the lease. The actual effect of these rules is described in Chapter X.

Revised  
rules 1916.

37. The rules of 1907 remained in force until 1916, but the revised rules (a) then published contained no new principle, but merely perfected the details of the admittedly experimental rules of 1907; no surer proof could be had of the soundness of the 1907 system than the paucity of the changes required. The alterations may be briefly narrated. The rules were made applicable to protected forests, which were now considered liable to reclamation; the special provisions regarding the right of Government to acquire holdings free of cost were omitted. The right of transfer was restricted, the main alteration being that transfers by Maghs were restricted to Magh transferees, in order to safeguard the position of the successful new Magh colonies. More definite rules were prescribed regarding the erection of embankments and the making of other improvements by Government. The erection of marginal embankments was in all cases to be subject to the advice of the Public Works Department. The liability of tenants regarding the preservation of embankments was defined in greater detail. The rules regarding administration as redrafted contained no new provisions of importance. The maximum rates of rent were prescribed for the areas where colonisation was already in progress, the principle of a fixed

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(a) Notification No. 861 T. R., dated the 29th May 1916.

rate as laid down in the rules of 1907 being abandoned viz.:—

			Re.		Re.
Bogi	Group	...	1	2 to	1 6 per bighā.
Central	"	...	1	2 to	1 4 "
Eastern	"	...	1	4	... "
Southern	"	...	1	0	... "
Kālāmeghā	(Western)	1	8	...	...
Group.					

The right to fix new rates for new areas and special rates for houses and shops was reserved. The draft form of lease was revised in accordance with the revised rules. These rules still remain in force, and, as will be seen, have been adopted as the basis of the rules applicable to the Khulnā and 24-Parganās areas.

**(b) Khulna and the 24-Parganas.**

38. It has already been stated that rules for *rāiyatwāri* settlement were published (a) in 1905, and that such publication had occurred before any definite policy had been adopted. These rules differ little from the Bākarganj rules of 1907 the alterations made in the latter rules being mainly verbal. The history of the 1905 rules is, however, brief and unfortunate. Even before the rules had been published the Government of Bengal had decided to initiate its experiment in *rāiyatwāri* settlement, on the advice of Mr. Sunder, in Fraserganj, otherwise known as Nārāyantolā or Mecklenberg Island—an island 15 square miles in area lying on the face of the Bay of Bengal at the mouth of the Sattaramukhi river. The history of this ill conceived scheme, and its consequent failure is recounted in detail in Chapter XIII. The experiment was no test of the suitability of the rules of 1905: the island was by nature unfitted for an experiment in reclamation and the real stage of settlement was barely reached. Even had reclamation been the primary consideration, success might have been achieved, but the scheme of reclamation and ultimate colonisation became subordinate to the creation of a sea-side resort for the citizens of Calcutta. The *rāiyatwāri* rules did not reach the stage of a practical test. By the year 1908, out of 28,555 *bighās*, only 1,900 *bighās* had been leased, and of this only 506 *bighās* held by 39 tenants were

Operation  
of the  
Rules of  
1905.

(a) Notification No. 3261, dated the 19th September 1905.

rent-paying, held on 25-year leases. In that year Mr. David Yule made an offer (a) to take the lease of the estate under the rules of 1879 for 40 years at the rate of 4 annas per *bighā*.

39. The Government of Bengal agreed (b) with the proposal to abandon the colonisation of Fraserganj by means of a *rāiyatwāri* settlement and, pending the completion of proposals to revert to the rules of 1879, obtained the sanction of the Government of India (c) to lease the estate under those rules, subject to two important modifications; the first modification abandoned the method of sale at competitive premia with rates of rent fixed under the rules, in favour of a system by which would-be lessees could bid a high premium with low rates of rent, or a low premium and high rates of rent—a principle which has in other places been condemned by Government as equivalent to capitalisation of the revenue. The second modification was to safeguard the right of tenants already settled on the island. The general question of abandoning the rules of 1905 was then considered. The decisions of the conference of 1903 were set aside subject to agreement on the finding that the unrestricted exploitation of waste lands would result in serious evils. This finding was supported by a warning given by the Public Works Department that much evil had been done and was still being done by the restriction of spill areas in the Sundarbans from the erection of embankments for reclamation, in consequence of which the Board had issued orders (d) prohibiting the erection of further embankments without the sanction of the Public Works Department. The area to which any rules might apply was accordingly largely curtailed. The Government of Bengal pointed out (e) that in addition to Fraserganj, 18 estates in the 24-Parganas and 7 in Khulnā had been resumed by Government and retained under direct management; in 9 of these estates only had it been possible to continue reclamation, and the results even there had been unsatisfactory, as the financial position of Government was not such as to justify adequate

(a) Board to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 5436 A, dated the 30th December 1908.

(b) Government of Bengal to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture No. 2134 T.R., dated the 22nd September 1909.

(c) Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture to Government of Bengal No. 1200-429-2 dated 26th October 1909.

(d) Board of Revenue to the Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 873-A.T., dated the 24th September 1909.

(e) Government of Bengal to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, No. 543 T.R., dated the 24th May 1910.

expenditure on these schemes. It was maintained that reclamation to be effective must be on a very extensive scale, but it was essential that "operations on a large scale must be financed upon a definite scheme and on a generous scale; and it is impossible for them to join in the scramble with other claimants over an occasional surplus. At the present time there is no immediate prospect of the possibility of such provision." The defects in the system were not, it is clear, due to the rules and principles of 1905, but to the financial situation of the province. Reversion to the Capitalist Rules of 1879 was accordingly recommended subject to a few minor modifications, viz :—

- (a) Avoidance of premature reclamation by consulting the Irrigation Department before the grant of new leases.
- (b) Safeguarding the position of cultivators as settled *rāiyats* by notifying all new grants as villages under the provisions of the Bengal Tenancy Act.
- (c) Insertion of a clause in the lease insisting on the maintenance of embankments to the satisfaction of the Collector.
- (d) Abolition of sale by auction and levy of premium in favour of leases at higher rates of rent.

The Government of Bengal came to the somewhat surprising conclusion that subinfeudation in reclaimed Sundarbans estates was inevitable for financial reasons and was not wholly an evil, but they had not the advantage of the experience that had been acquired in the settlement operations in Bākarganj. The Government of India accepted (a) the views of the Government of Bengal but suggested that in redrafting the rules and form of lease an attempt should be made to restrict unlimited subinfeudation. The framing of the modified rules was left to the local Government.

40. When actually faced by the problem the Government of Bengal does not appear to have relished the prospect of applying to the Sundarbans tracts rules which had already been condemned by 25 years of bitter experience. They had rid themselves

**All Rules in  
practical  
abeyance  
(1910-15).**

(a) Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture to Government of Bengal No. 875-278-2, dated the 5th August 1910.

of the trouble and expense of undertaking *rāiyatwāri* settlements, but they had no desire to revert in practice to a system that was admittedly bad. The Government of Bengal took advantage of the complaint of the Irrigation Department regarding the damage caused to the drainage of the country by indiscriminate embanking. It was decided that in future the tidal spill should not be excluded from any land until it had been raised to the level of the mean of high water of the spring and neap tides. The Irrigation Department, however, declined to advise with confidence on schemes of embankment without a preliminary survey of levels. This survey has not as yet been undertaken and Government was relieved of the necessity of remodelling the rules of 1879. Reclamation work in the Sundarbans of Khulnā and the 24-Parganās entered upon its first period of utter stagnation since the days of Warren Hastings. In 1915, however, the passing of the Bengal Embankment (Sundarbans) Act (IV B. C. of 1915) brought the Sundarbans under the ordinary embankment laws in force in Bengal.

**Introduc-  
tion of  
raiyatwari  
rules.  
(1915-1920).**

41. The year 1915 formed the turning point in the history of the rules for reclamation in the 24-Parganās; the change of policy was initially due to the administrative changes of 1912 which enabled the revenue authorities to apply the experience gained in Bakārganj to the western districts. In 1915, Mr. (now Sir) C. J. Stevenson-Moore, after an extensive tour through the Sundarbans, recorded a note (a) on the development of the area. After describing the great success achieved in the colonization of the Bākarganj Sundarbans, he proceeded to show that the failure of the Fraserganj experiment had not been a sufficient justification for the abandonment of the *rāiyatwāri* system in Khulnā and the 24-Parganās. He further pointed out that no action whatsoever had been taken for the improvement of the 16 resumed estates in the 24-Parganās, managed directly by Government; less than  $\frac{1}{5}$ th of the area was under cultivation, and since the year 1904, the total expenditure on embankments had amounted to Rs. 649.8 only. Government, he remarked, was shirking its responsibilities, and in the interest of the *rāiyats* some action was essential. He objected to a revival of the system of leases to *lotdārs*, and propounded a scheme for *rāiyatwāri* colonization, commencing with an initial annual outlay of Rs. 10,000

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(a) Note, dated the 13th February 1915.



to Rs. 15,000. The details of the scheme are dealt with in Chapter XIV. The scheme was at once adopted and in anticipation of the passing of definite rules, the system of reclamation by *rāiyatwāri* settlements was introduced in the resumed lots of Sāgar Island on the lines of the Bākarganj system. In 1917, a form of lease based on the Bākarganj model was prescribed, and in the following year, the Board of Revenue submitted, for the orders of Government, draft rules for the *rāiyatwāri* settlement of waste lands in the Sundarbans of the 24-Parganās and Khulnā. The rules are based on those adopted for Bākarganj in 1916, subject to the following important modifications. Compulsory residence on the holding was not insisted on, as many of the best lessees spent only a portion of the year on their holdings. The provisions regarding the construction and maintenance of marginal embankments were still further defined in the light of experience already gained—the embankments being of greater importance in the 24-Parganās area. The duty of constructing and maintaining interior embankments was placed definitely on the cultivator in accordance with local practice. The provisions regarding loans were omitted, as it was held that the provisions of the Land Improvement and Agriculturists' Loans Act would suffice. The form of lease was remodelled on the basis of the revised rules. In forwarding (a) the draft rules to the Government of India, it was proposed that, while *rāiyatwāri* settlements should be the ordinary method of reclamation, the Board of Revenue should be authorized to make settlements with capitalists in special cases; no such cases were then in contemplation, and if any did arise, the Capitalist Rules would be revised before any such settlements were made. The Government of India accepted (b) these proposals, and on the 15th of February 1919 the new rules were published (c). These rules are still in force, and *rāiyatwāri* settlements are now ordinarily the sole means of reclamation in the whole of the Sundarbans tracts.

42. The history of the reclamation rules from 1905 might suggest that the abolition of the office of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans had been a mistake

Resume.

(a) Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, to Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, No. 9568, dated the 18th December 1918.

(b) Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, to Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, No. 65-21-2, dated the 30th January 1919.

(c) Notification, No. 1601—L. R., dated the 15th February 1919.

and that uniformity of administration is essential in the whole tract. This, however, is hardly the case. The *rāiyatwāri* system had been introduced in 1905 in the teeth of the opposition of the Commissioner, and it was the former Commissioner of the Sundarbans who ensured the breakdown of the experiment in the 24-Parganās. In Bākarganj, the substitution of the Collector's responsibility for the irresponsible control of the Sundarban Commissioner was undoubtedly the main factor in the successful introduction of the scheme. The mistaken reversion to the Capitalist rules in 1910 in the western province would not have been avoided by the existence of a joint office of control; it was due to the more general control of the Provincial Government, and financial difficulties with which the area was only indirectly connected. Even the ultimate adoption of the Bākarganj system cannot be treated as an argument for joint control. The differences in the rules, though few, are of importance, and the separation of control in the different areas has at last resulted in the recognition of the fact that there are radical differences in the areas for which separate treatment is essential.



## CHAPTER VI.

### Abolition of the office of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans.

43. The office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans had been established by Regulation IX of 1816, and, though from time to time condemned to be abolished, arose from its own ashes and survived through the vicissitudes of Sundarbans developments until the opening years of the 20th century. As early as 1830, only 14 years after the creation of the office proposals had been made for its abolition; these proposals had been renewed in 1834, 1838, 1841 and 1842; the alternative suggested was to place each Collector in charge of the area belonging to his own district. It was recognised that the work accomplished had been trifling and that the field of work was too extensive and multifarious for a single officer. Even the appetising bait of economy, however, failed to entice the Board. In 1843, however, Mr. Harvey, the Presidency Commissioner, again strongly advocated the abolition of the office on the ground of economy, convenience, efficiency and control. The Board now fell to the attraction of this four-fold bait; the Commissioner-ship was abolished and two years of dire confusion ensued. Babu Uma Kanta Sen was appointed special officer for the 24-Parganās and Jessore under the two Collectors. Mr. Ross was placed in similar control over the Bākarganj area. Mr. Mullins, appointed surveyor to the entire area, appears to have disregarded the existence of Bākarganj. Disputes regarding jurisdiction ensued; the staff was found to be inadequate; the four-fold bait had proved illusory and in 1846 the office was restored. In 1866 a proposal to abolish the office was negatived on the grounds of inexpediency and the improbability of effecting any real economy. Collectors would require additional staffs, or they would be unable to attend to the extra duties involved. The Board of Revenue was, however, directed to diminish the establishment of the Sundarbans Commissioner's office as soon as practicable, and to bring forward the question of abolition again when

Early  
proposals  
for  
abolition.

Proposals  
for  
abolition  
in 1881.

it was satisfied that the measure could safely be carried out (a).

44. In January 1877 the office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans had been rendered immediately subordinate to the Board of Revenue in order to maintain that unity of control which was at that time considered essential. The time was one of difficulty. In Bākarganj a large part of the reclaimed area had been swept bare by the disastrous cyclone and storm wave of 1876; new rules for the grant of waste lands were in contemplation. In 1879, however, the Board again called on Mr. Pargiter, then Commissioner in the Sundarbans, for a report on the abolition of his office (b). It was not until 1881 that the report was received (c). Mr. Pargiter reported that there had been great pressure of work on account of the cyclone and the introduction of the new rules; the pressure had now relaxed and he anticipated little work in the near future. The main duties of the Commissioner comprised the following :—

- (a) applications for demarcation of boundaries and survey under the rules of 1853,
- (b) resettlement of estates sold for arrears of revenue and purchased by Government,
- (c) collection of rent from *rāijats* in estates included in (b),
- (d) lease of grants under the rules of 1879,
- (e) lease of plots to cultivators under the rules of 1879,
- (f) decision of boundary disputes under (d) and (e),
- (g) management of civil suits brought against Government.

Mr. Pargiter anticipated activity under heads (e) and (f) only and it is interesting to note his opinion that the area remaining for grants under head (d) was not likely to be taken up. He placed three alternatives before the Board :—

- (i) **Abolition of the Commissionership**, and distribution of the work amongst the three Collectors subordinate to the Divisional Commissioners. He did not recommend

(a) Government (Revenue Department) to Board No. 707, dated the 20th February 1866.

(b) Board to Sundarbans Commissioner No. 43-A., dated the 13th January 1879.

(c) Sundarbans Commissioner to Board No. 315, dated the 24th October 1881.

this course as it would be contrary to the orders of 1877 placing the area directly subordinate to the Board to avoid excess of labour for the Divisional Commissioners! It is instructive, in view of the arguments brought forward at the time of the final abolition of the office, to note that Mr. Pargiter deprecated a breach in the continuity of policy and administration.

- (ii) **Reduction of establishment.**—On this no definite opinion was recorded, but it is obviously open to the objections advanced in the thirties and forties that with diminished work the area would be too extensive for a single officer.
- (iii) **Absorption in the proposed Khulna Collectorate,** directly subordinate to the Board. Mr. Pargiter favoured this latter alternative.

The Commissioner of Dacca reported that the Collector of Bākarganj was prepared to take charge of the Bākarganj area without additional staff. The Collector of the 24-Parganās agreed to the proposed abolition; the Collector of Jessore, however, fought bravely for the fetish of uniformity of control. In submitting their proposals to the Government the Board (*a*) for the first time contradicted the assumption that uniformity of control was necessary or desirable. "The features of the Bākarganj portion of the Sundarbans are very different from those of the 24-Parganās, reclamation being much further advanced and the heavy embanking which is the characteristic of the 24-Parganās is not required." The Board recommended abolition and the distribution of the work between the three districts affected; they did not, however, recommend the repeal of Regulation IX of 1816 owing to the possibility that necessity for reviving the office might still arise. The opinion of the Board, as subsequent events have proved, was undoubtedly correct, but was not accepted by Government. Government again reverted (*b*) to the argument of the desirability of uniform treatment for and continuity of administration in the area, and asked the Board to reconsider the question with the object of reducing establishment

(*a*) Board to Government (Revenue Department) No. 79-A., dated the 8th February 1882.

(*b*) Government (Revenue Department) to Board No. 672-235-L.-R., dated the 20th March 1882.

and transferring the headquarters of the office to the proposed new district headquarters at Khulnā. The reconsideration by the Board resulted in reduction of establishment effecting a total economy of Rs. 1,108 per annum, and orders for the transference of the headquarters of the office from Alipur to Khulnā, the Commissioner still remaining directly subordinate to the Board. The economy effected was small, and it is doubtful if the proposed transfer to Khulnā, practically the whole Sundarbans area of which had already been declared 'reserved forest,' outside the Commissioner's control, was any distinct improvement on Alipur; the transfer was, however, never effected, though the proposals were renewed in 1895.

**Proposals  
of abolition in  
1891.**

15. For nine years, the office remained undisturbed. In 1891, however, proposals were again advanced for its abolition; it was now recognized that the original necessity of the special office had been due to the fact that the area was extensive, wild, inaccessible and uninhabited and that it was considered necessary to establish cultivators therein with the object of clearing the tract as speedily as possible. A very large proportion of the tract had now been cleared and settled; though Regulation IX of 1816 conferred on the Commissioner in the Sundarbans all the powers of a Collector of revenue, still Collectors of the adjoining districts exercised some of their powers in the Sundarbans area. The position was anomalous and doubtless unconstitutional, and the district officers resented the existence of an independent officer in a tract which was in fact a mere extension of their own districts. But Government was not prepared to depart from its placid enjoyment of a policy of uniformity of control; it was, however, prepared to adopt a compromise, which could be satisfactory to no one concerned with the administration of the Sundarbans. Orders (a) were issued that the Commissioner, though not directly subordinate to the Collectors, should in future, keep them fully informed of his proceedings, and treat their instructions and views with the utmost deference. The new system proved a failure; the Collectors had no responsibility for the administration of the Sundarbans; they found it impracticable to enforce their views or to exercise any adequate control over the proceedings of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans. The latter's office became a sink

(a) Government, Revenue Department, to Board, No. 3282-L.R., dated the 11th July 1896.

of iniquity, into which it is not now necessary to delve; embezzlements were rife; the interests of Government were bandied about like shares upon a market. The system stood self-condemned, and in 1902, the problem was finally tackled.

46. The resuscitation of the problem arose from a proposal made in 1901 by Mr. (now Sir) Nicholas Beatson-Bell, then Settlement Officer of Bākarganj, to extend his operations into the Sundarbans area of the district, and to take up the settlement of estates within that area. The proposal was not altogether novel, as in 1895 it had been suggested that the Collector should be entrusted with the settlement of all *hāolās* and other lands held under direct management. That proposal had been negatived by Government. The new proposal implied the abolition of the post of the Commissioner in the Bākarganj Sundarbans, at least temporarily. Despite the strong recommendations of the local officers, the Board was doubtful, but forwarded the proposals to Government with a strong bias against the proposed change (a). It will be noted that these proposals in origin suggested the abolition of the Commissionership in the Bākarganj area only. Government declined to accept the proposal (b), firstly and correctly on the ground that there would not be sufficient work in Khulnā and the 24-Parganās alone, secondly and wrongly because the Commissioner possessed a trained establishment and was an expert in survey and settlement work, which presumably Mr. Beatson-Bell was not, and thirdly and conclusively because the Commissioner had "a steamer for the express purpose of this work!" The orders of Government had been passed in haste, but repentance was not leisurely; within one month of the issue of orders, the matter was again under consideration, and Government proceeded to perform one of those surprising *volte faces* which have been so marked a feature of its policies, especially in the western area of the Sundarbans. Certain information was brought to the notice of Government regarding the defective methods of settlements in the Sandarbans. "It should seriously be considered" wrote Sir J. Bourdillon on the 24th January 1903 "whether the whole system should be changed and the appointment of the Sundarbans

**Proposed abolition in connection with survey operations in Bakarganj.**

(a) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 906-A., dated the 26th November 1902.

(b) Government, Revenue Department, to Board, No. 4829, dated the 24th December 1902.

Commissioner should not be abandoned. Taken in connection with the revelations as to the extremely loose methods employed by Mr. Ross, when Commissioner of the Sundarbans, they seem to indicate that if we could always have in the districts bordering on the Sundarbans, officers so capable as those who have been Collectors of Bākarganj, we might do worse than abolish the appointment of Commissioner in the Sundarbans and make over the settlement and administration of that area in each district to the Collector." It must be remembered that the question of the abolition of the Commissionership was intimately connected with the system of settling waste lands and with the extension of survey and settlement operations to the Sundarbans area of the Bākarganj district. The theory of uniformity of control in the various parts of the Sundarbans had now been definitely abandoned. The Board was directed (a) to obtain the opinions of the Commissioners of the Presidency and Dacca Divisions.

**Abolition  
of the  
Commis-  
sionership.**

47. The Board was not, however, prepared to abandon the practice of uniformity of control without a struggle, and in September 1903 (b), they addressed Government, adhering to the time-honoured policy of a separate officer in charge of the whole of the Sundarbans; that officer should not be independent of the Collectors of the districts, but should be a Deputy Collector working in subordination to the three Collectors concerned, and termed Superintendent of the Sundarbans. This proposal was nothing more than a tightening up of the system adopted in 1891 and still in force. The views of the Board of Revenue appear to have impressed the Government of Bengal (c), which proceeded to divest itself of its proposals under consideration; it considered that even the compromise proposals of the Board were too radical; it accepted the suggestions that the post should not be abolished and that the officer should be termed "Superintendent of the Sundarbans;" but the complete subordination of the post to the three Collectors, a position that would obviously have been unworkable, Government was not able to support. The Board were accordingly requested to reconsider

(a) Government, Revenue Department, to Board, No. 660, dated the 7th February 1903.

(b) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No. 7899-A., dated the 19th September 1903.

(c) Government, Revenue Department, to Board, No. 2877-T.R., dated the 29th October 1903.



their proposals with a view "to give effect to the orders of 1891." "The arguments" ran the letter with delightful disregard of a recent expression of policy "in favour of uniformity of treatment in the Sundarbans and against overburdening the Collectors in question with extra work appear to be as strong as ever". The quotation with which the discussion on the file opens "*Quot homines tot sententie*" is not without its humorous application. The whole question of Sundarbans administration was now referred to a Committee, the proceedings of which dated the 11th December 1903 form a notable landmark in the history of Sundarbans policy. Having decided on the advisability of initiating a system of *rāiyatwāri* settlement and the necessity of extending the survey and settlement operations over the Sundarbans area of Bākarganj under the control of the Settlement Officer, the Committee recorded the opinion that "not only for the successful working of the system of *rāiyatwāri* settlement now proposed but for all administrative purposes whatsoever, it is essential that the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, by whatever designation he may be known in future, should be subordinate and should submit his reports to the Collector of the district in which he is for the time working. The existing rules already provide, that he should work in communication with the Collector of the district, but this in practice has not been done, and necessarily, since the very conditions of the work preclude it". In accordance with the recommendations of the Committee the Board proceeded to press upon the attention of Government (a) "the necessity for making a change in the status of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans and for the repeal of the Regulation that constitutes this area a special tract under a separate independent officer". The objections on the ground of loss of uniformity had now lost much of their original weight. The Government of Bengal now agreed with the policy advocated by the Board and in March 1904 addressed (b) the Government of India recommending the repeal of Regulation IX of 1816, and the appointment of a Deputy Collector in charge of the Sundarbans in complete subordination to the Collectors of Bākarganj, Khulnā and the 24-Parganās. It was pointed out that the difficulties of

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(a) Board to Government, Revenue Department, No., 1143 A., dated the 8th February 1904.

(b) Government of Bengal (Revenue Department) to Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, No. 1875, dated the 22nd March 1904.

divided control would be simplified by the fact that for a few years at least the Deputy Collector would be employed almost solely in the 24-Parganās ; in Khulnā there was little work of reclamation to be done, while for some years the Settlement Officer of Bākarganj would be in control of operations in that district. These proposals were accepted by the Government of India. By Act I (B.C.) of 1905 Regulation IX of 1816 was repealed and "all the powers and functions heretofore vested in, and exercised by the Commissioner in the Sundarbans in any district" were vested in the Collector of that district.

**Subsequent  
administra-  
tion.**

48. The proposals of the Government of Bengal involved the appointment of a Deputy Collector subordinate to the Collectors of the districts of Bākarganj, Khulnā and the 24-Parganās for work in the Sundarbans. The partition of the province of Bengal in 1905 effectually separated the district of Bākarganj from the complexities of this joint control. In 1906 the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, in view of the proposed extensive *rāyatwāri* settlements in Bākarganj proposed the appointment of a special officer subordinate to the Collector in control of the colonization of the tract. The proposal was sanctioned and the first Colonisation Officer was appointed in 1907(a). It should be noted that his control was confined to the area under colonisation. On the reorganisation of the system of administration of Government Estates in the district in 1909, the Colonisation Officer was placed in control of all Sundarbans Estates under direct management lying in the Bargunā and Amtali Circles, each of which was placed under the charge of a Sub-Deputy Collector. By this arrangement the only important Sundarbans estate under direct management excluded from the control of the Colonisation Officer was Tushkhāli. In Khulnā and the 24-Parganās the joint control of a single Deputy Collector has never been of importance owing to the paucity of original settlement work in Khulnā. The work of the officer has been confined to the 24-Parganās. In 1916, however, in view of the extensive *rāyatwāri* settlements in Sāgar Island, a special Sub-Deputy Collector was appointed as Colonisation Officer for the area in the 24-Parganās. In all three districts revision and resettlement of existing grants is done on the principles adopted for the

(a) Notification No. 5736-C., dated the 9th May 1907.

resettlement of government and temporarily settled estates in Bengal generally.

49. The abolition of the office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans is a fact of extreme importance in the history of the tract. At the time of the original reclamations in the days of Warren Hastings, a special officer had been appointed to the tract; in 1816 when the necessity of resuming illegal encroachments within the Sundarbans boundary was pressing, the position of the special officer was explicitly defined. His status was not dissimilar to that of the Special Commissioners appointed in 1828 to resume lands illegally held free of revenue throughout Bengal. By 1836 however the work of resumption in the Sundarbans had been practically completed by Messrs. Dampier and Grant. It was still thought however that a special officer was required to control forest grants throughout the tract, to watch the observance of the conditions attached to grants and to effect renewals of leases when they fell due. It is an undoubted fact that the uniformity of administration tended to stereotype the rules in force throughout the Sundarbans. Excepting the Commissioner himself there were few officials, if any, who understood or attempted to understand the conditions of the tract. After Mr. Pargiter's term of office had expired the office was in the hands of subordinates; corruption and maladministration were rife, and it was left to the settlement operations in Bākarganj to raise the curtain and to prove that the continuance of the office had been due entirely to ignorance. Once the curtain had been raised, progress was apparent; each portion of the Sundarbans was subjected to rules considered apposite to the conditions prevalent; control by the Collector has been justified by its results; by degrees the leases of the past are being reduced to order, and development of the remaining waste lands has been undertaken with a vigour that holds out high hopes of ultimate success. Mistakes have been made, but they have not been concealed or multiplied as in the past; the results of the new policy will be apparent in the chapters on the development of the tract.

**Resume of  
the system  
of control.**



सत्यमेव जयते

## **PART II.**

### **(a) Administration and Development from 1870 to 1903.**



सत्यमेव जयते



सत्यमेव जयते

## CHAPTER VII.

### Creation of Reserved and Protected Forests.

50. It must be borne in mind that as late as 1853 Government had declared that the paramount object of its policy in the Sundarbans was the speedy reclamation of the forest in order to improve the health of the neighbourhood of Calcutta and to deprive wild animals, smugglers and pirates of the shelter afforded by the jungle; the improvement of the revenue was of secondary and altogether subordinate importance. Not unnaturally, accordingly, no attempt had been made to conserve the forest nor to derive any revenue from forest produce. In 1862, however, the advisability of conserving the forests of Bengal was considered on the basis of a memorandum prepared by Dr. Brandis, Conservator of Forests in Burma. In 1864 the total area of forest in the Sundarbans at the absolute disposal of Government was returned at 3,403 square miles; of this a very small area lay in Bākarganj. Practically the whole area was leased out to the Port Canning Company, but in 1868 Government again decided to make the area available for reclamation, and the leases for the collection of dues on forest produce were cancelled.

**Reclamation policy originally opposed to conservation.**

51. The decision to reallocate the forest area for reclamation appears to have been largely influenced by the oppressive methods adopted by the Port Canning Company. The next proposals for conserving the forest were formulated by the Forest Department in 1869-70, but the scheme was negatived by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir William Grey. In 1872-73 a revised scheme was prepared by Mr. Home, Deputy Conservator and Dr. Schlich, Conservator of Forests; this scheme aimed not so much at conservation of the forest, as at regulating exports of forest produce; it promised a net revenue of 1½ lakhs of rupees by the institution of a number of preventive stations and peripatetic patrol boats for the purpose of collecting a tax on the export of forest produce. Government was however chary. "Sir George Campbell" ran the order "must now finally negative the scheme for raising a forest revenue from the Sundarbans in any such way as is now suggested

**Investigations leading to the creation of the first forest reserve.**

He believes that any such scheme would involve very great harassment of the people as in the days of the Canning Company's monopoly; that it would cause great expense for establishment with very doubtful revenue results, and that there would be very great risk of corruption and oppression if we were to spread a low paid preventive establishment of this kind all over the Sundarbans rivers and channels." It is not improbable that the decision of Government was to some extent influenced by the new policy, then under discussion, regarding *rāiyatwāri* settlements. The Forest Department was, however, undaunted. In 1873-74 Mr. Home undertook a detailed survey of 1,100 square miles of forest in Jessore (now Khulnā). He laid stress on the extraordinary value of the forest, and the immense quantities of firewood and timber that were constantly exported to the districts of Bākarganj, Jessore and the 24-Parganās from Government forests from which Government derived no income. "The forest" wrote Dr. Schlich "must be called extremely rich, in fact inexhaustible." The Forest Department was, however, probably ill-advised in pursuing the quest of profit. The mistake was promptly realised and in the following year Dr. Schlich made a personal examination of the area; he now reported that the supply was not inexhaustible, the western parts of the forest were already exhausted, and year by year the woodcutters were proceeding further east. "Even in the *soonder* tracts one sees, for long distances from the river banks, nothing but dead *soonder* trees and seedlings." He further pointed out that the interior being marshy transport was impossible, and accordingly cutting was practically confined to the banks. The most valuable *sundri* wood was accordingly rapidly being destroyed. Dr. Schlich had abandoned the revenue tack, and based his advice on the necessity of saving from exhaustion what he had previously reported to be an inexhaustible forest. No alternative remained to Government but to agree and at the commencement of 1875 the *sundri* forests in the Bāgerhāt sub-division (500 square miles in area) and those in the north of the Khulnā sub-division (385 square miles) of the Jessore district, as then constituted, were declared reserved forest. "The object of Government in forming the reserve" ran the resolution "has not been so much the realisation of profit as the preservation for the public benefit, of a valuable property which was being recklessly destroyed, and which



ministered to needs which could not well be supplied from any other quarter." The rules for the cutting of timber in the reserved blocks limited the felling of *sundri* trees to those 3 cubits in girth; the royalty for *sundri* wood was fixed at  $\frac{1}{2}$  an anna and for firewood at  $\frac{1}{4}$  anna per maund. Four collection stations were established, and an Assistant Conservator was placed in charge.

52. Emboldened by his success in establishing the first reserve, Dr. Schlich recommended in the following year that the whole of the unleased area in the Sundarbans should be placed under the Forest Department. In this he was less successful. Government agreed to include in the reserved area a further 314 square miles in south Khulnā and 382 square miles in the Sātkhirā sub-division (then in the 24-Parganās, but absorbed by Khulnā in 1882). This extension appears to have been made with the object of securing well defined natural boundaries for the reserve as a whole and to facilitate control, rather than for any special value that might attach to the forest of the Sātkhirā and south Khulnā areas. "But" ran the Government resolution "the public convenience requires that the reserved tract should be limited to the smallest area compatible with the effectual preservation of the valuable *sundri* timber, and he (the Lieutenant-Governor) would be unwilling to enforce any restrictions which are not shown to be necessary to the accomplishment of this object. It is therefore probable that no further additions will be made to the reserved area in the Sundarbans". Having obtained as much as he could Dr. Schlich proceeded to perform another *volte face*; he abandoned his reformed view that the forests of the area were not inexhaustible and proceeded in 1876 to apply rules which limited the felling only of *sundri* trees in the Bāgerhāt block alone. In the Bāgerhāt block felling of *sundri* trees was limited to dry trees not less than 3' 9" in girth, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' from the ground, the royalty being 1 anna per maund; the right to fell other timber in that block and timber of all kinds in the remainder of the area was unlimited, subject to the payment of royalty varying from 3 to 6 pies per cubic foot. In 1877 and 1878 proposals were made for declaring the remainder of the unleased forest a protected area: this would empower the Forest Department to collect forest dues, but would not bar the leasing of lots in the area for purposes of reclamation—an important consideration, as new rules

Develop-  
ment of  
the Forest  
area up to  
1881.

for reclamation were then under issue. In 1879, an area of 1,851 square miles in the Bāsīrhāt, Diamond Harbour and Bāruipur sub-divisions of the 24-Parganās, 24 square miles (lot 165) in the Sātkhirā sub-division, and 50 square miles (lots 216, 224 and 225) in Khulnā were declared protected forest. By the year 1880-1881 the annual revenue derived from the reserved and protected forests amounted to Rs. 2,79,408 at an expenditure of Rs. 65,251.

Develop-  
ment of  
the forest  
area 1881-  
1901.

53. In the next decade there is little change to note. The same methods of management remained in force; the revenue which in 1889-90 had reached the record of Rs. 4,85,458 fell in 1890-91 to Rs. 4,10,483, working expenses being Rs. 77,711. In 1890 an area of 6 square miles of reserved forest in the Bāgherhāt subdivision was disafforested (a), while the area of protected forest fell to 1,881 square miles, by the reclamation of lots 216, 224 and 225 in Khulnā and of 5 square miles in Diamond Harbour and Bāsīrhāt. The following table shows the distribution of the forest area :—

District.	Subdivision.	Class of Forest.	Area. Square miles.
24-Parganās ...	Diamond Harbour ...	Protected ...	530
	Bāruipur ...		321
	Bāsīrhāt ...		1,006
Khulnā ...	Sātkhirā		24
	Total ...	Protected ...	1881
Khulnā ...	Sātkhirā ...	Reserved ...	382
	Khulnā ...		699
	Bāgherhāt ...		494
	Total ...	Reserved ...	(b) 1,575
	GRAND TOTAL ...	All Forests ...	3,456

In 1891 lot 240 of the Khulnā reserved forest was released for reclamation. In 1891-92 the first definite working plan for the reserved forests, as prepared

(a) Notification dated the 15th August 1890.

(b) Exclusive of water area. The total area amounted to 2,092 square miles.

by Mr. Heinig, Deputy Conservator, on the basis of proposals made by Mr. Dansey, Conservator of Forests, was adopted. The main change from the former system was the strict conservation within both the Bāgherhāt and Khulnā blocks of all valuable timber viz., *sundri*, *pussur*, *amur* and *keorā* trees, and a general raising of the rates of royalty. Owing to the rapid extension of cultivation under the Waste Lands Rules of 1879, Mr. Ross, the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, proposed the disafforestation of lot No. 7 (Khulnā-Barisāl) on the Haringhātā river in Khulnā in 1892. In 1893 the protected portion of lot 165 in the Sātkhirā Forest was again released for reclamation. In 1895 more drastic proposals were made for the disafforestation of 19 lots (200 square miles in area) included in the reserved *sundri* bearing forest of Khulnā (a). These proposals were negatived by Government (b) on the grounds that vast areas of protected forest of less value still existed, to the reclamation of which there was no objection, and lot 165 still remained unreclaimed. In the year 1895 a portion of the boundary of the reserved forest was demarcated by Mr. Ross, Sundarbans Commissioner, under the provisions of the Bengal Survey Act, mainly on account of a dispute with the boundaries of lot 172 (c). By the year 1900-01 the total area of reserved forest, all in the District of Khulnā, was returned at 2,092 square miles, an increase of 517, due entirely, however, to the inclusion of water area; the area of protected forest, always a fluctuating figure, had increased, despite the extension of reclamation to 1,923 square miles, the whole of which lay in the 24-Parganās. The annual revenue amounted to Rs. 6,30,808 against expenditure of Rs. 1,01,555. It should be noted that by the end of this decade no steps had been taken to reserve or protect any forest in the district of Bākarganj.

54. In 1904 a new working plan was adopted for 3 years on the proposals of Mr. Lloyd, Deputy Conservator; the plan was merely technical and aimed at the better conservation of the *sundri* reserve. In 1906 a forest working plan was prepared by Sir Henry

**Develop-  
ment of  
the forest  
area from  
1901.**

(a) These lots were Nos 214, 215, 225-228, 241-251, 7 and 2 unnumbered lots, situated to the North-east of the reserved area and bounded on the south and west by the Kairā, Sipsā, Arpangāsia and Pangāsia Rivers.

(b) Government (Revenue Department) to Board No. 3241, dated the 9th July 1895.

(c) *Vide* No. 1097F., dated the 27th February 1894 and letter No. 69R.L., dated the 9th April 1895 from Commissioner, Presidency Division, to Secretary, Board of Revenue.

Farrington Bart, Deputy Conservator; it is interesting to note the areas referred to in the plan :—

Class of Forest.	District.	Subdivision.	AREA (SQUARE MILES).			
			Land.	Water.	Total.	Sundri.
Reserved	Khulnā ...	Bāgherbāt	566	132	693	285
		Sadar ...	606	240	846	333
		Sātkhīrā	376	161	537	...
Protected	24-Parganās	...	1,110	642	1,752	...
		Total ...	2,658	1,175	3,833	618

While the methods of management were thus being systematised, attention was being paid to the smaller area of forest available in the Bākarganj Sundarbans and excluded from the Colonisation scheme. In 1908 Mr. Hughes-Buller, Collector of Bākarganj, proposed that a portion of the Colonisation area should be protected with the idea of conserving the valuable timber and obtaining revenue from tracts that were too low for immediate reclamation. In 1909 a definite plan was drawn up by Mr. Heinig Deputy Conservator, and proposals were submitted to Government; the main objects of the scheme were the prevention of reckless cutting, and the collection of revenue, but it was stipulated that the protection of the forest should not stand in the way of reclamation, when the scheme had sufficiently advanced. In 1910 the area, as proposed, was declared a protected forest (a); rules as drafted by the Forest Department were adopted, and control and collection placed in the hands of the Colonisation Officer. The protected area lies in the south-west of Amtali *thānā* astride the Andarmānik river and includes :—

Tengāgirichak (the whole)	9·7 square miles.
Bara Nishānbāriā Chak	
(southern portion) ...	5·8    „    „
Bara Bogi (Southern portion)	4·6    „    „
Sonātālā (the whole) ...	12·5    „    „
Dalbuganj (the whole) ...	5·6    „    „
Khaprabhāngā (western portion) ...	11·3    „    „
Total area	... 49·5 square miles.

(a) Notification No. 2589R., dated the 12th November 1910.

By the year 1910-11 the following was the state of the Sandarbans forest:—

District.	Class of Forest.	Area square miles.	ANNUAL	
			Revenue.	Expenditure.
			Rs.	Rs.
Khulnā ...	Reserved ...	2,089	} 5,44,252	1,70,565
24-Parganās ...	Protected ...	1,711		
Bākarganj ...	Ditto ...	50		

The area of reserved forest had remained almost stationary, while that of protected forest showed a slight decrease due to the extension of reclamation.

55. Subsequently to 1911 there is little of interest to report in the development of the Sundarbans forest. The forests of Khulnā and the 24-Parganās are under the control of a Deputy Conservator stationed at Khulnā. Apart from the *sundri* area in the Khulnā reserve, the most important species of trees are the *gorān*, *geoā* and *keorā*; minor products consist of the wild date palm (*hental*), *golpatā*, shells, honey and beeswax, from all of which revenue is obtained. The reserved forest is still divided in to the original three circles, Bāgherhat, Khulnā and Sātakhirā, and collection stations have been established throughout the area. The area of protected forest has not changed, while that of the reserved forest is now returned at 2,297 square miles (a) The gross revenue has risen to 6 *lākhs*, producing a net income to the state of more than 4 *lākhs* of rupees. The small protected area in Bākarganj has continued to develop but the success of the colonisation scheme has brought its natural consequences. A small unauthorised protected area in Kālameghā has now been sacrificed to the claims of the new settlers, while orders have been issued for the reclamation of the 50 square miles of protected forest, as soon as the area is required for reclamation. The income derived from the protected area amounted in the 13 years ending in 1920 to Rs. 2,68,778, the whole of which was collected by the staff of the Colonisation Officer.

**Present  
Adminis-  
tration.**

(a) The increase of 208 square miles is due to rectification of errors in computation, revised in 1913.

**Resume of  
the  
forest  
policy  
and future  
develop-  
ment.**

56. The forest policy of Government in the area has fluctuated to a remarkably small extent. Originally it was laid down that the primary object of Government was to accelerate the reclamation of the pestilential tract of jungle. The unhealthiness of the tract appears, however, to be largely mythical, as the reserved forest is reported to be the most healthy of the Bengal forest divisions. By the year 1870, however, it had been discovered to a small extent that a large portion of the area was too low-lying for reclamation, and that accordingly no real objection existed to the protection of some portions of the jungle. This fact has now been fully realized, and it has been recognized that the major portion of the Sundaibans in the 24-Parganās is not likely to be sufficiently elevated for successful reclamation for a considerable period. In Khulnā, the pressure of population is not sufficient to create a real demand for reclamation; in Bākarganj, on the other hand, the pressure of population is great, and the land is sufficiently elevated to admit of reclamation. In Bākarganj and the 24-Parganās the value of the jungle is little, and the necessities of these areas have been met by declaring the unleased areas "Protected Forests", from which Government collects revenue, but which are at any time available for reclamation, when required, subject, except in Bākarganj, to special rules requiring the consent of the Irrigation Department. In Khulna, however conditions are entirely dissimilar; the northern part of the Khulnā Sundaibans contains timber of very great value; in 1875, the more valuable portion was declared reserved forest with the object of conserving the supply of timber and of obtaining a reasonable revenue from this valuable property; the area of reserved forest in Khulnā has gradually been extended until it covers the whole of the unleased forest, none of which is now available for reclamation; a small part of it is of little value, but its reservation facilitates the administration of the more valuable area. The policy of Government as applied to each different district has been fully justified. In 5 or 6 years the whole of the Bākarganj protected forest will have been reclaimed, but during the period of protection from 1910 to 1920, Government has derived a revenue of Rs. 2,68,778, being at the rate of Rs. 415 per square mile per annum. In the 24-Parganās, Government will continue to derive revenue from 1,711 square miles of an otherwise valueless tract, until

it is fit for cultivation. In Khulnā, future developments are not likely to lead to any violent revision of policy in favour of an extension of reclamation. Tentative suggestions have been made for the reclamation of 9 lots in order to round off the forest boundary, and to release the forest on the Khulnā littoral for grazing purposes; these proposals have, however, been abandoned. When pressure of population, however, in Khulnā and Jessore, which is now satisfied with reclamation of the Jessore marshes, requires further room for expansion, such expansion can only be in a southerly direction, and the reclamation of a portion of the less valuable area of the reserved forest mainly in the west and south may then become advisable. The ultimate area of the reserved forest would then be confined to the northern parts of the Sundarbans forests in the Khulnā and Bāgherhāt Subdivisions—the area originally reserved in 1875. It is a mistake, however, to think that either protected or reserved forest will disappear with any degree of rapidity. Natural processes of flood and tidal action have still to raise the area to the minimum height required for successful cultivation; the necessity of maintaining a spill area for the floods will always require consideration, and finally experience has proved that patchwork reclamation is unsuccessful, as the surrounding jungle renders the reclaimed tract malarial and generally unhealthy. Whatever policy may ultimately be adopted, however, it is certain that the valuable *sundri* areas must be retained as reserved forest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Administration of the Sundarbans ; 1870 to 1903.

#### (A). GENERAL.

Features  
of the  
period.

57. There are few features in the administration of the Sundarbans apart from the proposals for the abolition of the office of the Commissioner which are of great importance in the period from 1870 to 1903 when the Sundarbans Committee was convened; the history of the rules shows that apart from the 24-Parganās, the period was one of little development and that such development as occurred was unsatisfactory; only in the 24-Parganās was there any important extension of grants; there are, however, two facts in the period of considerable importance which concern the whole of the area, the one the preparation of Ellison's map, the other, the cyclone and storm wave of 1876 and its consequent results.

Lieut.  
Hodges'  
map of  
1831.

58. As is shown in Mr. Pargiter's history, there had been several surveys, some whole, some partial, of the Sundarbans since the first experiment of Tilman Henckell. The only general map that had been published was one based on the survey of "Lieutenant Alexander Hodges, 29th Regiment, B.N.I., Surveyor to the Soonderbun Commission", during the Commissionership of W. Dampier in 1831, printed and published by T. Black at the Asiatic Litho. Press, Calcutta. This map purported to be "A new and improved map of the Soondarbuns, Compiled from the latest Government Documents, and showing accurately the Boundaries of the Forest, the recent Grants of Land and those of 1780, Together with 128 additional allotments of Jungul Land." The forest boundary as far east as the Jabunā river, and the area of all lots up to 109 was laid down from minute surveys made between 1822 and 1824; east of the Jabunā river, the forest boundary was plotted from minute surveys made in 1829 and 1830. Lots subsequent to 109 (*i.e.*, 109-239) were plotted by approximation; part of the forest detail was derived from surveys of 1811-1814, while the coast line to a depth varying from 5—10 miles was filled in from Rennell's Atlas.



The importance of Hodges' map lies firstly in the fact that it is the authoritative evidence of the northern boundary of the Sundarbans and that it lays down the 239 "*tots*" which have subsequently with small additions, formed the units of administration in the 24-Parganās and Khulnā. By 1873, however, the map was out of date.

59. At the time of the compilation of his map in 1873 James Ellison held the appointment of Surveyor in the Sundarbans, during the Commissionership of Mr. A. D'B. Gomess. The map purported to be "a map of the Sundarbans, showing the extent of available land, of land granted under the rules of the 24th September 1853. or held in Fee Simple, permanently settled estates, etc., compiled under the direction of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans by James Ellison, Surveyor in the Sundarbans, 1873." The scale of the map was, as in the case of Hodges' map, 4 miles = 1 inch. The map was not based as a whole on original surveys, and the method of its preparation is best described from an endorsement on the map itself. "This map has been compiled with the aid of the following maps and surveys—sheet No. 121 Indian Atlas, and the Revenue Survey maps of Districts 24-Parganās, 1851 to 1855, Jessore 1855 to 1859 and Bāckerganj 1860 to 1863. Captain Lloyd's chart of the Sea Face of the Sundarbans, published in 1831, Lieutenant Morieson's survey of a part of the Sundarbans, and the surveys executed by the officers attached to the Sundarban Commissioner's office; from which source the details and boundaries of the estates leased out have been worked up. The progress of cultivation has been taken from the latest records, but owing to the nature of Sundarbans clearances perfect accuracy cannot be attained." Different kinds of leases were shown on the map in different colours. Copies were lithographed from the original at the Surveyor General's office, Calcutta, in April 1874. This map has been the only map available for working purposes up to date, and has been reissued with slight alterations due to changes of jurisdiction in 1893, 1899, 1901, 1903 and 1917. The reprint of 1893 included leases granted under the rules of 1879 up to date. The great interest of the original map is that it shows clearly all areas leased, distinguishing between the various forms of leases, and thus constitutes a definite land mark in the history of the Sundarbans. The maps attached to his volume attempt similarly to distinguish the

Ellison's  
map of  
1873.

different forms of lease under which different grants are held. The year 1873 fell in a period of stagnation, when little progress was made until the issue of the rules of 1879. The tendency of the period was decline—a tendency that was hastened, especially in Bākarganj, by the cyclone of 1876.

The  
Cyclone of  
1876.

60. On the night of October 31st and November 1st, 1876, occurred the most terrible cyclone and storm wave that had been experienced since 1822. The greatest havoc was confined to Chittagong and the estuary of the Meghnā and accordingly the Bākarganj portion of the Sundarbans, only of the Sundarbans tracts, suffered severely; in *Gālāchipā thānā* no less than  $\frac{1}{5}$ th of the population was estimated to have been drowned. The calamity was described in detail by Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, who visited the affected area immediately after the occurrence, and a vivid account is contained in the Gazetteer of the Bākarganj District published in 1918. Crops and cattle were destroyed far and wide, and the immediate effect of the storm, so far as it effects this history, was the relapse of a vast area of the Sundarbans in Bākarganj to jungle. The secondary effect of the cyclone was an enquiry into the possibility of erecting refuges to protect from loss of life in case of similar calamities. "It may be asked in conclusion" wrote Sir Richard Temple, "whether any protective means against such calamities in future can be devised—any embankments or the like? This question will be duly considered; but at present I know not how to devise such safeguard, nor have I seen any one who can suggest anything. The area to be protected would be too great to be encompassed with protective works." In 1880 Government issued a resolution (a) on the subject; it was considered unnecessary to attempt protective measures in the southern face of the 24-Parganās (except Sāgar Island) and the western portion of Jessore (Khulnā) as the locality was thinly populated. For the remainder of the area it was proposed that tanks with high terraced banks sufficiently lofty to keep out a wave of ordinary height should be constructed at short intervals; the banks would serve as a refuge for the people, and the tank would ensure a supply of pure drinking water. The construction of such protective works had been an essential condition of the revenue-free grants in Sāgar

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(a) Resolution of the 26th April 1880.

Island after the experience of the storm wave of 1864, which had devastated the island. It was proposed that Government should set an example to other landlords by constructing such tank-refuges in its own estates. The resolution, however, merely contained a counsel of perfection; the construction of a sufficient number of tank-refuges to be of any value would have required an expenditure and organisation beyond the power of Government or the private landlord; for it was laid down that no cultivator should dwell at a distance greater than one mile from the nearest refuge. In Sāgar Island alone has the construction of such refuges been made an indispensable condition of the leases under the rules of 1897; the value and failure of the condition is referred to in the account of Sāgar Island. The lesson of 1876 has taught little more than the impossibility of protecting the Sundarbans area as a whole from the dangers and disasters of storm waves.

**(B) Bakarganj.**

61. It is not necessary to give a detailed account of the development estate by estate in the period from 1870-1903; where the facts are of importance, they are more appropriately referred to in the chapter on survey and settlement operations in the area—the defective inspection of forest grants and renewals of leases of resumed *mahāls*. In 1877, the total area under lease was reported to be 482 square miles against 520 at the close of the period; the area is probably incorrect as the total area is given as 616 square miles against 697 as ascertained during the settlement operations. Of the 482 square miles, 281 were under cultivation, the remainder being jungle. No fresh areas were opened up in this period under the rules of 1853; the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 resulted only in 7 grants in Naltonā, 2 in 1890 and 5 in 1896 covering an area of 8,198 acres, while the leases under the Small Capitalist Rules are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter IX. The period, however, was one of decline; even before the storm wave of 1876—a calamity upon which have been fathered far more sins than it could ever claim as its progeny, forest grants had been relapsing to jungle and resumed by Government on failure to fulfil the clearance conditions—Barā Bogi and Karāibāria in 1866 Chhotā Nishānbāriā in 1868 Kālāmeghā in 1869, Abuganj in

Adminis-  
tration  
from  
1870-1903.

1871 and Bara Nishānbāriā in 1874. After the storm wave, Dalbuganj and Nilganj capitulated in 1878 and 1879, Lātāchapli in 1886 and by the year 1890 many of the resumed *mahāls* had followed in the rout—South Teākhāli succeeded by Debpur, Kātādiā, Chilā and Kukuā. The rules of 1879 proved neither a palliative nor a restorative. In the resumed *mahāls* indeed, Government ordinarily adopted the line of least resistance and resettled with the *mālguzārs*; Kātādiā however, remained *khās*. In South Teākhāli, under the guidance of Mr. Pargiter, an experiment in *hāolādāri* settlement was attempted; over 4,000 acres were settled in 1880; four further grants were made in 1898, and in 1902 Mr. Sunder created 11 further *hāolas*; by 1903, however, when the area was resettled only 1,924 acres were occupied. In the forest grant area in the absence of any suitable system, Government probably adopted the correct policy of drift. An attempt to regrant Kārāibāriā in 1875 was effectually countered by the storm wave, and it remained waste till 1903. Kālāmeghā was abandoned to the Small Capitalist Rules; Abugunj, Dalbuganj and Bara Nishānbāriā were abandoned to jungle. Lātāchapli experimented with a farming lease in 1888, but in 1906, the claims of jungle prevailed. In Chhotā Nishānbāriā and Barā Bogi alone interesting experiments in colonization, not sanctioned by any rules, were instituted by Mr. Pargiter in 1880; in the former, a Māgh Settlement of 133 *bighās* was made, the experiment was a failure, and the creation of 6 *hāolās* over 190 *bighās* in 1880 did not materially effect the problem of reclamation. In Barā Bogi, however, the area colonized covered an area of 1,356 *bighās*, and had extended to 46 square miles when the colonisation period opened. The period is one of little interest and no progress. Applications for grants of land were not infrequent, numbering 30 in 1892-1893, 158 in 1893-1894 and 593 in the following year; the applications, however, received little attention. The Sundarbans Commissioner was unable to cope with the work in the distant tract of Bākarganj and in 1894-1895 and 1895-1896 failed even to visit the district. The Collector of Bākarganj appealed in vain for permission to control settlements in his portion of the Sundarbans. The period closed with gloomy prospects; a large area of the grants under former rules had relapsed to jungle and the rules of 1879 had resulted in little extension of cultivation, less than 2 square miles under the small

Capitalist Rules, and 13 square miles out of an available area of 43 square miles under the Large Capitalist Rules. The history of these grants is recorded in Chapter IX.

(C) **Khulna (a).**

62. The account of the Sundarbans forest in Chapter VII has shown that little development could be expected in the reclamation area during the period. In 1875 and 1876, the whole of the unleased forest in the Bāgerhāt and Khulnā subdivisions of the district then included in Jessore had been declared reserved forest; excepting 74 square miles, which were declared protected forest in 1879, the whole of the Sātckhirā forest had been similarly reserved. In 1890-1891 six square miles of reserved forest were released for reclamation—otherwise there has been no scope for the extension of reclamation. In 1895 Mr. Ross, the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, had proposed the release of 19 further lots for reclamation, but, as has already been shown, Government declined to accept the proposal. The earliest statistics available show that in 1877, out of 1,701 square miles, being the Sundarbans area in the Bāghérhāt and Khulnā Subdivisions, 429 square miles had been leased out, of which 168 were under cultivation; 1232 square miles constituted the reserved forest area, and the total area available for lease amounted to 40 square miles only. In 1880, the total area reported as available for leases under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 in the whole district amounted to 49 square miles only, covering portions of lots 165, 222, 223 and the whole of lot 225. In the year 1890-1891, lots 216, 224 and 225 were released from the protected area, while lot 240 of the reserved forest was also released. Small areas, however, have also been settled subsequently under the rules of 1879 in lots 164, 172 and 220. Throughout an attempt has been made to confine the narrative to genuine Sundarbans estates

Area available for lease.

(a) An apology is due to the reader for the very unsatisfactory and unreliable information that is available for Khulnā. On the abolition of the Sundarbans Commissioner's Office the Khulnā records appear to have been gravely abused, and it will be impossible to remedy the confusion until a complete survey of the area has been made. The administration of the area in the past appears to have been neglected, and is especially noticeable in the delightful disregard shown for the Dampier-Hodges' line. A printed list of estates presumed to be south of the line was drawn up only recently in 1915, but I find that it omits 6 permanently-settled and 12 temporary-settled estates, while including one to the north of the line. So far as can be gathered there now appear to be 99 estates south of the line, and 97 estates wrongly treated as Sundarbans estates, north of the line.

lying to the south of the Dampier-Hodges line, a matter of some difficulty, as most of the statistics existing refer indiscriminately to estates lying to the north and to the south of the line.

Existing  
leases, in  
1870.

63. At the opening of the period there appear to have existed south of the line the following estates :—

	Number.	Area (Acres).
Permanently-settled estates	... 6	7,111
Grants under the rules of 1853	... 28	143,885
Resumed <i>mahāls</i> ...	... 33	62,539
Total	... 67	213,535

or 334 square miles.

In addition to the above, 3 revenue-free properties redeemed under the rules of 1863 existed in the Morrelganj grant covering an area of 13,725 acres or 20 square miles. There is little of importance to record regarding these estates, but the grants under the rules of 1853 are interesting. It will be seen later that in the 24-Parganās the terms of the leases of nearly all resumed *mahāls* were commuted under the rules of 1853 and accordingly few original grants under these rules exist. In Khulnā, however, of the 28 grants, no fewer than 15 were made originally subsequent to the issue of the rules of 1853, the remaining 13 being commuted resumed *mahāls* or forest grants of an earlier date. In the Sātkhirā subdivision reclamation has been confined to 6 lots, Nos. 165—169 and 172; in the Bāgherhāt subdivision the lots under reclamation were only Nos. 239 and 1 to 6 to which lot 240 was subsequently added. In the Khulnā subdivision the lots originally reclaimed were 211, 212 and 217—223, supplemented in 1881 by lots 216—224, 225. The only extension of reclamation in the period was under the rules of 1879.

Leases  
under  
rules of  
1879.

64. The progress of the administration of the rules for leases to Large Capitalists in the district is interesting. The first lease was executed in 1881-82 for 7,934 acres lying in lot 223, followed in 1886-87 by 2 leases covering 2,182 acres in lot 216. In 1890-91 when lots 224, 225 and 240 were released for reclamation, a considerable increase in the grant of leases occurred, 4 in lot 223 covering 6,082 acres and 3 in lot 224 covering 6,069 acres. In the following year 6 further grants were made, 3 in lot 225 for 4,959 acres and 3 in

lot 240 for 4,890 acres. This extension of grants and of the area available for reclamation appears to have whetted the appetites of the land speculators, the appetiser being largely the value of the timber that could be extracted in clearing the grants. In 1892-93 out of 471 applications for grants in the Sundarbans no fewer than 434 referred to the Khulnā area, while in the following two years 223 applications were received. In the latter year (1894-95) four further grants were made under the revised rules in lot 225, the leases being executed in the following year. These grants covering 8,231 acres in all produced a sale price of Rs. 1,68,513. The price does not appear to have daunted the land speculators, for in the year 1895-96 no fewer than 1,300 applications were received for the Khulnā area, doubtless in the hope, supported by the Sundarbans Commissioner that a further attack would be made on the reserved forest. This Government declined to do, despite the fact that only a small portion of lot 165 now remained for reclamation, an area of 2,15 acres that was ultimately leased in 1901, and an area of 489 acres in lot 172 leased in 1903-04. The refusal of Government to sacrifice the reserved forest resulted in an immediate decrease in the number of applications from 68 in 1896-97 to 3 in 1902-03. During this period the Small Capitalist Rules showed little sign of activity. In 1904 Mr. Sunder, the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, reported that such grants had only been made in one lot in the year 1902 covering 165 acres. This information appears to be incorrect; the Khulnā records appear to indicate the creation of 9 *hāolās*, 6 in lot 216, 1 in lot 220 and 2 in lot 224, covering 14,039 acres but such was the confusion in Khulnā between the Large and Small Capitalist Rules, that the true state of affairs cannot be brought to light until the completion of detailed survey and settlement operations.

65. There is little else of interest to report during this period. Khulnā was affected only to a small extent by the terrible cyclone and storm wave of 1876 but its immunity was largely due to the protection afforded by the large area of forest and to the fact that no reclamation had been undertaken in the danger zone with the exception of lots 1 to 6 (Khauliā-Barisāl) on the Haringhātā estuary. In 1882 Khulnā was created a separate district which comprised the Sundarbans area included in the Sātkhirā subdivision of 24-Parganās and the Bāgherhāt and Khulnā

Miscellaneous.

subdivisions of Jessore. Almost immediately after the creation of the new district, orders were issued for the transfer of the headquarters of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, barely saved from impending abolition, from Alipur to Khulnā, the headquarters of the new district; effect was not, however, given to these orders.

**(d) 24-PARGANĀS.**

**Area under  
lease in  
1870.**

66. The history of the 24-Parganās Sundarbans from 1870 till 1903 is, with the exception of Sagar Island, practically confined to the working of the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879. The actual area cleared and cultivated at the opening of the period is not known, but by 1877, of the 3,203 square miles included in the area, inclusive of the Sātkhirā subdivision still at that time attached to the 24-Parganās, 1,014 square miles had been leased out, of which only 346 square miles or 34 per cent. was under cultivation, 423 square miles were under reserved forest, and the remaining 1,766 square miles were considered to be waste lands available for lease—the system of protected forest was not yet in force, and the administration had not reached the stage when control by the Forest and Irrigation Departments was considered to be of material importance. Of the area under lease in 1870 6 square miles (lots 17, 21 (I) and 51) were held on leases in perpetuity; 3 Fee Simple grants were in existence (lot 19 (part) 132 (part) and 137) covering less than 8 square miles, while the revenue of 12 others had been redeemed; further redemptions in 1872, 1878, 1879, 1880 and 1883 covering an area of 183 square miles raised the number of redeemed estates to 24, mainly in the vicinity of Port Canning. But practically the whole of the area under lease was held under 99 years leases granted under the rules of 1853. They were not all in origin forest grants but in the 24-Parganās the option had been taken by all the proprietors of resumed estates, with the exception of 7, covering 8 square miles, to convert under the profitable rules of 1853. The number of such leases amounted to 93, covering 411 square miles (a). The history of these leases is more intimately connected with the period prior to 1870; during the period now under review, records exist of the examination of the clearance conditions of the leases, but, as will be seen in the

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(a) All these figures exclude the Sātkhirā Subdivision, included now in Khulnā.



account of the settlement operations on Bākarganj in Chapter IX, little reliance can be placed on the thoroughness of these examinations, but the records appear to show that in no less than 27 instances it was necessary to renew the leases on revised conditions owing to the failure of the grantees to fulfil the clearance clauses of the leases. Settlement operations in the 24-Parganās will doubtless reveal abuses similar to those that the settlement operations in Bākarganj brought to light.

67. It has already been noted that in the 24-Parganās alone were the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 applied to any considerable extent, 509 (a) square miles being leased under 182 separate leases against 70 square miles under 29 leases in the districts of Bākarganj and Khulnā during the period from 1879 to 1903. Applications for grants were received as soon as the new rules were published, and in 1882 the first leases, 8 in number, were granted covering an area of  $15\frac{1}{2}$  square miles; the average area of each lease was 3,797 *bighās*, well below the maximum of 5,000 *bighās*. This rate of progress was not however maintained during the next succeeding years. In 1883 only one lease covering 3,750 *bighās* was executed; in 1884 two leases covering 9,268 *bighās*. 1885 showed no progress; in 1886 one lease of 4,500 *bighās* was granted; 1887 witnessed the grant of 2 leases covering 10,000 *bighās*; in 1888 five further grants were made of 22,000 *bighās*. Of these original 19 leases it is interesting to note that in no instance except 2 of the 1888 grants was it necessary to take action under the clearance conditions, the two exceptions being the eastern and western portions of lot 122, new leases for which were executed in 1895. This appears to point to the fact that the leases were genuine clearance leases and not merely the outcome of the land speculation which shortly afterwards became rampant. In 1889 two leases were executed for 5,600 *bighās*; in 1890, 2 leases for 9,000 *bighās*; in 1891 a single lease of 500 *bighās*; 1892 showed no progress, while in 1893 5 grants covering 24,500 *bighās* were made. It is interesting to note that at this time indications existed of the coming land hunger, but the interest of the speculators centred in the Khulnā area, undoubtedly with the expectation of securing the more valuable forest produce from the lots under reclamation.

Application  
of the  
rules of  
1879;  
1882-1894

(\*) These areas can only be taken as approximate owing to the lack of accurate surveys.

In the year 1892-1893, no fewer than 471 applications for grants had been received, of which 434 were for grants in Khulnā and only 7 for the 24-Parganās. In Khulnā, however, only one lot (No. 165) was still available for reclamation, and on the refusal of Government to sanction any further disafforestation, applications became more numerous in other areas.

The rules  
of 1879,  
1894-1904.

68. It would be tedious to narrate the further extension of the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 in detail. The year 1894-1895 witnesses the application of the revised rule referred to in paragraphs 18 and 19, but the element of competition then introduced seemed merely to sharpen the edge of the land hunger. The following table will show the progress made in the 24-Parganās :—

Year.	Number of applications	Number of grants.	Area of grants (acres).	Sale price.
				Rs.
1894-1895 ...	62	7	11,824	19,627
1895-1896 ...	147	12	18,979	75,328
1896-1897 ...	38	15	23,892	31,825
1897-1898 ...	72	4	22,831	...
1898-1899 ...	133	19	45,327	1,23,261
1899-1900 ...	132	45	80,566	2,64,502
1900-1901 ...	51	37	76,397	1,03,099
1901-1902 ...	35	1	1,583	1,583
1902-1903 ...	87	29	60,641	1,08,596
1903-1904 ...	47	2	4,169	9,708

The above table is self-explanatory and calls for little comment. The paucity of sales in 1901-1902 is ascribed to delay on account of the confusion then existing in the Sundarban's Commissioner's office. In 1903-1904, proposals for abandoning the system were already in existence. Of individual leases, it is only necessary to comment on the following of exceptional size each of which was specially sanctioned by Government, viz., lot 132 of 42,538 *bighās* in 1898, lot 128 (part) of 24,404 *bighās*, lot 127 of 21,265 *bighās* in 1900, lot L (1st portion) of 21,150 *bighās* in 1901 and lots 141 and 149 of 14,916 and 14,613 *bighās*, respectively, in 1903. It is interesting to note that towards the end of the period the area under grant was extended to cover blocks C to L in the south of the Diamond Harbour Subdivision. Of the 53 grants in this area, four, C (1st portion), E (6th part south) and

G (1st portion A and 1st portion B) were subsequently resumed by Government, while no fewer than 28 others failed to fulfil the original clearance conditions and were subsequently resettled on revised terms ; there is no doubt that much of the area was at the time unfit for reclamation.

69. Probably the most interesting estate of this period in the 24-Parganās is the Port Canning Government Estate. The estate covers the whole of lots 52 and 54 and comprises an area of 6,375 acres or approximately 10 square miles. Practically, the whole of the estate is included in lot 54. This lot appears to have been granted originally in perpetuity in 1830 at a rent of annas 8 per *bighā*. After numerous transfers, it appears to have been held in 1847 under a 99 years lease. About the year 1853, proposals were made for the creation of a port on the Matlā river, and on the 5th July 1853, this lot was purchased by Government for the sum of Rs. 11,000. Lot 54 became the centre of operations for the new port, and considerable expenditure was incurred in the foundation of Port Canning. In 1862 the Port Canning Municipality was created, and Government transferred all its interests in the area in fee-simple to the Municipality. In 1866, Government granted the Municipality a loan of 4½ lakhs of rupees on the security of the land and property ; and a further small mortgage loan of Rs. 22,200 was advanced in 1870. Shortly afterwards, however, Government was compelled to sue the Municipality on account of the first loan ; the property was attached in execution of the decree and the Collector of the 24-Parganās was appointed Manager of the estate. The financial position of the estate was very involved, and in 1881, Government determined to execute the decree by bringing the estate to sale. It was purchased by Government for Rs. 50,000 at a sale held on the 5th November 1883, and the property purchased now constitutes the Port Canning Government Estate. In 1888, a survey and record-of-rights were prepared by Mr. Ellison under the Bengal Tenancy Act and completed in 1889 for a period of 15 years ; existing rents were recorded and no settlement of fair rents was made. The survey was a rough compass survey and resulted in an area of 6,681 acres, with a total rental of Rs. 23,174. The estate was held under direct management. Shortly before the expiry of this settlement, a notification (No. 4308 of the 2nd December 1902) was issued for a fresh survey and record-of-rights,

**Port  
Canning  
Govern-  
ment  
Estate  
T. No. 2692.**

and a plane table survey was commenced in February 1903. The new settlement was more precise than the original operations and included the fixing of fair rents. The area of the estate was finally returned at 6,375 acres and the revenue fixed at Rs. 23,909, an increase of Rs. 735 only on the former revenue. This settlement took effect from 1905 and is still in force, the estate being held under direct management.

(E) Sagar Island.

Early  
history.

70. The early development of Sagar Island is dealt with in detail in Chapter XVI of Pargiter's history, but it is necessary briefly to recapitulate the events which led immediately to the grants of 1875. Sagar lies at the mouth of the river Hughli close to the eastern bank, from which it is separated by a channel known as the Baratālā river or Channel Creek. Attempts to reclaim the island had been made as early as 1811 with the intention of benefiting the navigation of the Hughli. After a series of vicissitudes, 31,190 *bighās* had been cleared by 1863 in 6 blocks: these blocks consisted of Mud Point, Ferintōsh, Bāmānkhālī, Trowerland and Shikārpur in the north of the island, and Dhobelat in the south on the seaface. A cyclone in 1864 and a storm wave in 1867 reduced the area under cultivation to 2,750 *bighās*. A proposal was made in the same year to renew the grant of the area under cultivation rent-free for ever on condition that certain protective works were erected. These proposals were not accepted by Government, and they decided to offer the grantees alternative terms—either the grant of the cultivated area in perpetuity at the rate of four annas per *bighā*—or a continuation of the grants free of revenue in perpetuity on condition that the grantees provided places of refuge and tanks for drinking water. The grantees accepted the latter alternative and the detailed conditions were approved by Government in March 1871 (a).

Terms of  
the  
revenue-  
free  
grants.

71. The areas actually settled by the new grant were as follows :—

	<i>Bighās.</i>		<i>Bighās.</i>
Mud Point	11,783	Trowerland	7,349
Ferintosh	15,258	Bāmānkhālī	3,826
Shikārpur	7,486	Dhobelat	17,726

(a) Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, to Board of Revenue No. 808, dated the 1st March 1871.

It will be noted that these grants covered only a small proportion of the island, the whole of the centre and the south western portion, covering an area of 71 square miles, being excluded and remaining the absolute property of Government. The actual deeds were not completed until 1875, and they were executed in the year 1875-76 except that for Shikārpur, which was not completed until the following year. The terms are important and may be summarised as follows. The grants were free of revenue in perpetuity subject to the following conditions :—

- (a) A place of refuge consisting of a tank and a surrounding embankment, terraced inside, was to be constructed on a specified spot, shown on a plan attached to the deed.
- (b) The size of the tank was to be 200 by 150 feet; the embankment was to be  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet in height with a crest 5 feet broad and a slope of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 and 2 to 1 outside and inside respectively.
- (c) The embankment was to be well rammed and turfed with a sward 50 feet wide between it and the tank.
- (d) No habitation was to be erected more than one mile from the place of refuge, unless its plinth were  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the ground, and raised roads were to be constructed between all habitations and the place of refuge.
- (e) Additional protective works were to be erected as cultivation extended beyond the prescribed distance.
- (f) The original works were to be completed within 3 years and all future works required under the previous clause within a similar period.

It was further laid down that a yearly inspection should be made by the Commissioner in the Sundarbans and that failure to construct or maintain the works would entail forfeiture of the grant; no penalty was prescribed for failure to clear the grants.

72. The subsequent history of these grants is somewhat obscure and they appear to have attracted little attention; within a few years of the grants much of the area had relapsed to jungle, and by the year 1880 the grantees had commenced disposing of their interests; the four northern blocks were purchased by Raja Piari Mohan Mukherjee; he appears to have succeeded in clearing the area for cultivation, but the

**Subsequent  
history of  
the  
revenue-  
free  
grants.**

condition of the protective works was deplorable. There is no doubt that in the 20 years succeeding these grants, Sāgar Island was not an attractive proposition to the prospective *ābādkār*—for despite the enormous demand for grants in the 24-Parganās under the rules of 1879, no application for land in the island was received before 1894. In 1898, however, the attention of the Board of Revenue was drawn to the neglect of the protective works. Orders were issued (a) that inspections should be made regularly and that the results of each inspection should be reported separately immediately after the inspection: the grantees should also be reminded of the terms of the deeds, and if they failed to execute the repairs after due notice, a report should be submitted to the Board, in order that the repairs should be done by Government at the cost of the grantees and the penalty inflicted according to the indentures. The confusion then reigning in the Sundarbans' office resulted in the successful evasion of the Board's orders, and it was not until 1904 that a bout of vigorous inspection commenced at the hands of Mr. Sunder. The result of the inspections was the same throughout the grants, and though properly appertaining to the succeeding period, the result can best be narrated here. Protective works were incomplete throughout; the water in the tanks was undrinkable, and no embanked paths had been constructed. The inspections had, however, as usual been made in disregard of the terms of the deeds and the Board was compelled to remark (b) that no action could be taken against the grantees; in future 14 days' previous notice of the inspection should be given to the grantee; the Commissioner in the Sundarbans would, after inspection, report in detail how far the conditions of the grant had not been complied with and what further protective works were required in view of the extension of cultivation. The Board would then determine the facts and issue the necessary orders. The abolition of the Commissionership in 1905 and the greater interest attached to the more profitable grants under the rules of 1897 resulted in the orders of the Board being once more lost sight of, and no further action has been taken with reference to the revenue-free grants. It should, however, be observed, that in the *rāiyatwāri* portions of Sāgar Island Government has abandoned

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(a) Board of Revenue No. 396A, dated the 11th August 1898.  
 (b) Board of Revenue No. 2894A, dated the 7th April 1901.

the idea that protective works are necessary, and it would no longer be equitable or justifiable to penalise the grantees of the revenue-free grants for failure to execute works which are now considered unnecessary.

73. The circumstances which led to the passing of the Sāgar Island rules of 1897 and the details of the actual rules have been described in Chapter III. It is only necessary to observe that they were based largely on the conditions laid down for the revenue-free grants grafted on the terms of the Large Capitalist leases of 1879. The new rules owed their origin to two applications filed in 1894; these were followed in the following year by 27 further applications. The rules were published in 1897 and between 1898 and 1901 the whole of the remainder of Sāgar Island, approximately 71 square miles in area, not included in the revenue-free grants, was under lease; the rapidity of settlement is indicative of the land hunger then prevalent; the collapse of the grants within 7 years of the passing of the rules is proof of the failure of the rules. Three leases were executed in 1898 for Sāgar Island, first and second portions, in the south-west of the island, 10,395 *bighās* in area, and Chak Fuldobi (9,500 *bighās*) in the north. In 1899 three further grants were made, Rāmkarer Char West (10,840 *bighās*) and Rāmkarer Char East (11,550 *bighās*) in the centre of the island, and Trowerland, second portion, (6,750 *bighās*) in the north. Progress was maintained in 1900 when Shikārpur (second and third portions) in the east of the island, 9,900 and 10,900 *bighās* in area respectively, and Sāgar, third portion (9,705 *bighās*) were settled. In 1901 5 further grants were made completing the settlement of the island, 10,100 and 10,200 *bighās* in Chak Goalia, first and second portions, respectively, and 10,000, 7,900 and 10,950 *bighās* respectively in the three portions of Chak Mansadwip. Three years later these new grants were included in the inspection of the Sāgar Island leases made by Mr. Sunder, and 12 out of the 14 leases fell beneath the hammer of resumption. The story of the resumptions and the subsequent history of the grants belong to the succeeding period and are narrated in Chapter XIV.

Grants  
under the  
rules of  
1897.



सत्यमेव जयते



## **PART II.**

### **(B) Administration and Development from 1903 to 1920.**





सत्यमेव जयते

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Bākarganj Sundarbans.

#### Survey and Settlement Operations.

74. There are two outstanding features of the period from 1903 in the Bākarganj tract, the first the survey and settlement operations, the second the introduction of the colonisation scheme; the former covers the history of the resettlement of resumed estates and the inspection of forest grants, the latter covers the administration of the new forest grant rules. It must be remembered that by 1876 practically the whole area of the Bākarganj Sundarbans was under lease, but the devastating cyclone and storm-wave of that year had resulted in numerous surrenders of leases and relapse of vast areas of reclaimed land to jungle. The attractions of the rules of 1879 had induced lessees to come forward for barely 15 square miles of waste. In 1904 the following synopsis of lands under lease was prepared by the Commissioner in the Sundarbans(1):—

Condition  
of the  
tract at  
the  
commence-  
ment of  
the period

Serial No.	Class of lease.	No. of estates.	Area. (acres).
1.	Held under <i>ūlukdāri</i> right, heritable and transferable; liable to reassessment.	25	46,215
2.	Held under <i>mālguzāri</i> leases; not transferable. No right to <i>mālikānā</i> on refusal of settlement.	2	1,637
3.	Held under farming rights; not transferable and no right to sublet or renewal.	13	19,213
4.	Held under Large Capitalist Rules, 1879.	7	8,198
5.	Held under Small Capitalist Rules, 1879.	2	1,187
6.	Held under rules of 1853 ...	21	114,745

(1) Commissioner, Presidency Division, to Board No. 467-R. L., dated the 15th December 1904.

Serial No.	Class of lease.	No. of estates.	Area. (acres).
7. (1) Held on proprietary title (heritable, transferable, entitled to <i>mālikāna</i> ).		3	41,909
8. Held on <i>rāiyatwāri</i> leases ...		7	18,533
9. Held in perpetuity ...		10	16,882
10. Held under fee-simple grants (1863).		2	9,117
		92	277,636 or 434 sq. miles.

It is not certain how far this list is accurate; the information on which the area was based is undoubtedly defective and certain minor discrepancies in classification were pointed out in 1905. The figures collected during the settlement operations show a total of 83 estates covering an area of 483 square miles against 90 with an area of 432 square miles in the synopsis of 1904 (1); 95 square miles of the leased area were however unreclaimed. The area estimated as still available for lease in 1904 was 260 square miles.(3) With the 10 estates reported as settled in perpetuity and the two fee-simple grants, Casperzabad (Nali Sāplezā) and Kākchirā, this chapter has little concern. Of the remainder classes 4, 5 and 6 consist entirely of forest grants; classes 1, 2, 3 and 7 are mainly resumed *mahāls*, but include some 6 forest grants made prior to 1853; class 8 includes both forest grants and resumed *mahāls*. It is unnecessary to note that the area included in the colonisation scheme was not included in the synopsis figures of 1904. The total area of the Sundarbans was calculated during the settlement operations at 697 square miles including alluvial accretions; the total area leased out at that time amounted to 520 square miles; a small part of this has been resumed and included in the colonisation area of 156 square miles.

### Settlement.

**Decision to prepare a survey and record-of-rights.**

75. In 1902 Mr. Beatson-Bell, as Settlement Officer of Bākarganj, had proposed the extension of survey

(1) Declared to be only tenures by Legal Remembrancer, Eastern Bengal and Assam to Board No. 1118-dated the 23rd July 1907.

(2) These figures exclude small capitalist tenures; the settlement figures show 383 tenures covering 23,614 acres against an unreported number of tenures covering an area of 1,187 acres in the synopsis. The latter is undoubtedly wrong.

(3) Board to Government Revenue Department No. 1143-A., dated the 8th February 1904.

and settlement operations into the Sundarbans area with the object of ascertaining what land had been cultivated, of gauging the measure of success which had attended the different experiments made, and of discovering whether due precautions had been taken for the protection of the cultivator and the preservation of the public peace. It was not at that time proposed to revise the revenue demand, but it was suggested that on the completion of the record-of-rights, Government should decide on its future settlement policy in the Bākarganj Sundarbans. These proposals were not accepted but it was decided that, as a traverse survey had already been completed, a cadastral survey should be made of Gālāchipā *thānā*, the most easterly part of the Sundarbans for subsequent use by the Commissioner of the Sundarbans <sup>(1)</sup>. Early in 1903 however in the light of certain confidential reports Government asked <sup>(2)</sup> the Board of Revenue to reconsider this decision; the condition of affairs in the Sundarbans was not satisfactory, and Government held that a survey and record-of-rights would increase the information about the area and would be of much assistance in arriving at a solution of the problem. The Board agreed <sup>(3)</sup> with Government in a somewhat hesitating manner and it was decided <sup>(4)</sup> that, unless the cost were prohibitive, settlement proceedings should be extended to the Bākarganj Sundarbans. "The result will be" ran the Government letter "that the settlement of the Bākarganj portion of the Sundarbans will be a model for Sundarban settlements for all time." The decision of Government was further emphasised by the Sundarbans Committee of 1903 which recommended that the resettlement of expired leases should form an integral part of the work of the Settlement Officer. An estimate of the cost of the operations was prepared; the total estimate amounted to 2½ *lāks* of rupees, of which Rs. 25,000 would be recoverable; the operations were provisionally sanctioned <sup>(5)</sup> by the Government of Bengal in anticipation of the formal sanction of the Government of India at the commencement of 1904;

(1) Government of Bengal Revenue Department file <sup>30 s</sup> of 1902 serials 16—19.

(2) Government, Revenue Department to Board No <sup>36</sup> 660, dated the 7th February 1903.

(3) Board to Government Revenue Department 7899 A., dated the 19th September 1903.

(4) Government Revenue Department to Board 2877 T. R., dated the 29th October 1903.

(5) Government of Bengal Revenue Department to Government of India Department of Revenue and Agriculture No. 250, dated the 12th January 1904.

final sanction (1) was not however received until April 1905.

**Synopsis  
of the  
survey and  
settlement  
operations.**

76. It is not necessary to describe in detail the course of the operations, which followed the ordinary system of settlement operations with the exception that forest areas were surveyed on a scale of 4" to the mile and no record-of-rights was prepared for the forest. The difficulties of the operations are thus described by Major Jack. "In the Sundarbans the establishment had to live and sleep in country boats and to draw drinking water and supplies at regular intervals from the north. There was a great deal of sickness, and on return the establishment presented a ghastly appearance. Tigers waited for them when they got out of their boats on to the banks, and crocodiles made caution equally necessary within their boats. Tigers killed two of the establishment, although in one case a surveyor in the squad was plucky enough to hit the tiger over the head with his brass sight-rule. It is little cause for wonder that many of the staff absconded in the Sundarbans." At one time the Settlement Officer himself was lost for two days and nights in his launch in the winding fetid creeks of the area. Galāchipā *thānā* in the east was commenced in 1901 and completed in 1907 with the exception of the Rabnābād islands—the completion of which was delayed till 1912. The Sundarbans portion of the Āmtali *thānā* in the centre and Matbāriā *thānā* in the west were commenced in 1904 and completed in 1908. The only important Sundarbans area omitted from the operations was the extensive Tushkhāli estate, the survey and record-of-rights in which had recently been completed in 1899. The maps of the survey are invaluable and have been supplemented by the issue in 1909 and the following years of a series of topographical maps of the whole area on a scale of 1" to the mile, published by the Survey of India. The most interesting features of the operations, however, were the inspection of forest grants and the resettlement of resumed *mahāls*.

**Character  
of the  
Sundar-  
bans  
leases.**

77. In paragraph 74 the total area of leased Sundarbans estates was shown on the basis of a return of 1904 to be 277,636 acres or 434 square miles; the new survey showed these figures to have been greatly underestimated, partly due to unauthorised extension of cultivation, but mainly to the fact that areas had

(1) Government of India Revenue and Agriculture to Government of Bengal Revenue Department No. 569-154-8, dated the 14th April 1905.

been entered in defect in original grants and resumption proceedings, in the former cases generally by fraud and corruption, in the latter largely on account of defective surveys. The district survey disclosed the following figures :—

Class.	Nature of settlement.	Number of estates.	Revenue.	Area (acres).
			Rs.	
Resumed <i>mahāls</i>	Permanently settled at fixed revenue.	9	26,940	17,006
	Permanently settled at variable revenue.	29	96,663	101,782
	Temporarily settled ...	5	17,166	13,098
	Settled with cultivators	3	1,13,458	25,935
Forest grants.	Fee-simple grants ...	2	Nil	11,163
	Grants under rules of 1853.	21	40,972	114,514
	Grants under Large Capitalist Rules of 1879.	8	8,215	11,528
	Grants under Small Capitalist Rules of 1879.	383	67,106	23,614
	Permanently settled ...	1	817	677
	Farmed ...	1	563	135
	<i>Hāolādāri</i> settlements	4	27,817	8,698
	Settled with cultivators	...	7,780	4,533
			4,07,467	332,683 or 520 sq. miles.

The increase in area is in very small part due to the inception of the colonisation scheme, to a small extent due to the exclusion of certain estates from the former regime of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans, but in the main to the accuracy of the survey. Of the 46 resumed *mahāls*, settlement of land revenue would never be necessary in the 9 estates, the revenue of which had been fixed in perpetuity; of the remaining 37 estates, land revenue was resettled and the leases revised or renewed in 36 estates, the only exception being the extensive Tushkhāli estate covering 36 square miles, which had recently been resettled by Rai Peari Mohan Basu Bahadur. This stage of the operations covered an area of 208 square miles, or 85 per cent. of the area of the resumed *mahāls* liable to revision of land revenue. In the forest grants, however, resettlement of land revenue was confined to 4 estates covering an area of 18 square miles, or less

than 7 per cent. of the total area of 272 square miles liable to re-assessment. This great difference is due to the fact that among forest estates, grants under the rules of 1853, being held on 99 years leases, would not normally expire until the year 1952, while leases under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 must escape the operations of the Revenue Officer until 1920. The grants under revision were all of a special character. Accordingly in the forest grants the main feature of the operations was the inspection of the clearance conditions of the leases; in the resumed *mahāls* the matters of interest are the settlement of fair rents, the revision of land revenue and the renewal of the leases.

### Forest Grants.

**Inspection  
of  
clearance  
conditions.**

78. For all practical purposes the inspection of the clearance conditions of forest grants was confined to estates held under the Forest Grant Rules of 1853, as all previous grantees had by that time commuted the conditions of their grants. Only 8 grants covering an area of 18 square miles (the return of 1904 had shown an area of 15 square miles) had been made under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879, 7 situated in Chak Naltonā and one in Ābād Karāibārīā; the conditions of the grant required that one-eighth of the area should be cleared by the end of the fifth year of the grant; no further clearance conditions had been laid down, and this very lenient obligation had been fulfilled, the average clearance found by the settlement staff being 55 per cent. of the area leased. Under the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879 no clearance conditions had been laid down, as no lease could be granted except for the area actually cleared, the clearance entitling the grantee to an additional grant; these grants had on the whole been successful; their abuse is described below in the account of the resettlement of land revenue of Kālāmeghā. The clearance conditions under the rules of 1853 were, however, severe, and affected 21 extensive grants in the district. It will be remembered that under the terms of the rules of 1853, one-eighth of the grant was required to be cleared and fit for cultivation at the end of the fifth year, one-fourth by the end of the 10th year, one-half by the end of the 20th year and three-quarters by the end of the 30th year; in default the entire grant was liable to forfeiture. As the last grant under the rules of 1853



had been made in 1857, the period of 30 years had long elapsed.

79. The survey operations had shown the following figures with respect to clearance in the 21 grants of 1853 :—

State of  
clearance  
in the  
grants of  
1853.

No. of estate.	Name of grant.	Total area.	Area cleared and cultivated.	Area required to be cleared and cultivated.	Deficit.
		(Acres).	(Acres).		
4542	Ailā Tearkhālī ...	9,650	7,512	7,240	...
4908	Debnāthpur ...	11,860	9,615	8,895	...
4553	Tafalbārīā ...	576	448	432	...
4554	Kāwābunīā ...	1,693	1,298	1,270	...
4565	Hāzikhālī ...	413	318	310	...
4579	Tārābunīā ...	723	587	542	...
4869	Amṭalī ...	2,967	2,306	2,225	...
4870	Ārpangāsīā ...	6,820	5,363	5,115	...
4821	Kalāi Char Kāthālīā ...	1,834	1,340	1,376	36
4551	Kukuā ...	3,035	2,110	2,276	166
4903	Pachā Korālīā ...	4,425	2,658	3,319	661
4899	Chāndkhālī ...	2,742	1,438	2,057	619
5105	Khaprabhāngā ...	2,303	296	1,727	1,431
4582	Char Chaplī ...	4,164	723	3,123	2,400
5087	Chakāmāyā ...	8,906	2,757	6,680	3,923
4900	Juānpārā ...	37,933	22,303	28,450	6,147
6292	Kachupatra ...	5,526	956	4,145	3,189
6307	Chhotā Bogī ...	12,285	2,954	9,214	6,260
4599, 4898 and 4897	Tiākhālī (3 estates) ...	9,707	5,456	7,280	1,824

In the first 8 of these estates it will be seen that the clearance conditions had been fulfilled and no further enquiry was necessary; as the settlement figures of cultivated lands excluded new and old fallow, thatching grass, etc., the small defects in Kalāi Char Kāthālīā and Kukuā were considered too trifling to justify the enforcement of the clearance conditions in minute detail. After some discussion the same principle was applied to Pachā Korālīā. In 1908 Major Jack, the Settlement Officer commenced the enquiries into the remaining 10 estates. The enquiry proved to be extremely troublesome, and it is not necessary to enter into details regarding the majority of the estates. Two main difficulties had first to be decided, based on the terms of the leases of 1853; doubts were raised firstly whether Government was bound to complete its inspection of the

fulfilment of the clearance conditions at the end of 30 years or whether the final inspection could be made subsequently. It was ultimately decided that the rules were no bar to a delay in the final inspection of the area cleared, provided that no previous final inspection had been made. The second difficulty lay in deciding whether the rules of 1853 contemplated the power of Government to resume if the area cleared reverted in part to jungle after a certificate of final clearance had been given; the difficulty was of importance as the storm-wave of 1876 had resulted in large areas relapsing to jungle, though not to the extent claimed. It was after careful consideration decided, that provided a *bona-fide* final certificate of clearance had once been given, there was no provision in the rules which conferred on Government the power to resume, if the area under cultivation subsequently fell below the required standard. These two decisions simplified the course of the enquiries.

Grants  
in which  
resump-  
tion was  
barred.

80. The case of Jnānpārā (T. No. 4900) was finally settled by the application of the first of the above decisions. The grant had been made originally under the rules of 1830, and had been commuted under the rules of 1853 by a *rubokāri* dated 11th August 1856, the date from which the progress of clearance was to be calculated. On a demarcation of the boundary of the grant with that of Char Kālāmeghā in 1881-82 by Mr. Pargiter it was found that the area had increased from 112,592 *bighās* to 112,722 *bighās*, and accordingly a revised lease containing the same clearance terms was executed on the 10th March 1883. In 1887 a proceeding was drawn up by Mr. Ellison, alleging that he had inspected the grant in January of that year and that practically the whole of the area had been cleared; he accordingly gave a certificate that the clearance conditions had been fulfilled. The enquiries made by the settlement staff showed that the required area had never been under cultivation, but in view of the existence of Mr. Ellison's certificate and the great difficulty of proving its falsity in Court, no further action was taken. In March 1909 the Collector referred (1) for orders regarding the remaining 9 grants. In 7 of these grants it was decided that no action could be taken, but the facts warrant a brief recital. In Char Chapli (T. No. 4582)

(1) Collector of Bākarganj to Commissioner, Dacca Division No. 5419 L. R., dated the 19th March 1909.

a lease for 99 years had been granted in 1856; the form of lease omitted, doubtless collusively, all reference to the clearance conditions and no handle for resumption existed despite the fact that only 17 per cent. of the area had been cleared! It is interesting to note, however, that this is the only lease, nominally granted under the rules of 1853, which does not confer a proprietary status; the right conferred is that of a temporary farmer, whose rights terminate wholly and finally on the expiry of the current lease in 1955. The three grants in North Tiākhāli presented an interesting history; originally settled as a single grant in 1852, the cleared portion had been resettled, obviously with no clearance conditions, as Tauzi No. 4599 in 1857; the uncleared portion had been divided into 2 grants, Nos. 4897 and 4898, the conditions requiring clearance of  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the area in the 15th year: Mr. Ellison supplied the necessary certificates for the two estates on the 22nd and 15th December 1873 respectively. The Tiākhāli grants were accordingly saved from resumption. Khaprabhāngā (T. No. 5105) was still more fortunate; originally granted in 1847 and commuted in 1856 under the rules of 1853, it was resumed on the 27th February 1879 after an inspection by Mr. Ellison, which somewhat surprisingly showed that only 6,219 out of 23,180 *bighās* had been cleared; a fresh lease was executed on the 7th November 1880 covering 7,356 *bighās* but including no clearance conditions; the remainder has been absorbed in the colonisation area. Chakamāyā (T. No. 5087) escaped the sword of resumption by a false entry of area and a false clearance certificate. Granted in 1846 and commuted on the 31st January 1856, Mr. Ellison certified on the 20th April 1876 that 9,675 out of a reputed area of 12,880 *bighās* has been cleared; it was however reported that the real area of the grant was 25,060 *bighās*. The Commissioner in the Sundarbāns, however, held by a decision of the 13th May 1876 that he was bound by the area entered in the lease, and accepted the certificate. Chāndkhāli (T. No. 4890) owed its salvation to a doubtful certificate of Mr. Ellison dated the 7th March 1888. There only remained the Chhotā Bogi and Kachupatra grants.

81. The grant of Chhotā Bogi was originally made in 1856 for an area of 27,392 *bighās*. An inspection made in 1868 showed that the original clearances had relapsed to jungle, but in 1869 Government

**Resump-  
tion pro-  
ceedings  
in Chhotā  
Bogi.**

waived (1) its right to resume, and in 1871 the grantee executed an agreement to clear  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the area within 5 years. By April 1879, however, only 3,300 *bighās* were under cultivation. Further concessions (2) were made to the grantee by the Board of Revenue, and a further agreement was executed for the clearance of  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the total area by the 30th April 1889 and 1894 respectively. On the 20th July 1891 the grant was inspected by the Sarishtadār and Peshkār of the Sundarbans Commissioner's office, who submitted a flagrantly false report that 13,790 *bighās* had been cleared. A final enquiry was commenced on the 10th December 1894 but was not completed until the preparation of the record-of-rights in 1906. The Collector of Bākarganj recommended the resumption of the whole grant. On the 4th December 1909 the Board of Revenue ordered a local enquiry, mainly to test the accuracy of the settlement map and record; the enquiry was made personally by Major Jack and Mr. Ascoli, Assistant Settlement Officer in May 1910, and the accuracy of the map and record was clearly proved. "The estate" wrote Major Jack "can properly be forfeited . . . but to confiscate all, would invite a comparison with the historical land-revenue exploit of Jezebel." He accordingly proposed a compromise, that the area lying east of the Gendāmārā *khāl* should be resumed, its clearance being essential for the success of the colonisation scheme, and that the grantee should be allowed a further period of 5 years to bring 5,000 acres out of the balance of 6,285 acres under cultivation. The Board in its order of the 25th March 1911 accepted the proposals for resumption, but extended the period for bringing  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the remainder of the grant under cultivation to 12 years from the 1st of April 1911. It should be noted that in 1923 a further inspection of the grant will be necessary, and that if the revised clearance conditions have not been fulfilled the whole of the grant will be liable to resumption.

Proceed-  
ings in  
Kachu-  
patra.

82. The case of Kachupatra (T. No. 6292) can be dealt with more briefly. Granted in 1857 with an area of 10,820 *bighās* it was subsequently found to contain an area of 14,671 *bighās* for which a revised lease was executed in 1883. In 1878 the clearance deficit had amounted to 2,659 *bighās* on the original

(1) Commissioner of Dacca to Sundarbans Commissioner No. 537, dated the 29th March 1869.

(2) Board's order No. 755A., dated the 5th August 1879.

area. In 1885 only 2,813 *bighās* had been cleared out of the required 7,336 and on the 1st September 1887 the grantee undertook to clear  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$ th by the 1st May 1890 and 1895 respectively. An inspection commenced on the 3rd February 1891, but, probably on account of a sale for arrears of revenue on the 26th June of that year, was never completed. The history of Kachupatra thenceforth tallies with that of Chhotā Bogi; it was however reported that one of the grantees had spent a considerable sum of money in attempted reclamation and that his failure was mainly due to the large number of co-sharers with whom he was associated. The Board of Revenue finally determined<sup>(1)</sup> to waive its power of resumption and allowed a further period of 12 years for completion of the reclamation of  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the area. In 1915 the grantees applied for a fresh survey and record-of-rights as they had claimed to have cleared the necessary area. In 1918 the grant was inspected, the clearance conditions were found to have been carried out in full and on the 7th November the Collector of Bākarganj granted the necessary clearance certificate.

83. It is important to remember that Bākarganj is the first district in which the grants of 1853 have been thoroughly examined, accurately surveyed and subjected to a strict scrutiny. The settlement operations have proved that the methods of inspection in the past have been lax and have offered opportunities for venality of which advantage was readily taken. The example of Char Chapli shows that even at the original settlement the methods employed were not above suspicion. It is extremely doubtful whether Khulnā or the 24-Parganās will be more successful in passing the test of a trustworthy examination of the grants. The grants of 1853 cover 34 per cent. of the area leased in the Bākarganj Sundarbāns; the percentage of unreclaimed forest is 24 per cent. against 18 per cent. in the whole of the area. The revenue derived is Rs. 40,972 averaging  $5\frac{3}{4}$  annas per acre against Re. 1-3-7 per acre in the whole of the area. The rental paid by the cultivators is Rs. 5,68,661 or 14 times the revenue. Such however is the complexity of subinfeudation, for the grants were ordinarily cleared by the creation of chains of tenure-holders on account of the unwieldy size of the grants, that the grantees receive but Rs. 1,51,605 or 28 per cent.

Resume  
of the  
grants of  
1853.

(1) Board's No. 1050-W. L.T., dated the 25th July 1911.

of the assets. The rules of 1853, despite the laxity with which their terms were enforced, failed in three aspects; they failed to stimulate cultivation; they failed to produce an adequate revenue for Government—for Government has sacrificed an annual revenue exceeding 5 *lākh*s of rupees even on the present basis; and finally they failed, owing to the inevitable system of subinfeudation fostered by the rules, to protect the actual cultivator.

**Assessment  
of forest  
grants and  
the grants  
under  
the Small  
Capitalist  
Rules,  
1879.**

84. In four forest grants only, each of them of an exceptional nature was resettlement of land revenue effected. Dhaluā (T. No. 5007) and Bargunā (T. No. 5008) had been decreed to Government as excluded from the Ailā Fuljhuri estate of the Nawāb of Dacca in 1870; Kālāmeghā (T. No. 4573) had been granted under the rules of 1853 but was resumed in 1869. These three estates had been set aside for grants under the Small Capitalists Rules of 1879, and only the area cleared before the application of these rules came under assessment. In South Tiākhāli (T. No. 4600) originally a 99 years grant, but resumed after the storm-wave in 1879, only a small area held by a *hāolādār* was reassessed, the remainder being placed under the control of the Colonisation Officer. The results of these assessments can best be shown in tabular form :—

Name of estate.	Area under assessment (acres).	Previous revenue.	New revenue.	Rate of rent per acre.
		Rs.	Rs.	Rs. A.
Kālāmeghā T. No. 4573.	290	Nil	720	3 14
South Teākhāli T. No. 4600	1,491	1,305	3 246	3 3
Dhaluā T. No. 5007.	4,727	16,522	21,344	{ 4 8 9 0(a)
Bargunā T. No 5008.	5,126	16,160	21,153	{ 5 0 9 0(a)

The most interesting aspects of Kālāmeghā, Dhaluā and Bargunā, however, are the *hāolās* granted under the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879; in these estates only were these rules applied. In Kālāmeghā 148 *hāolās* had been granted; of these 39 created by

Mr. Sunder in 1903 were cancelled in 1907 as they had been created in gross violation of the rules; violation, however, was not confined to the later grants; in 1887, for example, a fortunate Sub-Registrar was granted a lease for 1,150 *bighās* against 200 allowed by the rules. Despite the bar to subinfeudation in the rules, 385 under-tenures were recorded with 208 tenures subordinate to them. Out of 111 *hāolādārs*, no fewer than 104 were absentee speculators, a striking commentary on the supposition that these rules initiated a system of *rāiyatwāri* settlement. In other aspects the leases had resulted in development; the area from the time of the original grants has increased from 4,033 to 5,471 acres, but 35 per cent. of the area had still to be cleared. The opportunity was taken to make the quinquennial measurement required by the rules, resulting in an increase of revenue from Rs. 7,759 to Rs. 9,435 in 1910 and Rs. 9,621 in 1917. In Dhaluā 63 grants existed covering 4,004 acres; 358 *osat*-and *nīm-hāolās* with 41 other subordinate tenures had been illegally created. Only 4 per cent. of the area remained unreclaimed. In Bargunā 198 *hāolās* had been created covering 13,937 acres, of which 88 per cent. had been reclaimed, but the tenure-tree had produced 869 bastard blossoms, of which 578 were *osat*-and *nīm-hāolās* and the remainder subordinate tenures. A quinquennial assessment was made raising the revenue of the Dhaluā grant by Rs. 900 to Rs. 15,326 and that of the Bargunā grants by Rs. 3,295 to Rs. 48,708. It cannot be said that these *hāolā* grants were altogether unsuccessful, provided that they are correctly regarded as capitalist ventures; but they proved beyond a doubt that, without the initiation of a genuine *rāiyatwāri* system the cutting off of the hydra's heads is mere child's play compared with the stunting of the blossoms of the Bākarganj tenure-tree.

#### Resumed Mahals.

85. The re-assessment and re-settlement of land revenue of the "resumed *mahāls*" have been so fully described by Major Jack in the Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations on Bākarganj that it is unnecessary to describe the process in detail. It will be remembered that the Bākarganj Sundarbans area contained 16 such estates, of which 9 settled in perpetuity do not come under re-assessment. It

Nature of  
settle-  
ments in  
resumed  
*mahāls*.

might, however, be observed that the permanent settlement in 1854 of one of these estates, Gerākhāli (T. No. 4539) was illegal having been sanctioned by the Commissioner of the Nadia Division, whereas the sanction of the Governor-General in Council was necessary for such settlements. Of the remaining 37 estates, 31 are held by permanent tenure-holders, one Chāorā (T. No. 4801) was let in farm though subsequently managed *khās*, while 5 have been settled *rāiyatwārī*. Of these last the two petty Hāzikhāli estates (T. Nos. 4561 and 4568) are unimportant, they were previously held under *i'ārā* leases; Nishānbāriā (T. No. 4545) is interesting as having previously been held by a *tālukdār* whose rights were cancelled in 1910 on account of his oppressive methods; in Chak Chilā (T. No. 4540), the *ijārādār* had created tenures contrary to the terms of his lease, and on his refusal to agree to new conditions the *ijārā* was cancelled in 1910. Tushkhāli (T. No. 4642) had long been under the direct management of Government owing to the inability of the *mālguzārs* to control the turbulent tenantry of the estate. Subsequently to the settlement proceedings it will be shown that Chāorā, Kukuā and the Marichbuniā group of estates came under direct management. The difficulties of assessment in the area were, however, due to the remarkable fecundity of the tenure-trees; to obviate the difficulties two methods of assessment were prescribed which have been fully explained by Major Jack. The first system, that of 1907, was based on the *rāiyati* valuation of the estate, *i.e.*, a standard *rāiyati* rate added to a valuation of land held by tenure-holders at special grade rates; allowances varied for different grades. The Government revenue was fixed so as to allow the superior tenure-holders a profit of 25 per cent. on his collections subject to the proviso that the Government revenue should not be less than 50 per cent. of the total valuation; this valuation by grades was extremely complicated and difficult in practice. In 1909 a revised system of assessment was adopted; its main features were the assessment of *hāolā*-tenures on the basis of area instead of on profits—the rate being 35 per cent. lower than the standard *rāiyati* rate. The superior tenure-holder or *tālukdār* paid revenue assessed at 75 per cent. of the *hāolādāri* rental—the profit being shared by intermediate tenure-holders. The work of re-assessment and its results



may be described in brief. For this purpose the estates of the area may be divided into five groups :—

- (a) Northern group comprising 16 estates,
- (b) Rābnābād island group comprising three estates,
- (c) Eastern group comprising ten estates,
- (d) Central group comprising six estates,
- (e) Western group comprising two estates.

86. The northern group, commonly known as the Marichbuniā group was originally resumed from the *zamīndārs* of *parganā* Aurāngābād, with the exception of Bhayāng Kakrabuniā, a tenure of Buzrogmedpur *parganā*. With the exception of two small estates in Hāzikhāli, which had been settled with farmers, with an area of 180 acres, the remaining 10,701 acres were comprised in 14 estates, held by tenure-holders possessing a permanent right to renewal of their leases. In this tract the bee of subinfeudation had shown extraordinary activity, and the estates were honeycombed with tenures, 125 having been created under the *tālukdārs* with 589 subordinate creations; the incidence of tenures being one in every 15 acres. In these tenures the superior *tālukdārs* possessed an interest in whole or in part in no less than 411; this fact is important, if it is noted that whatever conditions might be entered in the leases of the superior *tālukdārs* for the protection of the cultivators, would not be binding on these same persons in their guise as subordinate *tālukdārs*. The estates were in an extraordinary state of confusion; oppression, illegal exactions and evictions, false criminal cases, confiscation of property and forced labour were rife. In July and August 1909 a special enquiry was instituted, as a result of which two courses of action were proposed; firstly that the estates should be held *khās* by Government for 12 years under section 3 of Regulation VII of 1822 as the continuance of management by the *tālukdārs* “would endanger the public tranquillity and otherwise be seriously detrimental”; secondly that the chains of tenures held by the same person should be merged under section 111(d) of the Transfer of Property Act. The Advocate-General’s opinion was, however, unfavourable, and it was determined to safeguard the cultivators by means of specific provisions in the *tālukdārs*’ leases, which would terminate the rights of the *tālukdārs* on the proof of

The  
northern  
group.

commission of any illegalities, and by requiring the subordinate tenure-holders to execute similar agreements, in default of which their net profits would be reduced by 50 per cent. With 13 exceptions all the *tālukdārs* and tenure-holders signed the agreements and broke the conditions before the ink of their signatures was dry. The result of the re-assessment raised the Government revenue from Rs. 22,106 to Rs. 34,908—the increase being entirely due to the acceptance of contractual rents which varied from Rs. 6 to Rs. 7-12 per acre. In August and September 1912 a further enquiry was held. “To summarise the result of the enquiry” ran the report “it has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the state of affairs now is identically the same as what it was before the current settlement was made, with the exception that the landlords obtained a firmer hold over the tenants by the extended application of control by locally appointed *mridhās*. The oppression and extortion continue with unabated force”. The futility of the agreements was now apparent—for the difficulties of proving the breaches in the terms with a cowed tenantry as the only witnesses were insuperable. Measures were, however, taken to strengthen the administration of the area; this had the desired effect, the cultivators combined for their own protection and refused to submit to the exactions and extortion. In 1918 the *tālukdārs* at last found their position unendurable and applied to the Collector of Bākarganj to take their estates under Government control for the whole period of the leases, agreeing at the same time to surrender all rights held by them in subordinate tenures. In 1919 the Board of Revenue issued orders assuming the management of the estates, and the group is now under the *khās* management of Government.

**Rabnabad,  
Island and  
Eastern  
Groups.**

87. The Rabnābād Island and Eastern groups call for little separate mention. The former group of three estates covering an area of 47,434 acres was reassessed under the rules of 1909, the revenue Rs. 36,792 being enhanced to Rs. 57,611; the estates are under *tālukdāri* settlement, and 1019 under-tenures were recorded, averaging 1 to every 46 acres. Several new islands have formed to the south and east of this group, the most important are Char Biswās and Char Kukri Mukri, the colonisation of which is about to be commenced. The eastern group comprising 10 estates, containing 27,235 acres, was settled under the rules of 1907; with the exception of Nishānbāriā

(T. No. 4545) and a part of Kātādiā (T. No. 4549) the estates are settled with permanent tenure-holders with a right to renewal; the revenue showed a big increase from Rs. 15,820 to Rs. 35,514. In these groups the rates of rent are considerably lower than the Mārichbuniā group varying from Rs. 2-10 to Rs. 4-12 per acre.

88. The main feature of the central group, consisting of 6 estates covering an area of 27,719 acres is the almost entire absence of forest which amounts to little more than 1 square mile; the rates of rent vary considerably from Rs. 2-15 per acre in Teparā to Rs. 6-5 in Kukuā; the revision of land revenue resulted in an increase from Rs. 38,754 to Rs. 91,648. The estates of this group are interesting. Chāorā (T. No. 4801), an estate 13 square miles in area, was the only resumed Sundarbans estate leased in *ijārā*; on the application of the *ijārādār*, however, Government assumed direct management on an annual payment of Rs. 8,000, approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of his nett profits, to the *ijārādār*; Kukuā (T. No. 4550) was obsessed with the evil of 18 superior and 268 subordinate tenures, the incidence being 1 tenure to 23 acres; the majority of the tenure-holders are non-resident speculators. As in the case of the Marichbuniā group, the tenure-holders have surrendered their rights to Government for the period of 30 years of the current lease on receipt of  $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of their nett profits, and the estate is now managed directly by Government. Taktabuniā (T. No. 4538) rejoices in one tenure to every 25 acres. In Chak Chilā (T. No. 4540) the permanent *mālguzār* refused to accept the terms of settlement and his rights have been permanently cancelled.

**Central  
Group.**

89. The western group contains only two estates, of which one, Teturām Peshkār is unimportant, being only 189 acres in extent; it is held under a *tālukdāri* settlement. The resettlement of the other estate, Tushkhāli was made subsequently to the district settlement operations and took effect for 15 years from 1916. This extensive estate covers an area of 22,801 acres; it includes the usual crop of Bākarganj tenures to the number of 453; its total revenue is Rs. 1,21,741.

**Western  
Group.**

#### **Resume.**

90. The above account covers the whole of the Bakarganj Sundarbans area under lease excepting the colonisation area, and the fullness of the account is due solely to the completeness of the investigations

**Apprecia-  
tion of the  
settlement  
opera-  
tions.**

made in the course of the survey and settlement operations. No such account can be possible for the Khulnā and the 24-Parganā areas until they have been perfected by the devotion and energy of Major Jack in Bākarganj; a tribute is also due to Rāi Sāhib Hara Kisore Biswās on whom the major portion of the labours fell. Possibly the above account does not convey a clear idea of the intricacies of the work; the lease of each grant or estate required detailed examination in order to ascertain its terms and the degree to which they were binding on Government; the conditions of every tenure amongst that mighty array were put to the test; the history of each estate was examined only to prove how in the past in many instances Government might have rid itself of these difficulties had it only known its rights and realised the conditions. As Government had prophesied in 1903 these settlement operations will indeed be a model to all similar operations in the Sundarbans. It only remains to give a synopsis of the leases in the area as they now exist. Excluding the alluvial area, 20 forest grants under the rules of 1853, and 9 resumed *mahāls* are held under proprietary title; 16 resumed *mahāls* and portions of 6 forest grants are held under permanent tenure rights; one forest grant under the rules of 1853 is let in farm; 5 resumed *mahāls* are settled *rāiyatwāri*. In 15 other estates held under permanent tenures, and one other estate let in farm, Government is at present managing on a *rāiyatwāri* basis. Two estates, of which one, Nali Sāplezā or Caspersābād, has been a model for rapid and efficient colonisation, are held in fee-simple. The remaining area is included in the colonisation scheme of settlement.

## CHAPTER X.

### The Bakarganj Sundarbans.

#### THE COLONISATION SCHEME.

91. In 1902 Mr. Beatson-Bell, as Settlement Officer of Bākarganj, had proposed that the Sundarbans area of that district should be transferred from the jurisdiction of the Commissioner in the Sundarbans to that of the Collector, and his proposals were warmly supported by Mr. Savage, Commissioner of the Dacca Division. The Board of Revenue were not however prepared to accept the proposals (1). The subsequent history of the proposals has been described in detail with reference to the introduction of the *rāiyatwāri* system (Chapter IV) and it is only necessary to note here that the Sundarbans Committee of 1903 recommended that Government should invest capital in a scheme for reclamation by *rāiyatwāri* settlement in Bākarganj, and that the settlement should be carried out by the Collector. The Board of Revenue accepted (2) the recommendations of the Committee, suggested that the work should be entrusted to the Deputy Collector in charge of Government estates and asked for an annual grant of Rs. 50,000 per year for a period of 50 years to complete the work of reclamation; the area remaining for reclamation was estimated to be 266 square miles. These proposals were accepted by the Government of Bengal and sanctioned (3) by the the Government of India. In 1906 definite proposals were formulated which resulted in the *rāiyatwāri* rules of 1907. In sanctioning (4) these rules the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam remarked that the work of colonisation should be under the control of the Collector of the district, but that for dealing with a task of this magnitude he should be given a special assistant, as Colonisation Officer; the appointment was sanctioned by the Government of India and in May 1907 Maulvi (now Khan Bahadur)

Creation  
of the  
post of  
Colonisa-  
tion  
Officer.

(1) Board to Government, Revenue Department No. 966—A. D. dated 26th November 1902.

(2) Board to Government, Revenue Department No. 1143-A., dated 8th February 1904.

(3) Government of India Department of Revenue and Agriculture to Government of Bengal Revenue Department No. 1040-151-1, dated the 26th July 1904.

(4) Chief Secretary, Eastern Bengal and Assam Government to Board No. 5296-C., dated the 26th May 1906.

Ataur Rahaman was appointed<sup>(1)</sup> as the first Colonisation Officer. Meanwhile however the work of colonisation had already commenced and it is necessary to review the area and the progress that had been made up to date.

Area  
available  
for  
colonisa-  
tion.

92. The original colonisation area consisted of 20 estates in whole or in part, forming with a few exceptions a solid block 233½ square miles in area at the south of the Sundarbans. These exceptions consisted of Char Chapli, held on a 99 years farming lease, Chak Bogi and a portion of Khaprabhāṅgā leased under the Waste Land Rules of 1853, Chak Naltonā leased under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879, and portions chiefly of Chak Kālāmeghā, Bargunā and Karāibāriā, which had been leased from time to time, mainly under the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879. The original area had been extended by the resumption of a part of Chhotā Bogi in 1911 (*vide* paragraph 81) and of the whole of Nishānbāriā (T. No. 4545) during the survey and settlement operations (*vide* paragraph 85). This tract differs in many respects from the uncultivated forest of the 24-Parganās mainly by the fact that the whole of it had at one time been leased and had been largely under cultivation; the original estates had been resumed partly after the disastrous storm-wave of 1876. The following table gives a brief history of the area:—

NAME OF ESTATES.	Tauzi number.	Date of original lease.	Date of resumption.	Total area (square miles.)	Area available for colonisation (square miles.)
1	2	3	4	5	6
Chak Kālāmeghā ...	4,573	1,853	1,869	35	30*
Bargunā ...	5,008	1,805	1,856	32	½*
Chhotā Bogi ...	6,623	1,879	1,911	4½	4½
Karāibāriā ...	4,526	1,855	1,866	8	3*
Bara Bogi ...	4,959	1,856	1,866	16½	12†
Chhotā Nishānbāriā ...	6,221	1,862	1,868	8	8
Bara Nishānbāriā ...	6,300	1,862	1,874	12	12
Tengagiri Chak ...	6,301	...	...	9½	9½†
Lātāchapli ...	4,958	1,856	1,886	25½	23½
Khaprabhāṅgā ...	6,450	...	...	11½	11½†

(1) Eastern Bengal and Assam Government Notification No. 5736-C., dated 9th May 1907.

\* Small Capitalist Rules area.

† Partly colonised before.

‡ Protected forest.

NAME OF ESTATE.	Tanzi number.	Date of original lease.	Date of resumption.	Total area (square miles.)	Area available for colonisation (square miles.)
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dhulasār ...	4,583	...	1818	7	5 <sup>o</sup>
Char Bāliātālī ...	5,092	1866	1906	1½	1½
Bara Bāliātālī ...	4,580	...	1819	5¾	4½ <sup>o</sup>
Chhotā Bāliātālī ...	4,581	...	1819	6½	6 <sup>o</sup>
Mithāganj ...	4,865	1847	1871	10	10
Dalbuganj ...	4,973	1856	1879	5	5
Sonātālā ...	6,052	...	...	12½	12½†
Nilganj ...	4,771	1856	1879	10	10
South Tiākhālī ...	4,600	...	1831	10	7 <sup>o</sup>
Nishānbariā ...	4,545	...	1908	5	1½ <sup>o</sup>

\* Partly leased before.

† Protected Forest.

The total area of the estates included in the colonisation area is 233½ square miles, of which 176½<sup>(1)</sup> was available for colonisation. It is important to note that in many of these estates *rāiyatwāri* or small *hāolādāri* settlements had been made as long as 25 years before the inception of the colonisation scheme. It is further important to remember that the estates shown as protected forest form only a portion of the area originally protected, and that the protection afforded will only continue until the areas are required for colonisation. In the meantime the forest is under the control of the Colonisation Officer.

93. The first effort at colonisation was made in the year 1904, after the decision arrived at by the Committee of 1903. 11,000 *bighās* of land were demarcated in South Tiākhālī and Nilganj and allotted to 151 prospective settlers under the promise that loans would be granted to them. The Board of Revenue however sanctioned advances<sup>(2)</sup> of grain only, which the settlers declined to accept, and the original colony was abandoned. On the issue of the Bengal *rāiyatwāri* rules of 1905 a detailed enquiry regarding the applicability of these rules to Bākarganj was made. This enquiry resulted in the Bākarganj rules of 1907; it is merely necessary to point out that great emphasis was laid on the necessity of granting loans in cash and undertaking an extensive programme of improvement

Initial  
settle-  
ments,  
1904-1907

(1) A more accurate calculation shows 173½ square miles.

(2) Board's No. 449-A. of the 9th January 1905.

works. In June 1906 the Board sanctioned the commencement of the colonisation work in anticipation of the issue of final rules. A certain amount of spade work had however already been done since the transfer of the area from the jurisdiction of the Sundarbans Commissioner in March 1904. An Inspector had been appointed† for the area and in the year 1904-05, Rs. 4,910 was expended; in 1905-06 came the abortive resettlement of South Tiākhāli and Nilganj above referred to. On receipt of the Board's orders the work of colonisation was taken up in earnest and by August 1906, 340 colonists had been selected for the colonisation of portions of South Tiākhāli, Nilganj and Abuganj-Mithāganj. Little progress could, however, be made owing to the absence of a special officer; a suggestion that the work should be undertaken by the Settlement Officer was negatived on the advice of that officer himself. By the time that the Colonisation Officer had joined his appointment in April 1907 only 92 new tenants had been settled in Nilganj; of these all but 13 deserted and abandoned their holdings.

**Features  
of the  
Bākarganj  
Sundar-  
bans.**

94. To understand the work of colonisation, it is essential that the condition of the Bākarganj Sundarbans should be fully realised. The land is on the whole high, and the tides, compared with the 24-Paraganās tract, low; throughout the greater part of the colonisation area, however, the water is saline or brackish. Marginal embankments are accordingly required, but not of great height; smaller embankments and dams are required along and across the interior *khāls* to prevent the salt water flooding the area under cultivation. Owing to the absence of fresh water, tanks for drinking purposes are required in all areas reclaimed. Sporadic cultivation already existed in some of the estates in 1907, largely in the possession of Maghs; the safe-guarding of the rights of these tenants was accordingly essential; this was particularly important in the case of Maghs who are unable to compete in business transactions with the Bengali. Owing to the fact that the whole area was covered with jungle, the necessity of issuing loans to the new colonists during the period of clearance is obvious. The three essentials for successful colonisation may accordingly be described as (a) the selection of suitable colonists, (b) the issue of loans, (c) the construction of works of sanitary and agricultural

\* Board's No. 49-W.L.-D., dated the 11th June 1906.

† Government Order No. 1605, dated the 14th April 1904.



improvement. A fourth and very important aspect of colonisation work in the area is the necessity of extending clearances in continuous blocks—a necessity not fully realised for some years; this is due to the fact that the jungle is very malarious and the existence of jungle near a cleared area results in outbreaks of virulent fever amongst the colonists. The actual work of colonisation consists in three stages (*a*) colonisation, (*b*) reclamation and (*c*) assessment. The first stage covers the selection of colonists and allocation of holdings, the second, settlement on and clearing of the holding, and the third, fixing of rents for the area cleared. In Bākarganj, however, areas that had already been settled were included in the colonisation scheme; improvements both sanitary and agricultural, were effected, and settlements made under the colonisation rules; in these areas only the final stage of assessment was required. In Chapter VII it has been shown that of the area three whole *mauzās* and three *mauzās* in part were declared protected forest; this does not, however, affect the progress of reclamation, but merely controls the cutting of the timber until reclaimed. Reclamation has not however commenced in Sonātālā, the colonisation of which will be postponed until the remainder of the area has been developed. For convenience the history of the colonisation is narrated year by year; important decisions are referred to in the year in which the problem arose. A brief synopsis is then given of the development of each estate, followed by an account of the general development of the area as a whole.

95. Maulvi Ataur Rahaman, the Colonisation Officer, commenced his work with great vigour, and in the year 1907-08 no fewer than 22,120 *bighās* were settled with 488 colonists mainly in Kālāmeghā and Nilganj, but also in South Tiākhālī, Chhotā and Bara Bāliātālī, Dhulasār and Mithāganj. During the year Rs. 22,181 was expended on improvements. Khepu-pārā, situated in South Tiākhālī, was selected as the headquarters of the Sundarbans, and Rs. 6,109 was expended in laying out the site; pending the completion of accommodation the Colonisation Officer was empowered to make Patuākhālī, the subdivisional town, his headquarters. Naturally no rent was assessed during the year but Rs. 4,400 was collected for grazing rights and Rs. 3,962 from the sale of timber and reeds. Rs. 2,820 were advanced as loans to settlers. During an inspection of the area by Mr. Savage,

**Develop-  
ment from  
1907—1909.**

Member of the Board of Revenue, an important decision was arrived at, namely that improvement works should be executed in areas occupied by former settlers, provided that they agreed to come under the colonisation rules.

1908-09. 12,750 *bighās* were settled with 341 new colonists, 162 being settled in Kālāmeghā; the area under colonisation was now extended to Bargunā, Lotā Chapli, Bara Bogi and Bara and Chhotā Nishānbāriā. 244 former colonists occupying 5,618 *bighās* in South Tiākhāli, Lotā Chapli, Chhotā Nishānbāriā, Bara and Chhotā Bāliātāli and Dhulasār were included in the colonisation scheme. Loans were advanced to the amount of Rs. 10,440 and Rs. 43,720 were spent on improvements. A large number of the new settlers were Maghs, for whom it was now decided to reserve specific areas.

Develop-  
ment,  
1909-10;  
fixing of  
rate: of  
assess-  
ment.

96. The year 1909-10 is one of importance. The actual number of new colonists was 296 in 10,229 *bighās*, the majority, *viz.*, 161 being in Kālāmeghā. The old colonists in South Tiākhāli and Chhotā Nishānbāriā were assessed to rent. Rs. 6,715 were distributed in loans and Rs. 62,970 expended on improvements. A very important work of improvement was commenced in the excavation of a big *khāl* connecting the Haringhātā and Bishkhāli rivers. between Kālāmeghā and Gnānpārā, an estate held under a 99 years lease. Two important matters came up for decision during this year. The one concerned the status of old tenants who came under the colonisation rules. The majority of these tenants held at low rates of rent, about five annas per *bighā*, and it was clear that it would be impossible to settle new tenants at a fair assessment, while the old tenants held at ridiculously low rates; at the same time the law did not permit of the enhancement of their rents as *rāiyats* to the necessary extent. In 1903 it had been proposed that all new settlers should be given rights as *hāolā-dārs*. This proposal had not been accepted though even now again supported by Major Jack. It was now proposed in order to avoid the difficulties of enhancement that the old settlers should be given *hāolā* rights. After a considerable amount of discussion this proposal was accepted\* by the Board of Revenue; this decision, which was gladly accepted by the old settlers, made the principle of equalisation of

\* Board's No. 15-W.L. dated the 13th May 1910.

assessment feasible in each estate. The second matter for decision was the fixation of rates of assessment—a matter of urgency as the period for assessment of the settlements of 1907 was now at hand. It will be remembered that the rules of 1907 had laid down a single scale for the whole area; the scale covered a rent-free period for three years, followed by a gradual enhancement from two annas a *bighā* in the fourth year of the lease to the maximum rate of Rs. 2 per *bighā* from the twenty-first to the thirtieth year of the lease. For the purpose of assessment, the area was now divided into 5 groups, excluding South Tiākhāli and Karāibāriā, which were reserved for special treatment. In all groups the rent-free period was maintained, and the principle of progressive enhancements adopted. The maximum rates fixed for each group were as follows:—

**Bogi Group.**—Bara Bogi, Chhotā and Bara Nishān-bāriā, Re. 1-2 to Re. 1-6 per *bighā*.

**Central Group.**—Mithāganj, Nilganj, Dalbuganj, Sonātālā, Re. 1-2 to Re. 1-4 per *bighā*.

**Eastern Group.**—Dhulasār and Bara. Chhotā and Char Bāliātālī, Re. 1-4 per *bighā*.

**Southern Group.**—Lotā Chapli and Khaprabhāngā, Re. 1 per *bighā*.

**Kalamegha Group.**—Re. 1-8 per *bighā*.

It was decided that the Bogi and Southern Groups should be maintained as Magh reserves, and a further principle was laid down that in the future reclamation should radiate from Khepupārā (in South Tiākhāli) as the centre.

97. In the year 1910-11, 346 new colonists were settled on 11,616 *bighās* of land, mainly in Kālāmeghā and Lotā Chapli; Rs. 36,681 were spent on improvements and a commencement was made in the work of assessing the first of the new settlers to the extent of 395 acres with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,463-13. In the following year 317 new colonists were settled on 8,398 *bighās*; Rs. 37,051 were spent on improvements and 3,810 acres were assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 16,914. As this was the last complete year in which Maulvi Ataur Rahaman was in control, a review of the work during the first five years is interesting. During this period, the period of the pioneer, no fewer than 1,788 new colonists had been settled and an area of more than 34 square miles had been colonised. The

Develop-  
ment from  
1910—12.

experiment had been proved to be a success and that success was largely due to the methods employed by the original Colonisation Officer, methods which have been followed by his successor. In December 1912 he was succeeded by Maulvi Qamaraddin Ahmed, who still holds the post.

Develop-  
ment from  
1912-1920.

98. The development during the 8 succeeding years has been rapid, but efficiency has not been sacrificed to rapidity of progress. The results may be seen from the following tables :—

YEAR.	Number of colonists.	Area settled in <i>bighas</i> .	Amount spent on improvement.	Area assessed (acres).	Ultimate rental.
			Rs.		Rs.
1912-13 ...	715	54,586	45,110	430	723
1913-14 ...	239	12,340	51,327	3,754	13,292
1914-15 ...	535	31,560	46,841	7,108	29,290
1915-16 ...	416	24,070	50,542	7,515	25,654
1916-17 ...	638	24,805	33,240	4,946	14,895
1917-18 ...	476	23,141	33,235	1,883	6,345
1918-19 ...	...	...	5,457	3,916	13,501
1919-20 ...	278	10,960	57,609	2,866	9,388
Total ...	3,297	181,482	3,53,361	32,418	1,13,088

It will be seen that the year 1918-19 shows a decrease in progress, no new colonists being settled and the area assessed being small. This is due partly to the fact that of the  $173\frac{1}{2}$  square miles available for colonisation, 110 square miles covering the best land had already been colonised, partly to the fact that colonisation had been allowed to run too far ahead of reclamation, little more than half of the colonised area (viz., 58 square miles) having been reclaimed, and largely to the fact that during the last three years the amount spent on improvement works had been insufficient to render the colonised area fit for reclamation. The progress in 13 years has however been exceptional. In its original programme the Government of Bengal had suggested the colonisation of the whole area in 50 years at a total expenditure of 25 *lākhs* of rupees. More than half the work has been completed in 12 years at a total cost in improvements of approximately 5 *lākhs* of rupees and in management of little more than 2 *lākhs*; the programme should without difficulty be completed in half the time and at half the cost originally estimated. During this period, apart from land revenue which has

amounted to  $3\frac{1}{4}$  *lākhs*, Government has obtained an income of approximately  $2\frac{1}{4}$  *lākhs* of rupees from forest produce and grazing rights, thus reducing the excess of expenditure over income to 1 *lakh*. On the completion of the scheme a revenue of  $4\frac{1}{4}$  *lākhs* of rupees may be anticipated against the present annual income from land and forest revenue of 1 *lakh*.

99. A review of the progress effected in the different estates included in the colonisation area is of interest.

Progress  
of coloni-  
sation  
by estates.

*Chak Kālāmeghā—T. No. 4573.*—As has been previously stated this estate had been set apart for leases under the Small Capitalist Rules of 1879. The *hāolās* that had been created were resumed during the settlement operations and on completion only 44 remained covering an area of 188 acres; the remainder of the 35 square miles constituting the estate was available for colonisation, which commenced in the year 1907. Up to date some 18 square miles have been colonised of which 10 square miles with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 35,089 has been assessed. The population is 5,581, and two thriving *hāts* exist in the estate at Pātharghātā and Char Duāni. Ten Co-operative Credit Societies have been founded with a working capital exceeding Rs. 32,000. The total amount expended in improvement works has been Rs. 9,495; the most notable improvement, namely, the *khāl* between the Haringhātā and Biskhāli rivers is however maintained by the District Board; this has facilitated colonisation to a very considerable extent. It is expected that the remaining area of 17 square miles will soon be colonised.

*Bargunā—T. No. 5008.*—Practically the whole of this estate was cultivated previously, and only 206 acres remained, the colonisation of which is complete. The feature of Bargunā is a large and prosperous *hāt*.

*Chhotā Bogi—T. No. 6623.*—Was resumed in 1911 from a 99 years grant, which the grantee had ignominiously failed to clear. By an expenditure of Rs. 15,655 the whole area,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  square miles in extent has been colonised by 289 settlers and reclaimed within a period of 7 years, the estate will ultimately produce an annual revenue of about Rs. 10,000. Three Co-operative Societies have been established with a working capital of Rs. 3,075. The estate is a remarkable example of the superiority of the present scheme over leases to middlemen.

*Karāibāriā—T. No. 4526.*—Five square miles are held under a special grant. The remaining 3 square miles

have been colonised by 176 settlers, but not yet assessed. Rs. 6,623 have been spent on improvements and 3 Co-operative Societies have been founded with a capital of Rs. 2,435.

*Bar i Bogi*—*T. No. 4959*.—Of the  $16\frac{1}{2}$  square miles,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  had been previously settled; of the remainder,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  square miles have been colonised between 1911 and 1920 and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 12,329. Rs. 16,819 have been spent on improvements, and two Co-operative Societies have been established with a working capital of Rs. 7,300.

*Chhotā Nishānbāriā*—*T. No. 6321*.—Excepting 63 acres previously settled on *hāolādāri* leases, the whole area of 8 square miles is under colonisation; of this half a square mile was colonised in 1909 and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  square miles in 1915 entirely with Maghs at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 10,800. Rs. 16,692 have been spent on improvements and one Co-operative Society is in existence with a capital of Rs. 3,106. The population is now 1,200.

*Bara Nishānbāriā* *T. No. 6300*.—This is also a Magh colony. 7 square miles out of 12 have been settled with 307 colonists; only 2 square miles have been assessed up to date at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 4,999. Rs. 10,456 have been spent on improvements.

*Lātāchaplī*—*T. No. 4958*.—This estate being on the sea face, has required heavy expenditure to the amount of Rs. 48,723. Of the total area of  $23\frac{1}{2}$  square miles 8 have been colonised by Maghs only and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 13,650. Three Co-operative Societies have been founded with a working capital of Rs. 9,513. In this estate a bungalow has been constructed on the sea face.

*Chak Dhulasār*—*T. No. 4583*.—Of 7 square miles 2 square miles had already been settled; the remaining area was colonised between 1911 and 1916 and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 7,592. Rs. 29,096 have been spent on improvements, and 3 Co-operative Societies have been founded with a working capital of Rs. 12,431.

*Char Bāliātāli*—*T. No. 5092*.—Is a small estate of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  square miles; the cultivable area was colonised in 1909 and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,720. Rs. 7,315 were spent on improvements; one Co-operative Society with a working capital of Rs. 4,870 has been established.

*Bara Bāliātāli*—*T. No. 4580*.—Excluding  $1\frac{1}{2}$  square miles previously settled,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  square miles were colonised

between 1912 and 1915 and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 5,111. Rs. 43,709 have been spent on improvements and one Co-operative Society with a capital of Rs. 5,889 has been established.

*Chhota Bāliātāli*—*T. No. 4581*.—Excluding  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of a square mile previously settled, the remaining 6 square miles have been completely colonised between 1913 and 1917 and assessed at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 11,722. Rs. 53,534 have been spent on improvements, and one Co-operative Society is in existence with a working capital of Rs. 8,019.

*Mithāganj*—*T. No. 4865*.—The whole area of 10 square miles has been colonised between 1913 and 1918, but only one square mile with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,783 has been assessed. Rs. 42,612 have been spent on improvements, and 4 Co-operative Societies are in existence with a capital of Rs. 12,225.

*Dalbuganj*—*T. No. 4973*.—Of 5 square miles only half a square mile has been colonised by Magh tenants and assessed in 1917 at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 832. Nothing has been spent on improvements.

*Nilganj*—*T. No. 4771*.—The whole estate, 10 square miles, has been colonised between 1914 and 1918, but only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  square miles have been assessed at an ultimate rental of Rs. 8,933. Rs. 48,146 had been spent on improvements, and 4 Co-operative Societies have been established with a capital of Rs. 19,529.

*South Tiākhāli*—*T. No. 4600*.—Three square miles had been settled previously, leaving 7 square miles for colonisation. The whole of this has been settled and was assessed in 1909 and 1914. The amount spent on improvements to date is Rs. 52,498. One Co-operative Credit Society with a capital of Rs. 32,177 has been formed. Within this estate is situated Khepupārā, the headquarters of the Colonisation Officer; it contains a *bāzār*, Post office, school, dispensary and a successful Co-operative Sale Society.

*Nishānbāriā*—*T. No. 4545*.—Out of 5 square miles only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  square miles were available for colonisation and of this the cultivable area of 140 acres has been colonised and assessed. No improvement works have been necessary; one Co-operative Society with a capital of Rs. 8,268 is in existence.

100. The progress of the colonisation scheme in Bākarganj has been described in detail for a set purpose. "For the colonisation scheme" wrote Mr. (now Sir Charles) Stevenson-Moore in 1915 "as it is being worked in the Bākarganj Sundarbans. I have nothing

**The  
success of  
the colo-  
nisation  
scheme.**

but unqualified praise.....What has been done in this area constitutes a record of which the local officers can justly be proud, and should, in my opinion, be regarded as the model on which any scheme for the development of the Khulnā and 24-Parganās Sundarbans (after such modifications as the difference of physical conditions necessitates) should be based." Since 1915 development has been even more creditable, and the only real defect that can be pointed to is the recent failure of reclamation to keep pace with colonisation—a failure due to the financial stringency occasioned by the war. A contrast with the tardiness of reclamation under the rules of 1853 and 1879 is inevitable, and is finely illustrated by the history of Chhotā Bogi. But the real success has not been one of quantity, so much as of quality, and this success has been largely due to the human element, the two Colonisation Officers, Khān Bāhādūr Ataur Rahaman and Khān Sāhib Qamaraddin Ahmad; to them is jointly due the credit for the establishment of a colony unparalleled in Bengal. Each settlement is a model—created almost on patriarchial lines with the Colonisation Officer at its head. The Maghs have been converted from a poverty—stricken community to a body of prosperous cultivators. Rents are moderate, though not too low; tanks for drinking water have been provided by Government assisted liberally, since 1911, by the District Board, and at Khepupārā a headquarter has been established, containing all the advantages of a modern village which the colonists look upon as their centre. Loans have been generously granted by Government, and faithfully repaid. A spirit of thrift and co-operation is being inculcated and already 42 Co-operative Credit Societies have been established. A central bank has also been registered with a capital of 4 *lākhs* of rupees, and in Khepupārā a Co-operative Sale Society has commenced a prosperous career not only by the sale of necessities to the colonists, but also for the purpose of disposing of their produce on a co-operative basis. The area is a model in development—not only in the principles and system which have rendered it possible, but in the spirit with which the work has been effected and the humanity which has been instilled into the dry maxims of the rules.



## CHAPTER XI.

## The Khulna Sundarbans.

101. Owing to the extensive area of reserved forest subsequent to the years 1875-1879, there has been in the Khulnā area little scope for extension of reclamation, excepting where former grants have been resumed. As late as 1915 the Board of Revenue accepted generally the policy of the Forest Department that for the present no further area of forest should be opened for cultivation, and even the 19 lots proposed for reclamation by Mr. Ross in 1895 still remain reserved. It will thus be seen that the history of the area from 1903 is more concerned with re-settlements of former resumptions or grants than with the opening out of new grants, and that accordingly Khulnā has only to a small extent been affected by the alterations made from time to time in the forest grant rules. The work has been mainly that of re-settlement, and even in this respect has been simple. The important distinction between resumed *mahāls* and forest grants, has already been referred to; in the former re-settlement only was required; in the latter Government was required to inspect the amount of clearance under the rules of 1853 from 20 to 30 years after the commencement of the lease, and to check the rent-free periods and periods of subsequent enhancement.

History of  
the Khulna  
area not  
complicated.

102. But it is not only the paucity of forest grants due to the extent of the forest reserve that differentiates the problem of Khulnā from that of other Sundarbans tracts. The main difference is a physical one; the Khulnā Sundarbans are the mean between those of the 24-Parganās and Bākarganj; whereas in the 24-Parganās the land is for the most part low, and its elevation has in many cases been retarded by premature embankment, in Khulnā it is more favourably situated; a large portion of the 24-Parganās area is subject to the abnormally high tides of the river Hughli which do not affect the Khulnā tract. In the 24-Parganās the streams of the Sundarbans are comparatively free from silt, but saline, due mainly to the fact that there is little flow throughout the year

Physical  
characteristics;  
importance  
of recognition.

from the Ganges through the head-waters of the Hughli river; the streams of the Khulnā Sundarbans contain sweeter water, laden with a greater quantity of silt. The difference is of great importance; reclamation in the 24-Parganās implies big expensive embankments to avoid damage by salt water or high floods; the spill area of the rivers is affected and the natural process of land elevation is hampered. In Khulnā however, where embankments are required, they are small and are not required throughout the year; there is no obstacle to the natural elevation of the land by deposits of silt, and even where embankments are required a vast spill area remains for the river system over the 2,089 square miles of reserved forest, where embankments are not permitted. Thus in Khulnā the cost of reclamation is less, the possibilities of success greater; on the other hand in the 24-Parganās the salt laden soil weakens the jungle growth, and jungle clearance requires less toil. The differences between the 24-Parganās and Khulnā are accentuated in Bākar-ganj; there the water of the streams, connected as they are with the main channels of the rivers Padmā and Meghnā, is sweeter than in Khulnā, the land well elevated and the soil exuberant with fertility. The distinction between the various characteristics of these tracts was noted in 1852; it was never acted upon until the fetish of uniformity of administration had been finally abandoned by the abolition of the Commissionership in the Sundarbans in 1905. From that time the administration has considered primarily the physical conditions and requirements of each part of the tract, and it is this recognition of the power of nature that must form the future basis of development and administration in the Sundarbans.

Synopsis of  
leases  
existing in  
1904.

103. The year 1903 is an important one in the history of the Sundarbans. In this year proposals were advanced for the abolition of the office of Commissioner in the Sundarbans and the first definite advance was made in the policy of reclamation by *rāiyatwāri* settlements. The Khulnā area was, however, almost definitely excluded from the new policy; it was reported in 1904 that apart from the reserved forest only 3,800 acres of waste land remained unsettled in Khulnā; this, as events have proved, was an under-estimate, but the paucity of available land was a sufficient justification for the decision of Government, declining allotments of funds for the furtherance of *rāiyatwāri* settlement in Khulnā, as

in the case of Bākarganj and the 24-Parganās. The period from 1903 is accordingly, with the exception of the grant for reclamation of a portion of lots 164 (Khāikhāli) and 216 entirely a history of surveys and resettlements. To realise the extent of these operations, it is important to understand the nature of the leases in existence at the time; the following table prepared in 1904 will explain the situation:—(a)

Serial No.	Class of lease.	No. of estates.	Area (acres).
1.	Held on <i>tālukdāri</i> leases, permanent transferable, but liable to enhancement.	41	18,155
2.	Held on <i>mālguzāri</i> leases with the option of renewal; non-transferable; cancellable on refusal of revised conditions or assessment.	31	30,923
3.	Held on farming leases; non-transferable, temporary and without right to sublet.	19	20,318
4.	Held under Large Capitalist Rules of 1879.	22	36,697
5.	Held under Small Capitalist Rules of 1879.	1	165
6.	Held under the rules of 1853.	38	157,991
7.	Held under proprietary leases, enhanceable but entitled to <i>mālikānā</i> .	10	5,935
8.	Held on <i>rāiyātwāri</i> leases.	3	6,237
9.	Permanently settled estates.	30	63,655
10.	Estates redeemed under the rules of 1863.	2	12,802
Total		197	352,878 or 551 square miles.

(a) Commissioner, Presidency Division, to Board No. 467 R.L., dated 15th December 1904.

This table does not appear to be entirely accurate the number of estates is very much larger than those now in existence (a) and excluding the permanently-settled and redeemed area (120 square miles), the balance of 431 square miles is greater by 85 square miles than the area now returned as under temporary settlement. The difference is due to the inclusion of estates classed at the time as Sundarbans estates but situated north of the Dampier-Hodges line, 97 in number, and accordingly now excluded. It is interesting to note that no fee-simple grants were made in Khulnā. Classes 1, 2, 3, 7 and 9 include without distinction resumed *mahāls* and forest grants, made prior to and not converted under the rules of 1853. It should further be noted that the leases included in class 7 as proprietary leases were declared in 1907 on a reference from Bākarganj to be tenures (b).

Extent of  
resettle-  
ments.

104. During this period the term of settlement of all estates (with a single exception) included in classes 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 have expired covering 103 estates with an area of 125 square miles. Classes 9 and 10 are naturally excluded from resettlement, while the leases of 1853 being for for a term of 99 years and those of 1879 being for 40 years fall in at later dates. The dates when renewals fell due is indicated herewith :—

Year.	Number of estates.		Area (square miles)
1903-04	...	72	64
1904-05	...	13	10
1905-06	...	1	18
1911-12	...	5	11
1918-19	...	5	11
1919-20	...	7	11
Total	...	103	125

Resettlement proceedings were instituted with vigour. In 1903, 12 estates were already under settlement. In 1904, 43 estates were notified for settlement under the Bengal Tenancy Act (c), and the settlement

(a) In 1902 the number had been returned at 170, but this number included only 4 permanently-settled estates. Adding the balance of 26 and one new grant under the rules of 1879 the numbers tally.

(b) Legal Remembrancer to Board of Revenue, Eastern Bengal and Assam No. 1118, dated 23rd July 1907.

(c) Notification 1481 L. R., dated the 8th March 1904.

of 37 other estates was ordered by the Board of Revenue under the provisions of Regulations VII of 1822 (a). In October of that year settlement proceedings were in progress in 87 estates covering an area of 72 square miles of the Khulnā Sundarbans, Mr. Sunder the Commissioner in the Sundarbans being in charge. The leases were ordinarily renewed for terms of 15 or occasionally 30 years; it must be remembered that none of the specific leases of 1853 and 1879 were under renewal. By 1910, 99 estates had been resettled. There are several points of interest to note in the resettlement of these 99 estates. The total number of *rāiyats* recorded was 3,835 of whom 2,910 were accorded the status of settled *rāiyats*, possibly as a *jeu d'esprit*, for no *mauzās*, as will be seen below, were at that time in existence! Compared with the customary rate of rent viz., Rs. 6 per acre existing in the Sundarbans, the rates fixed were low, varying materially in different areas:—

<i>Thānā</i> Morrelganj	...	Rs. 7 to Rs. 3	per acre.
<i>Thānā</i> Bāgherhāt	...	" 5 " 4	" "
<i>Thānā</i> Rāmpal and Pāik-gāchā	...	" 5 " 2	" "
<i>Thānā</i> Kāliganj	...	" 4 " 2	" "
<i>Thānā</i> Asāsuni	...	" 3 " 2	" "
<i>Thānā</i> Dumuriā	...	" 3 " 1	" "

The average rate approximated Rs. 4 per acre and only one-third of the *soi-disant* settled *rāiyats* were assessed at a rate of Rs. 5 or more. It is interesting to note that the detailed cadastral survey which the settlement proceedings undertook, was supplemented in 1906 by a topographical survey of the reserved forest on a scale of 2 inches to 1 mile. In 1906-07, 953 square miles were so surveyed, and in 1907-08 an area of 1311 square miles, including the survey of lot 165 on a scale of 4 inches to 1 mile.

105. The Sundarbans area of Khulnā had been excluded from the *thākbast* survey, which had demarcated and mapped revenue villages or *mauzās* which in other areas had been generally adopted for revenue purposes on the basis of the Revenue Survey map. The importance of the *mauzā* lies in the fact that under the provisions of the Bengal Tenancy Act it forms the unit by which the rights of the vast

Formation  
of mauzas.

(a) Board to Presidency Commissioner No. 2639 A., dated the 25th March 1904.

majority of cultivators, namely settled *rāiyats*, are determined. It is an extraordinary fact that this defect in the fiscal arrangements of the area was not noticed at the time of the large number of settlement proceedings under the Bengal Tenancy Act, which commenced in the year 1903. The defect appears to have been detected initially early in the year 1910 by the Collector of Khulnā, and its importance was immediately realised by the Government of Bengal, which at that time in view of the breakdown of the Fraserganj *rāiyatwāri* experiment was proposing to revert to the system of reclamation through capitalists. "If however," ran the Government letter (a) "the old system of leases to capitalists is to be restored, there is one precaution which it is necessary to take in the interests of the tenants. The Sundarbans have hitherto been practically excluded from the scope of the Bengal Tenancy Act, so far as the protection of the *rāiyats* is concerned, for the reason that the areas leased have not been defined as villages, and there have in fact been no villages within the Sundarbans as defined in section 3(10) of the Bengal Tenancy Act. This omission should be supplied; and in future, at the time of granting a lease, the area included in it will be declared to be a village within the meaning of the Bengal Tenancy Act". The Collector of Khulnā proposed the declaration of 50 areas, each consisting of a separate estate, and comprising the whole or part of a lot, as villages. Difficulties however existed; the area of these estates varied from 28 acres (T. No. 943) to 7,933 acres (T. No. 931). The Board expressed the opinion that as the proposals were made for the specific object of extending to cultivators certain rights under the Bengal Tenancy Act, the size of the unit adopted was of considerable importance; a small unit would minimise the advantages to be given; too large a unit would be inconvenient for administrative purposes in general and in particular for surveys and records-of-rights. As the proposals were however merely a temporary expedient, and in the absence of any more satisfactory unit, the Board agreed to accept them until a further survey and record-of-rights of any of the lots or of the district generally were made. A long desultory correspondence ensued, regarding the form of notification, and finally in

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(a) Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal to Secretary, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Government of India, No. 543T.—R., dated 24th May 1910. paragraph 11.

August 1914, the Board of Revenue sanctioned (a) the declaration by the Collector of 46 areas as villages under the provisions of the last part of clause 10, section 3 of the Bengal Tenancy Act. The declaration however was not exhaustive; in 1915 it was reported that several lots had not been included in the declaration; in 1916 the sanction of the Board was given (b) to the declaration of 42 more estates as villages, the estate within each lot being adopted as the unit and the areas varying from 4·39 acres (T. No. 829) to 15365 acres (T. No. 865). These declarations constitute an important advance in bringing the Sundarbans area within the general fiscal system of Bengal, but it is important to remember firstly that no villages have been constituted within the reserved forest and that any extension of cultivation will require further declarations, and secondly that the village units adopted are admittedly make-shifts, and will require considerable modification at the time of the next survey.

106. This chapter has dealt almost entirely with the steps that have been taken to systematise and improve the administration of the reclaimed area. It would however be incomplete without a brief account of one of the few experiments at reclamation in the period. It will be remembered that the *rāiyatwāri* experiment introduced in 1904 was abandoned in 1910, when the Capitalist rules of 1879 were again introduced. In 1911 an area estimated at 2,200 acres in the north of lot 164, Khāikhālī, situated on the Kālindi river in the Sātkhirā sub-division was leased to the Bengal Young Men's Zamindāri Co-operative Society for a period of 40 years under the large Capitalist rules of 1879. This Society was originally formed with the intention of encouraging Bengalis of the *bhadralok* class to take to agricultural manual labour. It has not proved a success. Of the total area the Society retained about 330 acres, the greater part of which it subsequently sublet to 4 of its members. The remainder of the grant was taken over by a syndicate consisting of 7 members of the Society after a sale by auction resulting in the payment of Rs. 26,657 to the funds of the Society. The rent of the lessees was fixed at double the Government

**Tha  
Khaikhali  
reclama-  
tion.**

(a) Board of Revenue to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 2861 Miscellaneous, dated the 27th August 1914.

(b) Board of Revenue to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. 371 R.L., dated the 18th May 1916.

revenue; where cultivators have been settled, the rent has been fixed at Rs. 2-8 per *bighā* against the normal rate of Rs. 2, but the greater part of the area is being cultivated by hired labour. The methods of clearance and cultivation have been poor and slow. The grant originally supposed to be 2,200 acres in area is now returned at more than 4,800 acres, an excess not unusual in former Sundarbans history. The object of the experiment has been a dismal failure; and still the results contain the germs of a system of subinfeudation before which even Bākarganj might pale. The result is the surest justification for the reversion to the *rāiyatwāri* system decided on in 1918.

**Future  
develop-  
ments.**

107. It is unlikely that the future will see any developments of importance in the Khulnā Sundarbans; of the area not included in the reserved forest portions of lots 163, 164, 165, 169 and 172 only remain to be cleared. The general policy of excluding the Forest Reserve from reclamation has been accepted; but proposals have recently been made for straightening out the boundary by additional reclamation, (a) and for the surrender to reclamation of lot 7, a tongue of land lying between the Haringhātā and Bhola rivers, detached from the Forest Reserve. A further proposal has been advanced to throw open for grazing purposes the Khulnā littoral, where the abundance of luxuriant *dhup* grass might form a suitable area for grazing stock. This proposal would result in a slight reduction of forest area, which, except in the case of lot 7, contains little in the way of valuable timber. The history of the Khulnā area for some time to come, however, must be one of resettlements of the reclaimed area, the creation of a system of *manzās* suited to the conditions of the area and the preservation of the reserved forest.

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(a) Of lots 209, 210, 213-219 and 241-243.



## CHAPTER X.I.

### The 24-Parganas Sundarbāns.

#### General.

108. While the account of the administration of the Bākarganj Sundarbans in Chapters IX and X covers the whole area south of the Dampier-Hodges line, the account of the 24-Parganās area for the same period is practically confined to two specific areas, Fraserganj where the first *rāiyatwāri* rules came to a sudden termination, and Sāgar Island, where the new *rāiyatwāri* rules were first applied. The small extent of administrative activity is not due only to the vacillating policy regarding the rules, but very largely to the extensive area of protected forest and to the inevitable decision to subordinate development to the necessities imposed by geographical conditions. The 24-Parganās Sundarbans, it must be remembered, lie at the mouth of the river Hughli and consequently the treatment of the tract is of vital importance to the Port of Calcutta. In the first place a large spill area is required for the vast quantities of water brought down by the rivers Hughli, Dāmodār and Rupnārāyan during the season of floods in order to avoid deterioration to the channel of the port; secondly, the area is subject to abnormally high tides; and thirdly, extension of reclamation requires the erection of big embankments which, while limiting the spill area, prevents the elevation of the ground-level by a natural process of silt deposits. The account of the development of the 24-Parganās area up to the year 1903 has shown to what a large extent, compared with the Khulnā and Bākarganj areas, advantage had been taken of the forest grant rules of 1853 and of the large Capitalist Rules of 1879 to develop that part of the area, mainly in the north, which was reasonably fit for reclamation.

**Peculiarities of the area.**

109 In the year 1904, Mr. Sunder, Commissioner in the Sundarbans, submitted a list showing the nature of the leases under which different portions

**Synopsis of leases in 1904.**

of the 24-Parganās Sundarbans were held; the list may be summarised as follows :—

Serial No.	Nature of lease.	Number of estates.	Area (acres).
1.	Held under <i>tālukdāri</i> right ...	1	330
2.	Held under <i>mālguzāri</i> right ...	4	2,733
3.	Held under farming right ...	2	1,957
4.	Sāgar Island leases under the rules of 1897 ...	8	23,304
5.	Held under the Large Capitalist rules of 1879 ...	182	3,25,671
6.	Held under Forest Grant rules of 1853 ...	93	2,62,937
7.	Held in perpetuity ...	3	3,842
8.	Redeemed estates ...	24	1,17,113
9.	Resumed for Canning Town ...	2	6,311
10.	Held under fee-simple ...	3	4,867
11.	Held revenue-free in Sāgar Island ...	6	20,966
Total		328	7,70,031 or 1,203 square miles.

The area of 1,203 square miles out of a total area of 2,896 square miles may be taken as approximately accurate and compares favourably with the areas reported as under lease in Bākarganj and Khulnā at the same time—434 and 551 square miles respectively. The list is noteworthy for several reasons; in the 24-Parganās alone had the redemption rules of 1863 been applied to any extent, no less than 183 square miles having been redeemed out of a total of 203 square miles in the whole of the Sundarbans; this result was largely due to the operations of the Port Canning Company. The second feature worthy of note is the large area held under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879, *viz.*, 509 square miles, compared with 57 in Khulnā and 13 in Bākarganj. The third noticeable feature is the extent of the grants held under the rules of 1853 *viz.*, 411 square miles. The extent of this area is largely due to the fact that in the 24-Parganās large numbers of the holders of resumed estates were allowed to convert the terms of their lease; under the rules of 1853; the natural result of this has been the exclusion of a large number of estates from resettlement during the period. These three classes of grants cover an area of 1,103 square miles out of 1,203 leased in the area. In the redeemed estates the

revenue administration has no further interest; in the area leased under the rules of 1879, no lease would expire until 1923; while the first leases of forest grants or commuted resumed estates to expire under the rules of 1853 would not fall in before 1929. With the whole of this vast area then the period under review has no concern. It is true that a similar remark might have been applied to Bākarganj; but in the 24-Parganās there have been no District survey and settlement operations to test the extent to which the conditions of the grants have been carried out or abused, and until such operations have been undertaken it would be idle to attempt a review of the conditions prevalent in these grants. If the analogy of Bākarganj is of any value, the settlement operations in the 24-Parganās will reveal an interesting history.

110. The areas leased under the Rules of 1853 and 1879 require little comment. In the preceding paragraph it has been shown that in the year 1904, 93 forest grants under the rules of 1853 existed covering an area of 2,62,937 acres. The number and area of these grants have not varied during the period, but the maximum revenue, namely Rs. 80,163, approximately at the rate of 4 annas 10 pies per acre, was attained in the year 1917-18. The average area of each grant is 2,827 acres. No grants existed under the Small Capitalist Rules, but under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 there existed, in 1904, 182 grants covering an area of 3,25,671 acres. The years succeeding the abolition of the Commissionership in the Sundarbans witnessed considerable activity in checking the clearance clauses of these leases, namely, the clearance of 1-8th of the area by the end of the fifth year of the lease, as a result of which the number of grants had been reduced by the year 1906-07 to 163 covering an area of 2,96,469 acres held at a revenue of Rs. 26,166, which would ultimately rise to Rs. 1,74,928. During the period only one additional grant was made, that of lot 148 covering 14,000 acres in 1909, but during the checking of the clearance clauses several grants were split up, lot 112, 1st portion, for example being divided into 7 separate leases; at the same time considerable increases in area were recorded. By 1911 the number of grants had thus risen to 188 covering an area of 344,263 acres, with a current revenue of Rs. 58,292 which would eventually rise to Rs. 2,35,111. The number of grants has remained the same until the close of the period, but the

**Forest grants under the rules of 1853 and 1879.**

current revenue has risen to Rs. 1,38,269, while the ultimate revenue at the expiry of the leases has been revised at Rs. 2,35,206. The average rate of revenue will ultimately work out at approximately 11 annas per acre, while the average area of each grant is 1,831 acres, or slightly in excess of 5,000 *bighās* sanctioned by the rules.

**Guasaba.**

111. It will be remembered that at the time of the introduction of the *rāiyatwāri* experiment at Fraserganj in 1904, the Capitalist Rules of 1879 were held in suspension and that orders of the Government of India were obtained for their revival in a modified form in 1910. The modified rules never eventuated, and were finally abandoned in 1915, when the objections of the Irrigation Department to indiscriminate embanking resulted in the decision to suspend further reclamation pending the completion of a level survey. During this period accordingly the Large Capitalist Rules—for the Small Capitalist Rules had never been applicable to the 24-Parganās—are of little importance. It is only necessary to sketch the history of the special grant referred to above. In the year 1903 leases under the Large Capitalist Rules were given to Sir Daniel Hamilton for 3 blocks of land *viz.*, Guāsāba Island (approximately 830 acres in area), lot 143 (approximately 3,200 acres in area) and lot 149 (approximately 4,850 acres in area). In 1909 these grants were supplemented (despite the fact that the rules of 1879 were in abeyance) (a) by the lease of lot 148, an extensive adjacent block exceeding 14,000 acres in area, at a sale price of Rs. 14,226 and an ultimate revenue of Rs. 8,069. The total grant covers an area of approximately 35 square miles. The method adopted for the development of the area has been by means of the gradual embankment of specific blocks and subsequent reclamation : approximately 1-4th of the area has now been completed. The colony is managed by the Salvation Army but is entirely undenominational ; no difficulty is experienced in getting tenants, and the general condition is one of prosperity. Rents are fixed at Rs. 2 per *bighā*, and the extent of a holding is limited to 30 *bighās*. This settlement is an exceptional example of the results that can be obtained by spreading the heavy initial outlay in reclaiming Sundarbans lots over a series of years.

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(a) *Vide* Bengal Government, Revenue Department, Notification No. 5093, dated the 14th December 1908.

112. The real history of the development of this period however deals merely with six small estates, held under *mālguzāri* leases, or resumed by Government, the term of settlement of which had expired, to a few general proceedings affecting the area as a whole, and to two specific areas, the importance of which necessitates separate treatment, *viz.*, Fraserganj, an entirely new clearance, and Sāgar Island, the whole of which was in 1904 held under leases, either as revenue-free grants, or as revenue-paying tenures under the rules of 1897.

113. The resettlement of the 6 small estates with which the period opens does not require any detailed treatment; the subsequent history of some of them is however of interest. In 1904 a notification was issued sanctioning the survey, the preparation of a record-of-rights and resettlement of land revenue of 6 estates in the 24-Parganās Sundarbans.

Scope of  
activity.  
petty  
settle-  
ments.

(i) Lot No. 16 (Northern portion) had been originally settled in 1831 and after various resumptions was finally resumed by Government on breach of the clearance conditions of the lease in 1879. The survey and publication of the record-of-rights was completed in July 1905, the area being 1,426 acres held by 13 tenure-holders and 136 *rāiyats*. Since the time of resumption it had been under a *mālguzāri* form of lease; proposals were now made for cancelling the lease on the grounds that the estate had been sublet contrary to the terms of the lease, and that no attempt had been made to improve the estate. A *rāiyatwāri* settlement was proposed and an expenditure of Rs. 15,000 on embankments and jungle clearing. The Board of Revenue agreed that the estate should come under direct management from the 1st April 1906. The total revenue was fixed at Rs. 4,899 against the former revenue of Rs. 2,351. In June 1906 however the settlement proceedings were stopped mainly owing to difficulties regarding the rights of the tenure-holders and to the fact that it would be inequitable to enhance rents until the embankments were improved, and for this funds were not then available. Rents were accordingly collected at the former rates. Settlement proceedings were again instituted by a notification (b) of 1917 and a fresh *rāiyatwari* settlement was completed in 1920 at a net revenue of Rs. 7,040. The total area of the

(a) Notification No. 1481L.R., dated the 8th March 1904.

(b) Notification No. 9116L.R., dated the 29th December 1916.

estate is now returned at 1,437 acres, of which 1,294 acres are assessed. Of the rental of the estate Rs. 2,766 is payable direct by *rāiyats* and Rs. 6,106 is collected by tenure-holders, who have been allowed a profit of 15 per cent., subject to a further 15 per cent., if the embankments are kept in proper condition.

(ii) Rānāghātā (T. No. 596) situated in lot 31 was originally resumed in 1820, and in 1829 Government conceded to the *lotdārs* a proprietary status. This status was respected in the new settlement which was completed in 1907 at a revenue of Rs. 1,593 on an area of 333 acres against the former revenue of Rs. 1,100.

(iii) Tonā (T. No. 38) is a small *patitābhādi mahāl*, lying north of the Dampier-Hodges line, having an area of 450 acres; it was originally resumed in 1823 and was settled under a *mālguzāri* form of lease; on a complaint of the *rāiyats* that the *mālguzārs* had neglected the embankments of the estate, the lease was cancelled in 1904 and the estate brought under *khās* management. The new settlement took effect from 1907 at a revenue of Rs. 1,452 being an increase of Rs. 411 on the previous assessment.

(iv) Lot No. 20 (Bhagwanpur) T. No. 1326, containing 989 acres appears to have been settled originally as a forest grant in 1830; the grant was relinquished in 1842. After further settlements had been made, the lot was purchased by Government at a sale for arrears of revenue in 1875, and settled on a farming lease. The settlement proceedings disclosed a lamentable state of affairs. The farmer, an officer of the Public Works Department, had contrary to the terms of his lease, created four permanent tenures over the estate; no embankments had been built and the estate was in a deplorable condition. Orders were initially issued postponing the settlement until Government had erected the required embankments, but finally in 1907 it was decided to settle with the four *chakdārs* or tenureholders, to whom the responsibilities of the management of the estate were made over, Government obtaining a revenue of Rs. 3,357 against the former revenue of Rs. 616.

(v) Lot 62, Painābād is of especial interest; it was originally a forest grant of 1830 resumed for failure to carry out the clearance conditions in 1848; it was not however, brought under *khās* management until 1904 on account of the failure of the lease-holders to keep the embankments of the estate in proper order. Mr.

Sunder's settlement was completed in 1907 for an area of 429 acres at a revenue of Rs. 1,831. This estate has been extremely unfortunate; little was done by Government to restore the embankments that had been neglected by the former grantee until 1915. In that and the following year the embankment surrounding the *khās* portion of the lot was completely restored. The restoration, however, proved of little value despite the expenditure exceeding Rs. 9,000. The lot was inspected at the commencement of 1918; it was found that the embankments of the surrounding lots, the leased portion of Painābād and Sarangābād were badly breached, and that any attempt to maintain the embankments round the Government estate under such conditions must result in disaster. Owing to the fact that the area is liable to heavy deposits of silt, the Irrigation Department suggested the abandonment of the embankments until the land had risen to a sufficient level; the Collector recommended the abandonment of the estate for 10 years. Orders were finally issued that Government would abandon the embankments temporarily, that the tenants might remain on the land, in view of the obvious difficulty of removing them, but would be responsible for the upkeep of the embankments; liberal remissions of rent should, however, be allowed. It was held that on the expiry of the current settlement in 1922, the question of restoring the embankments should again be considered, if the level of the land had risen to the necessary extent. It is interesting to note that since 1913 no crops have been produced on the estate and the total revenue collected has amounted to Rs. 827 against an annual demand of Rs. 1,834. The estate is a valuable example of the dangers of premature embanking and of the impossibility of reclaiming small isolated areas in the 24-Parganās tract.

(vi) The sixth estate for resettlement lay in the south-west of lot 67, Sākdāh, T. No. 1467; settled first in 1830 as a forest grant and resumed from time to time, the south-western portion was finally settled on a *rāiyatwārī* basis in 1880. The fresh settlement was commenced in 1904 and took effect for 15 years from 1907, the area being returned as 1905 acres assessed at a revenue of Rs. 6,909 against a previous revenue of Rs. 3,422. It is interesting to note that Mr. Sunder called special attention to the neglect of the embankments in the past and pointed out the necessity of repairs being taken in hand on an extensive scale.

Other  
areas,  
the  
property  
of Govern-  
ment.

114. Of the above six estates two are held on proprietary and *mālguzāri* leases; the remaining four are the property of Government; they do not, however, exhaust the estates that have been directly under Government control in the area during the period. Excluding Fraserganj and the Sāgar Island estates, there are four other resumed estates, the 1st portion of plot C, 1,533 acres, the 6th portion of plot E. (south portion), 908 acres in area, plot G, 1st portion A and 1st portion B, 3,270 acres in area; no attempt has been made to colonise these resumed estates, and it is interesting to note that, again excluding Sāgar Island, Government has incurred no expenditure on repairing or constructing embankments in the resumed area. The history of lot C is, however, of interest. After an inspection by Sir Charles (then Mr.) Stevenson-Moore in 1915 enquiries were ordered with a view to reclamation and colonisation. This lot had been settled under the Large Capitalist Rules in 1901; an inspection made by Mr. Sunder on the 7th May 1906 showed that no attempt had been made to clear the lot. The lot was resumed on the 13th August 1906, although the terms of the lease entitled the grantees to resettlement on certain conditions. In 1916, the grantees filed a suit against Government and proposals were made for a compromise restoring the lease for a period of 35 years at a rental of annas 2 per *bighā* for the first 15 years and four annas per *bighā* together with a penalty of 20 per cent., for the remaining 20 years. In May 1917 these proposals were accepted and the lot is again included in the Large Capitalist Grants. The Irrigation Department objected, however, to the reclamation of the lot as it would involve the danger of serious injury to the navigable channels in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, though Government has withdrawn its claims, no fresh lease has been executed and the lot remains waste. Plot E, sixth portion had been settled in 1900 under the Large Capitalist Rules but was resumed on the 28th August 1906 for failure to fulfil the clearance conditions. On the 11th August 1908, the northern portion, comprising 2,117 *bighās*, was settled with a *lotdār*, the southern portion remaining in the possession of Government; it is apparently fit for reclamation. Plot G, 1st portion had been settled under the same rules in 1901, but on the 4th September 1906, portions A and B were resumed as the area had remained virgin jungle. These portions have remained in the *khās* possession of Government



and are not yet sufficiently elevated to justify any attempt at proper reclamation. In addition to the resumed area, in the years 1917 and 1918, Government took formal possession under section 3 of Act IV of 1863 of 22 islands lying in the large rivers and on the sea face; the most important of these are Upper Bedford Sand in the main stream of the river Hughli, Moore Island lying south of Sāgar Island in the Bay, plots A and B near the mouth of the Baratala River, Lothian Island near the mouth of the Sattāramukhi river and Bulcheri Island lying on the sea face at the mouth of the Jāmīrā river. Apart from protecting its interests by taking formal possession, Government has made no attempt to colonise any of these islands.

115. It has already been stated that the failure to extend the area under colonization has been due to a definite policy—a policy necessitated by the importance of maintaining a spill area for the river which forms the channel to the port of Calcutta. The question was raised seriously for the first time in 1909. In that year it was reported by the Public Works Department that the contraction of tidal spill caused by the reclamation of Sundarbans lots was causing obstruction to drainage in the basins south of Calcutta. Two remedies were suggested, the first that certain areas, already reclaimed should be restored to tidal spill, the second that tidal spill should not be excluded by embankments from any land in future, until it had been raised to the level of the mean of high water of the spring and neap tides. The first proposal was clearly unpractical and was abandoned, though as has been shown it has been applied in the peculiar case of Pāinābād. The second proposal was, however, accepted by Government and orders were issued by the Board of Revenue accordingly (a). In 1915, however, the subject was raised again by Mr. (now Sir Charles) Stevenson-Moore; he was not prepared to accept the policy as being applicable to the whole area of the Sundarbans lying in the 24-Parganās and Khulnā; he pointed out that conditions varied to an extraordinary extent in different tracts of the area; while the rivers between the Hughli and the Matlā carried very little silt, those east of the Matlā were silt-laden and had the advantage of more active headwaters; and paradoxical as it might appear, drainage was more efficient

**Restriction  
of area  
for coloni-  
sation.**

(a) Board to Commissioner, Presidency Division No. 873 A—T, dated the 21st September 1909.

in the heavily embanked Bāsīrhāt subdivision than in the more open area of Diamond Harbour. He ascribed the state of affairs largely to artificial causes necessitated by the requirements of the town of Calcutta, and stated as his opinion that a single standard of level could not be applied to the whole of the tract. He suggested that a systematic examination of the whole area should be made, and that such examination should commence with a complete survey of levels. The question was referred to Mr. Addams-Williams, an officer of the Public Works Department on special duty in the area; he concurred generally with the proposals and it was decided to hold in abeyance the settlement of new lots until the completion of the level survey, the cost of which was estimated at Rs. 28,500. The survey has not yet been undertaken, and extension of reclamation is definitely barred without a reference to the Irrigation and Forest Departments.

**Extension  
of the  
Embank-  
ment Act  
to the  
Sundar-  
bans.**

116. Closely allied to the question of levels in relation to spill areas is the problem of the control of embankments in the Sundarbans. The decision of 1909 regarding extension of reclamation raised certain legal difficulties; for within the Sundarbans area Government possessed no power to prevent the erection of embankments. This difficulty first appeared as a practical obstacle in the year 1910 with reference to the Boyersinga estate in Khulnā, recently purchased by Government, where it was found impossible to prevent the erection of embankments by cultivators. In 1912, proposals were made by the Board of Revenue to extend the Bengal Embankment Act (II of 1882) to the Sundarbans; section 76 of the Act would enable Government to prevent the erection of embankments in any area notified under section 6. These proposals were accepted and ultimately became law in Act IV of 1915. Though the Act applies to the whole of the Sundarbans it is peculiarly applicable to the 24-Parganās; in the Bākarganj area embankments are only of minor importance, in Khulnā the extension of reclamation is suspended. In the 24-Parganās, however, where reclamation is in progress, and where river and flood problems are of such great complexity and concern to the Port of Calcutta, complete control of embankments is of vital importance.

**Formation  
of villages.**

117. The decision to abandon the *rāīyatwāri* system in 1910 and to revert to a modified form of

Capitalist lease, involved the necessity of taking measures for the protection of the *rāiyats* against the demands of the *lotdārs*. In 1910 the Government of Bengal had proposed that all future grants should be declared to be villages within the meaning of the Bengal Tenancy Act, whereby the *rāiyat* would be able to acquire rights of occupancy. The 24-Parganās Sundarbans had been excluded from the *thākbasti* and revenue surveys. It is obvious that the extension of this privilege to future grants only would deprive the cultivators in the lots already reclaimed of the benefit conferred by the Tenancy Act. It was subsequently decided to notify the whole of the area that had been divided into lots. It is unnecessary to repeat here what has already been written with reference to Khulnā (paragraph 105, Chapter XI) regarding the effect of the measure now proposed. In December 1910 (a) it was decided to notify 335 blocks of land, each comprising a single estate, as villages under section 3(10) of the Bengal Tenancy Act; the units were not altogether suitable, the size of the new villages varying from 43,034 to 103 *bighās*, and were declared to be provisional and liable to revision when settlement operations were undertaken in the area. It must also be remembered that a vast area of protected forest was excluded from these proposals. The blocks were finally declared to be villages by a notification dated the 14th February 1912. The problem of the real status of the *rāiyats* recorded in the 6 settlements commenced by the notification of 1904, before any villages had been constituted, is one of considerable intricacy and surprise.

118. It has already been stated that the only available map of any value of the 24-Parganās Sundarbans was that completed by James Ellison in 1873 (*vide* Chapter VIII, paragraph 59). This had been brought up to date in a rough manner from time to time. In 1905 however a detailed scientific topographical survey of the 24-Parganās Sundarbans area was commenced by the Survey of India. The operations of the year 1905-06 covered an area of 1050 square miles in the eastern part of the district. The northern portion, 456 square miles, comprising the part of the area divided into lots was surveyed on a scale of 4-inch to the mile, while 594 square miles, consisting of

**Survey  
of the  
Sundar-  
bans.**

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(a) Board of Revenue to Presidency Commissioner No. 4478-A., dated the 21st December 1910.

protected forest, were surveyed on a 2-inch scale. In the following year, 1906-07, the operations covered an area of 638 miles in the west of the district including Sāgar Island, the whole block being surveyed on a scale of 4-inch to the mile. These maps are purely topographical ; they do not attempt to distinguish the estates within the different lots, nor do they show the limits of the villages notified in 1912.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## The 24-Parganas Sundarbans.

## Fraserganj.

119. In paragraph 38 it has already been stated that, even before the issue of the *rāiyatwāri* rules in 1905, it had been decided to inaugurate the system in Fraserganj; it is now necessary to give an account of the progress of these operations. Fraserganj, or more correctly Nārāyantolā, the local name, or Mecklenberg Island according to the Admiralty charts, is an extensive island in the Diamond Harbour subdivision, situated on the sea face of the Bay of Bengal at the mouth of the Sattaramukhi river. Bounded on the south by the Bay of Bengal and the Pukhuriaber *khāl*, on the east by the same *khāl* and the Sattaramukhi river, on the West by Edwards Creek or the Patibunia *khāl* and on the south by the same creek and the Chandanpiri river, the island covers an area of 28,555 *bighās* (9.46 acres) or approximately 1½ square miles. The island had formerly been inhabited, for during the reclamation four old brick kilns were discovered in the south east of the island while a number of house sites were discovered with large tamarind and *mansa* trees growing in the vicinity. Facing the Bay an extensive sandy beach runs into a series of sand dunes, behind which a fringe of trees separates the dunes from the jungle which then covered the rest of the island. Between two series of sand dunes there lies an extensive fresh water *jhil* or lagoon. By the year 1904 the island had reached a sufficiently advanced stage in its formation to justify the commencement of cultivation. But it must be remembered that the original intention was not so much the commencement of a *rāiyatwāri* settlement, as the foundation of a seaside resort for the population of Calcutta; in fact a survey of the island was undertaken, prior to reclamation, in the year 1903-04—before the *rāiyatwāri* scheme had been definitely accepted.

**Description of the island.**

120. In 1904 the Government of Bengal placed before the Government of India definite proposals for *rāiyatwāri* settlement in the 24-Parganās Sundarbans; and it was proposed that Fraserganj should form the first centre for *rāiyatwāri* colonisation. It was estimated that the total cost of reclamation, including

**The original scheme of reclamation.**

embankments, clearance of jungle, construction and maintenance of drinking water tanks, and advances to cultivators, would not exceed Rs. 23,000 per square mile or approximately Rs. 22 per *bighā*; this estimate is considerably in excess of the actual expenditure incurred in more recent reclamations of resumed estates in Sāgar Island, where the normal expenditure does not ordinarily exceed Rs. 5 per *bighā*. The Government of India entertained some doubt as to whether the financial advantages anticipated to result from the scheme would be realised; the *rāiyatwārī* proposals were however sanctioned. A general scheme was accordingly drawn up for the reclamation of Nārāyantolā—hereafter called Fraserganj after Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal at the time. To those experienced in Sundarbans reclamation, Fraserganj would seem a difficult area to experiment with; the nature of the island is such as to necessitate the reclamation of the whole area at a time, involving an enormous outlay of capital,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  *lāks* of rupees according to the Government estimate, before any real progress would be apparent and before any return on the heavy outlay could be expected. The more profitable areas are those in which a specified area can be reclaimed in independent sections. The general scheme necessitated the enclosure of the whole island by a massive embankment excluding a portion in the north to be retained as a fuel reserve; interior embankments were to be erected as required. The island was divided into 9 blocks, averaging 1,051 acres each in area and varying in extent from 1284 to 610 acres. Block I in the north (1284 acres in extent) was to be left as a fuel reserve; Block IX (826 acres) and the greater portion of Block VIII (1,105 acres) forming the southern tongue of the island were to be reserved for residential sites; the remaining area of the island, more than 6,000 acres in area would be available for cultivation—the justification for the experiment in *rāiyatwārī* colonisation. In furtherance of this object it was decided that reclamation should commence in the north of the island where the land was higher and accordingly reclamation would be easier, spreading southwards from Blocks II and III, which lay immediately to the south of the Fuel Reserve (Block I).

121. The work of reclamation was commenced in the year 1904-05 under the superintendence of Mr. Sunder, at that time Commissioner, and from 1905 Deputy Collector and Settlement Officer in

the Sundarbans, and the originator of the scheme for the reclamation of Fraserganj. According to the scheme as originally sanctioned the work of reclamation should have been commenced in the north of the island; Mr. Sunder however considered it advisable on his own authority to commence work in the south; the ostensible reason for this was the fear of cholera amongst the coolies, which might be obviated by the existence of the large fresh-water *jhil* in the south of the island. The history of the reclamation points, however, to the conclusion that the real object of developing the southern area more rapidly was to expedite the creation of a seaside resort. In the first year of the work, a small amount of embankment was constructed in the south, and 2,611 acres nominally cleared at a cost of Rs. 65,175. It is necessary to point out that the clearance was only nominal and not sufficient to constitute reclamation. In the 24-Parganās area the completion of circuit embankments is essential, before the cutting of the jungle can make the land fit for cultivation; clearance of jungle before the completion of embankments is of little use, and it is this defective procedure that militated so strongly against the success of the Fraserganj experiment. By the end of the first year's work 25 colonists had settled on the cleared portion of the island. The construction of roads for the sea-side resort had already commenced, and in the following year, roads and embankments were continued, and an additional area of 3,300 acres reported to be cleared; only 2 further families, however, were induced to settle on the clearance. The total expenditure of the year amounted to Rs. 1,49,712. Mr. Sunder was still hopeful. "I believe" he wrote, "that in another season with the reclamation of the whole of the island completed, progress will be great."

122. In the year 1906-07 expenditure continued on a lavish scale to the amount of Rs. 1,21,695 resulting in the clearance of 1,761 acres, the construction of 4 miles of the circuit embankments and 2 miles of cross embankments, while 12 miles of embankments and roads were under repair; much jungle still existed in the north of the island, where the clearance should have commenced, and interest centred in the south where a golf course was under preparation for the sea-side resort. The number of cultivators increased from 27 to 53, and 14 applications for building sites in the residential area were received. Considering that already 7,672 acres of the island had been cleared, covering the whole

**Progress  
1906-08.**

area except the fuel reserve and parts of blocks II, III, IV and X in the north, the demand for land was disappointing, and it was now apparent that it would be difficult to attract a sufficient number of colonists to the island. The attractions of Fraserganj as a sea-side resort were however increased by the running of a subsidised week-end steamer, the "Khatri", from the beginning of January, and by the construction of a *dāk* bungalow at a cost of Rs. 20,000. The programme for 1907-08 was ambitious and included the construction of 15 miles of outer embankment, the damming of 58 *khāls* and the clearing or reclearing of 3,523 acres to complete the reclamation of the island. The programme was not completed, only 8 miles of embankment being constructed, 30 *khāls* dammed and 1,500 acres cleared. Only 1,900 *bighās* of land had been leased out after 4 years of toil, and of this only 506 *bighās* were actually under cultivation; the total revenue payable amounted to Rs. 1,011. During the year the expenditure amounted to Rs. 1,19,163, and in addition to the reclamation work, there now existed a golf course, a landing stage, a *dāk* bungalow and a refuge house constructed at an abnormal cost of Rs. 9,985. During the year the forms of lease for use in Fraserganj were sanctioned by Government; as however they have never been of more than academic interest it is unnecessary to enter into the terms in detail. The *rāiyatwārī* lease was for a period of 25 years at the rate of Rs. 3 per *bighā* the customary Sundarbans rate. No transfers or subleases were permitted except to resident cultivating *rāiyats* and then only with the consent of the Collector; residence on the island was an essential condition of the lease, and Government retained the right of re-entry on failure to clear and cultivate the area leased. The building lease was for a period of 30 years and the land leased could not be sold or sublet without the Collector's permission; the plans of buildings to be erected required the approval of the Collector. On the termination of the lease both land and buildings would revert to Government but the lease would be renewable on conditions and at a rent to be agreed upon; the lease was liable to forfeiture in case the buildings were not completed within two years.

Failure of  
the  
Scheme.

123. The abnormal expenditure and the failure to show any adequate return for the enormous outlay had not escaped the notice of Government. The wasteful method adopted by Mr. Sunder had been



brought to their notice at the commencement of 1907, and in June of that year it was decided that all projects exceeding Rs. 2,500 in value should be treated as public works. The Commissioner of the Presidency Division was requested to make a detailed inspection and this was done in February 1908. The Commissioner's report was not hopeful; up to September 1907, exclusive of the cost of management, Rs. 3,27,233 had been spent on reclamation alone in addition to Rs. 39,497 on other necessary work. Rs. 1,56,000 would still be required for reclamation, Rs. 48,000 for refuge houses as protection against storm waves, and Rs. 40,000 for the health resort, bringing the total to over Rs. 6,00,000. The progress of the work received a not undeserved condemnation. As a result of this inspection Government issued a resolution(a) calling on Mr. Sunder to explain his action, and suggesting that as soon as the reclamation was complete, the whole of Fraserganj should be leased out to a capitalist, a course, which in the opinion of the Government, would be more profitable.

124. The Government resolution resulted in the decrease of the allotment for Fraserganj to Rs. 39,500 and in a reply from the Commissioner(b), who expressed a strong opinion against the adoption of a single definite system for colonisation in the Sundarbans and was inclined to favour a system of reclamation through capitalists. As regards Fraserganj he wrote:—  
 “In my opinion it is too early to pronounce definitely on the success or non-success of the scheme of direct settlement by Government...in the first place the experiment at Fraserganj has not given the new system a fair trial. The island was selected by Mr. Sunder partly because it possessed fairly high lands, which it would be easy to protect from the tides, and partly because there were good means of communication, as it lay on the route of the Assam steamers. The former advantage was lost by commencing work on the south (where good drinking water was available) instead of the north of the island as originally sanctioned, though this has resulted in securing a convenient site for a sea-side resort. The latter advantage has been lost, for the time, by the abandonment of the route by the steamers. It would however have been better for the purposes of the experiment to select some island nearer the mainland and more accessible to cultivators and to

**Progress  
1908-10.  
Proposals  
to abandon  
the  
scheme.**

(a) Resolution No. 1878, dated 27th March 1908.

(b) Board of Revenue to Government No. 365—A. T., dated 10th June 1908.

have devoted attention solely to reclamation." In December 1908 an offer was received from Sir David Yule offering to take the lease of Fraserganj at a rental of annas four per *bighā*; in the absence of a reference to the Government of India on the proposal to revert to the capitalist system, the offer was refused. The work of reclamation continued; in the year 1908-09 an agricultural farm was established on 154 *bighās* of land and the reclamation operations continued. By the close of the year 21,740 *bighās* had been reclaimed nominally leaving only 3,966 *bighās* unreclaimed apart from the fuel reserve. The Commissioner had again to call attention to the fact that funds intended for the outer embankment and essential for reclamation had been diverted for the construction of interior embankments, and caustically remarked that, whereas since 1903 Sir David Hamilton had successfully reclaimed and colonised 12,000 *bighās* of his Guāsāba grant at a cost of two *lākhs*, Government had expended 5 *lākhs* on the partial reclamation of 17,000 *bighās* and the settlement of 40 cultivators. By the 21st April 1909, the work of reclamation so far as Government was concerned had been completed, covering the whole area of the island except 3,860 *bighās* in Block I (the fuel reserve), 2,653 *bighās* in Block II and 308 *bighās* in Block IV. Of the remaining 21,734 *bighās*, only 1,902 *bighās* had been settled with cultivators; 50 *bighās* in Block III, and 1,072 and 780 *bighās* in Blocks VIII and IX in the south, the area reserved for the seaside resort! The total expenditure on the experiment had been Rs. 5,24,184 excluding the cost of management, and of this amount 4½ *lākhs* had been spent on actual reclamation work, at the rate of Rs. 42,240 per square mile against the original estimate of Rs. 23,000.

Abandon-  
ment of  
ralyat-  
war  
scheme.

125. In September 1909(a) the Government of Bengal finally decided to abandon the scheme, mainly for financial reasons, and proposed that Fraserganj should be leased out under the large Capitalist Rules of 1879 subject to certain alterations, firstly that the system of sale by auction should be abandoned, and that tenders should be invited for lease either at a high premium with a low rental or at a normal rental with little or no premium, and secondly that the rights of the few cultivators already settled on the island should be safeguarded by declaring the island to be

(a) Government of Bengal to Government of India No. 2134 T.-R., dated the 22nd September 1909.

a village, within the meaning of the Bengal Tenancy Act and by specific provisions in the lease. The Government of India agreed to these proposals<sup>(b)</sup> and in May 1910 advertisements for tenders were issued and by July 7 offers had been received, the revenue offered for a period of 40 years varying from Rs. 2,54,220 to Rs. 5,55,470. The offers were considered poor, but Government hesitated to take responsibility for the heavy cost of upkeep that a *rāiyatwāri* settlement would entail. The offer of the Mahārājā of Kasimbāzār for a total revenue in 40 years of Rs. 5,42,570 was accepted, the total revenue barely covering the amount that had been spent on the reclamation of the estate. For the first 10 years of the lease, the revenue was fixed at annas two per *bighā* for an area of 20,000 *bighās*, while in the three succeeding decennial periods the rate of revenue was fixed at annas four, annas eight and rupee one anna one per *bighā* for the whole area. Government reserved a strip of land 25 feet broad round the island to prevent claims to accretion and also all existing rights of way, water, easements and minerals. The lessee was bound to keep the Refuge House and embankments in a proper state of repair, in default of which repairs would be undertaken by Government and the cost recovered from the lessee. The lease was heritable and renewable for a period of 15 years at a revenue to be calculated at 60 per cent. of the assets of the lessee, but assignment of the lease was prohibited without the permission of the Commissioner. Government retained the right to re-enter on the estate if the lessee failed to pay the stipulated revenue. The lease was executed on the 2nd December 1910 and confirmed by Government on the 4th February 1911. On the 21st January 1911 a notification was issued, declaring Fraserganj to be a village within the meaning of the Bengal Tenancy Act.

126. How far the new lease will be successful it is impossible to judge; by the year 1915, 350 *rāiyats* had been settled on the estate, and the area reported to be under cultivation was 15,000 *bighās*, and no difficulty was being experienced in procuring *rāiyats* to take up the land. If this was the case, and had Government decided to proceed with the experiment, the revenue to Government in 1915 would have been Rs. 30,000 against Rs. 2,500 under the terms of the

**Criticism  
of the  
Fraserganj  
policy.**

<sup>(b)</sup> Government of India to Government of Bengal No. 1200-429-2, dated the 26th October 1909.

lease, and it is improbable that the cost of management and upkeep on reasonable lines would have exceeded Rs. 10,000 a year as a maximum. Subsequent experience in *rāiyatwāri* colonisation in the Sundarbans has proved that the expenditure in Fraserganj was extravagant, but that even despite the extravagance it would have been profitable to Government to proceed with the scheme. This aspect of the case cannot be described more accurately than in the words of Sir Charles Stevenson-Moore written in 1915:—"The island known as Fraserganj was selected by Mr. Sunder, Commissioner in the Sundarbans, for the trial of this experiment in the 24-Parganās. The selection was not a good one for several reasons. The island (so at least it was said) was so formed that it was necessary to embank practically the whole of it at one time, thereby a very heavy initial capital outlay being entailed. There are many islands in the Sundarbans which have been and are being reclaimed in portions, and I have no doubt such a block could have been discovered for the commencement of this experiment. Then difficulty seems to have been experienced in attracting *rāiyats* to this island, but it can be said that ordinarily there is no difficulty in obtaining *rāiyats* to cultivate Sundarbans lots. Again Mr. Sunder was obsessed by a wild-cat-scheme for converting Fraserganj into a seaside resort for Calcutta business people, and this no doubt contributed in a measure to the extravagant lines on which the experiment was run . . . Mr. Sunder's actual expenditure worked out to the extravagant rate of Rs. 22 per *bighā*, even on the assumption that the whole of the 21,741 *bighās* had been completely reclaimed, although this was very far from being the case. The only possible conclusion is that the work was carried out extravagantly and inefficiently, and that the experiment did not receive a fair trial. In spite of this, however, the scheme, had Government persevered with it, would have probably turned out financially sound. The Commissioner estimated that if the estate were completely settled the rents would in 5 or 6 years amount to Rs. 40,000, but that during these years there would be a loss of Rs. 67,000 in interest. Probably the whole of the land would not have been settled in the time, but the interest at 4 per cent. on  $4\frac{1}{2}$  *lākhs* is only 19,000; so without labouring the point further, it is clear that there was some margin. It is moreover a fact patent to all that *lotdārs* in spite of the revenue

chargeable to them find Sundarbans lots exceedingly remunerative.

“The Government of Bengal, however, embarrassed by financial stringency declined to persevere with the experiment in the 24-Parganās and in their letter to the Government of India applied to lease out Fraserganj on the ground that ‘the experiment has to this extent been unsuccessful that its continuance in the present condition of the provincial finances is impracticable’.”

Whatever the actual financial results of continuing the colonisation of Fraserganj on a *rāiyatwāri* system might have been, it is obvious that they could not have been so unsound financially, as the system which Government has adopted. The average annual revenue to be received by Government during the current lease amounts to Rs. 13,564 a return of only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on the capital invested by Government in the scheme.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### The 24-Parganas Sundarbans.

#### Sagar Island.

**Synopsis  
of the  
period.**

127. In Chapter VIII the development of Sāgar Island has been traced up to the year 1904. With the area of 33 square miles included in the six revenue-free grants of Mud Point, Trowerland (1st portion), Bāmankhāli, Ferintosh, Shikārpur (1st portion) and Dhobelat, this chapter has no concern. The history of the 71 square miles leased out in 14 grants under the rules of 1897 is of great interest and some complexity. Commencing with resumption proceedings from 1904 till 1906, a period of stagnation followed until a new policy was instituted in the year 1915, which aimed at the colonisation on a *rāiyatwāri* basis of the whole of the area resumed. The details of the new *rāiyatwāri* scheme have already been described in paragraph 41 of Chapter V.

**Resump-  
tions of  
1904-1906**

128. The rules of 1897 under which the 14 grants had been made contained 2 penal conditions: the one required the clearance of  $\frac{1}{5}$ th of the total area of each grant by the termination of the 5th year of the lease—the other imposed the obligation of constructing the necessary protective works within four years of the execution of the lease. The penalty for failure in either case was forfeiture of the lease; or in alternative certain monetary penalties. At the beginning of the year 1904, Mr. Sunder commenced the necessary inspection, the results of which may be briefly related now, a more detailed account being given in describing the history of each lot. Only two of the 14 grants, viz., Chak Fuldobi after being allowed one year's grace and Chak Mansadwip (3rd portion) escaped resumption. In 1904 the following grants were resumed for failure to construct the protective works; in every case it appears that the grants were still under jungle; Sāgar Island 1st, 2nd, and 3rd portions, Rāmkarer Char East, Trowerland (2nd portion) and Shikārpur 2nd and 3rd portions. In 1906 Chak Mansadwip, 2nd portion followed in the rout. Only 4 grants remained; in 1904 Rāmkarer Char West was given a year's grace; it was resumed on the 23rd November 1906 and restored to the grantees on the 31st October of the following year. Chak Mansadwip 1st

portion which had been settled on the 13th April 1901 was inspected by Mr. Sunder on the 12th April 1906 and resumed by Government on the 18th August 1906, on the ground that one-eighth of the area had not been cleared. On the 27th July 1909 the area was resettled with one of the co-sharer grantees, but in 1917 the resumption was declared invalid and the original grantees restored to possession. On the 4th September 1906 Chak Goāliā 1st portion was resumed, and was resettled with the lessees on the 28th February 1908. On the 4th September 1906 Chak Goāliā 2nd portion was resumed, but was resettled under the Large Capitalist Rules of 1879 on the 1st April 1908, the conditions regarding protective works being omitted and the ultimate revenue being enhanced by adding a penalty of 20 per cent. on the rate of revenue. By the year 1909 accordingly at the time when the original scheme of *rāiyatwāri* settlements was being abandoned, the fiscal condition of the island was as follows:—

	Number.	Area (bighā).
Revenue-free grants	... 6	63,424
Leases under the rules of 1897	5	51,390
Leases under the rules of 1879	1	10,200
<i>Khās</i> possession of Government	8	67,100

As late as the year 1915 the total revenue derived from the resumed estates amounted to Rs. 6,368 only, averaging  $1\frac{1}{2}$  annas per *bighā*; of the area 3,782 *bighās* only were under cultivation; from five of the properties no revenue at all was derived. With the 6 revenue-free grants and the 6 leases under the rules of 1879 and 1897, this history has no further concern. The next development of the Government estates was the result of a detailed inspection made by Mr. (now Sir) Charles Stevenson-Moore in January 1915.

129. The steps that led to the inception of the new scheme and the details of the new *rāiyatwāri* rules have already been dealt with in paragraph 41; it is necessary, however, to give a concise account of the work that was actually taken in hand, the general scheme being first described and followed by an account of the development in each estate. The new scheme was based on a detailed examination of the resumed grants in Sāgar Island in 1915. It was pointed out that out of the 67,100 *bighās* held by Government, only 3,782 *bighās* were paying rent to Government. No attention had been paid by Government to

**Investiga-  
tions and  
proposals  
of 1915.**

the maintenance and repairs of embankments; in Shikārpur 2nd portion it was found that the tenants were themselves maintaining the embankments, to such advantage to themselves that about 3,000 *bighās* of unauthorised and unassessed cultivation were in existence. The same conditions prevailed throughout the resumed grants; the actual state of affairs was unknown, and no effective agency existed for the management and control of these estates. As a result of this investigation definite proposals were placed before Government :—

- (a) That a record-of-rights and a settlement rent roll should be prepared for Shikārpur 2nd portion, Sāgar Island 3rd portion and Mansadwip 2nd portion, where cultivation already existed, and that all unauthorised cultivation should be assessed,
- (b) That an annual grant of Rs. 15,000 or Rs. 20,000 should be made for the reclamation of Sāgar Island, the work to commence over a block of 1,000 acres in Shikārpur 2nd portion,
- (c) That a Muhammadan Sub-Deputy Collector with a small staff should be placed in charge of the area with a status similar to that of the Colonization Officer in the Bākarganj Sundarbans.

**Progress  
in 1915-16.**

130. In September 1915 the first action was taken on the proposals made by Mr. (now Sir) Charles Stevenson-Moore, and on the 21st of that month Kāzi Muhammad Mahiuddin joined as Colonization Officer. The scheme had not yet received the general sanction of Government and accordingly as all systems of settlement in the area were in abeyance there could be no question of commencing colonization. His work in the year 1915-16 was confined to the expenditure of Rs. 800 on the embankments of Shikārpur 2nd portion and to the collection of rents in the resumed grants held under direct management. The most important result of his deputation however was to put a stop to the many encroachments made on the resumed grants by squatters and neighbouring *lotdārs*; these encroachments will be referred to later. During the same year proposals were made by the Board of Revenue (a) for assessing unauthorised cultivation in Mansadwip 2nd portion and Shikārpur 2nd portion,

(a) Board of Revenue to Government Revenue Department No. 2006G.E., dated the 31st May 1915.



and for repairing and constructing new embankments in the latter resumed grant. In May 1916 Government (a) accepted the proposals of the Board which was asked to submit definite proposals of colonisation work in the year 1917-18 to the amount of Rs. 15,000.

131. In the following year no allotment had yet been made for colonisation, and the work of the Colonisation Officer was again confined to the collection of rent; in the winter of the year, however, settlement operations were commenced under Chapter X of the Bengal Tenancy Act in Shikārpur 2nd portion, Mansadwip 2nd portion and Sāgar Island 3rd portion. Extensive encroachments were discovered in Rāmkarer Char East and it was decided to extend survey operations to that grant. Proposals were made for reclamation work and the repair of embankments in these estates in the following year, and the *rāiyatwāri* rules and leases for the Bākarganj Sundarbans examined in detail with the intention of adapting them to the requirements of the 24-Parganās. The revenue of the resumed grants still remained at Rs. 6,568, derived from Shikārpur 2nd portion, Mansadwip 2nd portion and Sāgar Island 3rd portion, with the addition of Rs. 25 collected from the Port Commissioners of Calcutta for a semaphore on Sāgar Island 1st portion. The remainder of the grants remained untenanted with the exception of Rāmkarer Char East where extensive encroachments had taken place.

Progress  
in 1916-17.

132. It was expected that the year 1917-18 would result in considerable progress in the resumed grants. The resettlement of Shikārpur 2nd portion was completed, and the settlement of the other three resumed grants referred to in the previous paragraph advanced considerably—the details can however be more accurately dealt with in the subsequent history of the resumed grants. Progress was however made in the construction and repairs of embankments, Rs. 240 being spent in Shikārpur 2nd portion, Rs. 5,254 in Mansadwip 2nd portion, Rs. 1,010 in Rāmkarer Char East and Rs. 7,458 in Sāgar Island 3rd portion; an area of 1,216 *bighās* was settled with 101 colonists in Rāmkarer Char East. By this time however the position in the resumed lots had become complicated. No sooner had Government commenced to assert its rights in the resumed lots and to attempt to develop and reclaim them, than litigation was

Progress  
in 1917-18.

(a) Government Revenue Department to Board No. 355 T.R., dated the 16th May 1916.

threatened by the former grantees on the grounds that the resumption proceedings had been invalid. It is unnecessary to enter into details of the alleged defects of the resumption proceedings, but it was immediately apparent that it was impossible for Government to expend money in reclamation, where its title was being assailed and where the success of Government was not assured. In September 1917 (a) it was accordingly decided that no further expenditure should be incurred on the resumed estates regarding which civil suits were pending, until the suits had been disposed of. Reclamation was accordingly postponed in Shikārpur 2nd and 3rd portions and in Mansadwip 2nd portion. It was however, decided that a scheme should be drawn up for an annual expenditure of Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000 in the remainder of the area, that ordinarily the outer embankments only should be erected and maintained by Government, leaving the tenants to clear the jungle and erect and maintain the inner embankments, and that settlement should be entirely *rāiyatwāri*, except that exceptions might be made in the case of certain trespassers up to the extent of 250 acres each. In accordance with this decision a definite programme was drawn up and submitted by the Collector (b) of the 24-Parganās in October 1917. The programme contemplated the reclamation of the whole of the remaining area of the 3rd portions of Sāgar and Ramkarer Char East and Trowerland 2nd portion, an area of 34,100 *bighās*, by the year 1922-23 at an expenditure of Rs. 1,13,482 excluding certain expenditure already incurred. Finally however, it was decided to confine the original reclamation work to the 3rd portion of Sāgar Island where the title of Government was unassailable. Apart from the work already undertaken in the year 1917-18, a revised programme was submitted (c) for reclamation work in Sāgar Island portions 1, 2 and 3 on the following lines :—

			Bighās.
1918-19—Reclamation Sāgar Island	...	(3rd portion)	2,550
1918-19	Ditto	... (2nd „ )	3,000
1918-19	Ditto	... (1st „ )	1,550
1919-20	Ditto	... (1st „ )	3,000
Total			10,100

(a) Collector, 24-Parganās to Board of Revenue D. O. No. 73—Con., dated the 14th September 1917.

(b) Collector, 24-Parganās to Commissioner, Presidency Division, No. K. M. 266-4-17, dated the 8th October 1917.

(c) Collector, 24-Parganās to Commissioner Presidency Division, No. K. M. 19-11-18 dated 14th March 1918.

The programme was sanctioned by the Board of Revenue.

133. It will be more convenient to deal with the litigation in connection with the resumed grants and to recount the result of the settlement operations in the detailed account of each estate. In the year 1918-19 however reclamation work proceeded but was greatly hampered by a severe outbreak of cholera. The reclamation of 2,750 *bighās* in Sāgar Island (third portion) was completed and 808 acres were settled with 305 colonists. Reclamation was also commenced in 1,570 *bighās* of Sāgar Island (first portion), 300 *bighās* of the second portion and the remaining 110 *bighās* of the third portion. The total expenditure in the year under report was Rs. 13,923 mainly in the three portions of Sāgar, the remainder being used for the completion of the work commenced in Mansadwip (second portion), Shikārpur (second portion) and Rāmkarer Char East. It is interesting to note that as a result of the reclamation work and the settlement operations in four of the resumed estates the revenue had increased to a very large extent, as the following statement will show:—

Progress  
in 1918-19.

ESTATE.	1915.		1919.	
	Area settled ( <i>bighās</i> ).	Revenue.	Area settled ( <i>bighās</i> .)	Revenue.
		Rs.		Rs.
Mansadwip (second portion) ...	1,389	2,778	7,120	13,931
Shikārpur ( ditto ) ...	559	838	1,077	2,154
Rāmkarer Char East ...	...	...	1,216	661
Ditto West* ...	...	...	7	13
Sāgar Island (first portion) ...	20	25	8	10
Ditto (third portion) ...	1,775	2,662	4,792	4,085
Total ...	3,743	6,303	14,220	20,854

\* A special lease in a grant under the 1897 Rules.

Of the area in Sāgar Island (third portion) 2,749 *bighās* had not yet been assessed, while a further Rs. 2,079 would be derived from Mansadwip and Rāmkarer Char East on the completion of the assessment. The total ultimate revenue of the area assessed by 1919 amounted to Rs. 35,721.

Progress  
in 1919-20.

134. In the closing year of this period, considerable advance was made in the extension of reclamation, the total sum expended being Rs 19,669 out of an allotment of Rs 25,000. The failure to spend the full amount was due to an objection raised by the Port Commissioners to the reclamation of a block of land, 2,570 *bighās* in extent, situated in Sāgar Island (first and third portions), on the ground that reclamation would result in the silting up of a *khāl* and render useless one of the Hughli river semaphores; for this reclamation a sum of Rs. 5,000 had been allocated. A sum of Rs. 12,002 was spent on successfully completing the reclamation of the 4,680 *bighās* taken up in the three portions of Sāgar Island in the previous year. A sum of Rs. 2,827 was spent in the improvement of existing embankments in Mansadwip (second portion), Shikārpur (second portion), Rāmkarer Char East and Sāgar Island (third portion), the balance being used for establishment and works of less importance. In addition to reclamation 360 colonists were settled on 1,309 acres of land, assessed at an eventual revenue of Rs. 7,800. The following table will show the actual results obtained in the Sāgar Island estates by 1920 as a result of the resettlement of existing leases and the extension of colonisation on a *rāiyatwāri* system:—

ESTATE.	AREA ( <i>bighās</i> ).			Revenue.	
	Total area.	Reclaimed.	Assessed.	Present.	Ultimate.
				Rs.	Rs.
Mansadwip (second portion.)	8 242	8,242	7,120	13 931	14,161
Shikārpur (second portion.)	9,900	1,219	1,077	2,154	2,154
Rāmkarer Char East ...	11,550	1,368	1,216	1,097	2,408
Sāgar Island first portion	6,300	1,578	8	10	7,810
Sāgar Island (second portion.)	3,000	3 000	...	...	
Sāgar Island (third portion).	9,000	4,902	2,043	4,085	9,975
Total ...	47,992	20,309	11,464	21,277	36,508

Out of a total area of approximately 25 square miles available in the estates in which work has been commenced 42 per cent. has now been reclaimed and 24 per cent. has been assessed to rent.

It will be observed that in Trowerland no work has yet been done and the area still lies waste.

Shikārpur (third portion) has been excluded from the table; as the result of a compromise in a civil suit, the estate has been restored to the original grantees under special conditions which are described in the paragraph dealing with the history of the estate; the eventual revenue of the estate from 1930-40 will, however, amount to Rs 6,540. Litigation is still pending with regard to the resumption of Mansadwip (second portion), and Shikārpur (second portion), in the latter the decision of the original court having been in favour of the grantees.

135. Rāmkarer Char East is the largest of the grants made under the rules of 1897, covering an area of 11,550 *bighās*; it was originally leased on the 13th April 1899 for the usual period of 40 years, but was resumed on the 24th June 1904 on the grounds that the grantees had failed to erect protective works, or to reclaim any portion of the grant. At the time of resumption not a single tenant had been settled on the estate. After resumption no attempt was made to reclaim the estate; in 1914 however, it was discovered that on the authority of *amalnāmās* granted by the *lotdār* or Goāliā Chak (first portion), extensive encroachments had been made on the estate. The correct boundary between the two estates was accordingly demarcated, and in 1917 the *lotdār* of Goāliā Chak applied for settlement of the encroached area which amounted to 452 acres as a *chakdār* under Government. The application was refused, and in 1918, following a demarcation under Act V of 1875, the whole of the encroached area was surveyed and settled with the exception of 23 acres under dispute and 31 acres mainly of waste, recorded in the possession of Government, the net area colonised being 398 acres. The area was settled mainly with the cultivators, 101 in number, who were in possession of the encroached portion, the rate of rent for the cultivated portion being fixed at Rs. 2 per *bighā*; for the uncultivated portion a rent-free period of 2 years was allowed and the full rate fixed from 1921-22. The revenue of the first year amounted to Rs. 661 rising in 1921-22 to Rs. 2,408. In order to ensure the success of this colonisation, repairs to the embankments of the estate were undertaken at a cost of Rs. 1,376. The colonisation only covered  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the total area of the estate, and in the original programme of 1917 for the reclamation of Sāgar Island, it was proposed to complete the reclamation of the

History of  
Rāmkarer  
Char East.  
T. No. 2. 51.

estate by the year 1921-22, blocks varying from 2,000 to 3,000 *bighās* in area being reclaimed each year. In the revised programme of 1918, however, it was decided to postpone the reclamation of Rāmkarer Char East until the 3 portions of Sāgar has been completed. Consequently no further progress has been made. The area colonised remains at 452 acres with an ultimate revenue of Rs. 2,408, the whole having been done since the date of resumption. The colonisation of the remaining area of the estate will be commenced from the year 1920-21.

History of  
Trower-  
land  
second  
portion-  
T. No. 2932.

136. The history of Trowerland is brief and up to date of little interest. The original lease dates from the 13th April 1899 for a period of 40 years, covering an area of 6,750 *bighās*. The grant was inspected by Mr. Sunder in 1904, and was resumed by Government on the 24th June of that year. The whole estate at that time lay waste and no attempt had been made to construct the protective works required by the terms of the lease. No attempt has yet been made to reclaim the estate, the greater part of which is now covered by wild *hetal* palms; the boundaries of the estate remain intact. Reclamation will not be commenced until the three portions of Sāgar Island have been completed according to the existing programme.

History of  
Mansadwip  
second  
portion  
T. No. 3024.

137. Mansadwip (second portion) covering an area Rs. 7,900 *bighās* was originally settled for a period of 40 years under the rules of 1897 from 1st April 1901 by a lease dated the 16th July 1901. The lot was inspected by Mr. Sunder on the 2nd February 1904. At that time little jungle clearing had been done and no protective works had been constructed. The lot was again inspected on the 12th April 1906 and it was reported that the clearance conditions had not been fulfilled and no protective works had yet been made. The estate was accordingly resumed by Government on the 18th August 1906. A certain amount of settlement was then effected, and a rent-roll prepared in 1909 showed 32 tenants in possession of 1,339 *bighās* of land paying Rs. 1,578 as revenue; a subsequent settlement brought the total area up to 1,389 *bighās* paying Rs. 2,778 as revenue. Subsequently the tenants of the estate and of the adjoining *lotdāri* grant, Mansadwip (first portion), cleared the whole area of the estate. In order to obtain a full assessment a survey and record-of-rights of the estate were commenced under the Bengal Tenancy Act. Excluding an area of 130 acres in possession of the *lotdār* of Mansadwip

(1st portion), the area of the estate was found to be 2,725 acres; of this area 371 acres is recorded as unculturable waste; 1,833 acres were found under cultivation, and the remaining 50 acres of virgin jungle and 471 acres of recent clearance were colonised. The rent-roll showed a total of 352 cultivators possessing 2,354 acres of land assessed at a revenue of Rs. 14,240 against a former revenue of Rs. 2,778. This settlement was confirmed in 1918, when orders were also issued for the ejectment of the *lotdār* from the area of 130 acres encroached on by him. This estate furnishes a good example of the possibilities of colonising the Sāgar Island estates; it furnishes an equally good example of the difficulties inherent in the area. The colonisation work necessitated a considerable amount of work on the embankments of the estate, and the work was taken in hand and completed between 1917 and 1920. In the meantime in July 1917, however, the widow of the original grantee threatened to file a suit against Government, declaring the resumption to be invalid. The suit was filed and is at present pending in the Civil Courts. It should be noted that if the plaintiff succeeds, the maximum revenue that Government will be able to collect till the termination of the first period of the lease in 1941 will be Rs. 1,481 against the revenue now fixed at Rs. 14,240, a startling commentary on the respective values of *lotdāri* and *rāīyatwāri* settlements.

138. Shikārpur (2nd portion) having an area of 9,900 *bighās* was leased under the rules of 1897 with effect from the 13th April 1900, for a period of 40 years. In 1904 the grant was examined by Mr. Sunder, and on his report that the terms of the grant had not been complied with, the lot was resumed by Government on the 25th July 1904. A rent-roll of the estate was prepared in 1909 from which it appeared that 36 tenants were cultivating 498 *bighās* of land, which were assessed at Rs. 747. By 1910, 47 tenants were in possession of 559 *bighās* which were assessed at a revenue of Rs. 838. An inspection made in the year 1915 showed that there had been considerable encroachments on the estate by squatters and by the grantees of the Shikārpur revenue-free grant and their tenants. It was accordingly decided to make a survey and prepare a record-of-rights of the cultivated portion of the estate leaving the waste area for subsequent colonisation. The survey was commenced in 1916 and covered an area of 403 acres, 55 acres of which had

History of  
Shikarpur  
2nd portion  
T. No. 2933.

been encroached on by the grantees and tenants of Shikārpur (1st portion). Of this total area 47 acres were recorded as unculturable waste, the remaining 356 acres in possession of 100 tenants being assessed at the rate of Rs 2 per *bighā*, the total revenue amounting to Rs. 2,154 against the former revenue of Rs. 838. The proceedings were completed in 1917. The extent of cultivation, covering almost one quarter of the estate rendered it necessary for Government to repair the existing embankments in order to ensure the success of cultivation. In 1915-16 Rs. 800 were expended on repairs, in 1916-17 a further sum of Rs. 240 was spent; up to the year 1920 the total expenditure on the estate has been Rs. 1,661. Proposals had been made in 1917 for reclaiming an additional area of 2,000 *bighās* by repairing the old *lotdāri* embankments—the institution of a civil suit however in the same year for a declaration that the resumption proceedings were invalid necessitated the suspension of any further attempt at reclamation. The original grantees had petitioned in 1915 for the restoration of the lot; their petition was however refused, and on the commencement of a regular settlement a suit was filed by them against Government. During the pendency of the suit a compromise was suggested, but negotiations proved abortive and the case was allowed to run its course. In 1920 the resumption proceedings were declared by the original court to have been invalid, and the original lessees were ordered to be restored to possession, but an appeal against this decision is now pending. If the appeal fails the ultimate revenue in the current settlement will be Rs. 1,856 against a probable revenue on a *rāiyatwāri* settlement of Rs. 17,000.

History of  
Shikarpur  
3rd portion  
T. No. 2987.

139. Shikārpur (3rd portion) was one of the grants leased on the 13th April 1900 for a period of 40 years, and covered an area of 10,900 *bighās*; it succumbed beneath the wave of inspections in 1904 and was resumed by Government on the 27th September 1904. The whole estate was waste and up to the present time has yielded no revenue, and being bounded by Shikārpur (2nd portion) and rivers, has not suffered from encroachments; there is no trace of any embankment in the estate. Up to the year 1916 there is no history to record, but in that year the original lessees threatened to file a suit against Government to declare the resumption proceedings invalid. Owing to the fact that there were admittedly defects in the resumption



proceedings, the Board of Revenue originally agreed to negotiate for a compromise by granting the original lessees a tenure within the estate; the lessees however declined the proposed terms, and ultimately a compromise was effected restoring the lessees to possession under revised conditions, which differ from the original lease in the following respects. The grantees were admitted to settlement as temporary tenure-holders for 20 years in place of "an occupancy right which shall be hereditary and transferable" for 40 years; the allowance for unassessable area was reduced from  $\frac{1}{4}$ th to  $\frac{3}{5}$ th; provisions for the construction of protective works were omitted, while the rent-free period was reduced from 15 to 5 years, the rate of rent being enhanced to 8 annas per *bigā* from the 6th to the 10th year and to 12 annas from the 11th to the 20th year against a maximum of 4 annas per *bigā* from the 21st to the 40th year in the original lease. In place of the stipulated clearance of  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the area by the end of the 5th year in the original lease the lessees were required to clear  $\frac{2}{5}$ th of the area by the end of the 5th and  $\frac{3}{5}$ th of the area by the end of the 10th year. They were granted a preferential claim to all future settlements on condition that the terms of the previous lease had been carried out and on agreeing to the terms proposed by Government. The penalty for forfeiture on failure to fulfil the clearance conditions was omitted, the lessees accepting the alternative term of a penalty of 4 annas per *bigā*. Under the terms of this lease the estate will be held revenue-free until 1924; from then until 1929 the annual revenue will be Rs. 4,360 and from 1929 till 1940 Rs. 6,540 against a revenue of Rs. 2,044 per annum from 1920 to 1940 under the old lease; under the new lease the total revenue for the full period of the lease amounts to Rs. 87,200 against Rs. 45,990 under the original lease. The new lease was finally executed on the 23rd December 1919.

140. The history of the three portions of Sāgar, being the area in which the reclamation scheme has been applied can be narrated most conveniently together. The first and second portions, containing 7,395\* and 3,000 *bigās* respectively, constituted the first grants made in 1898 under the rules of 1897 and were resumed on failure to fulfil the conditions of the grant

**History of  
Sagar  
Island 1st,  
2nd and  
3rd  
portions  
T. No. 2928  
and 2968.**

\* According to more recent calculations the area is now given as 6,300 *bigās*.

on the 27th July 1904; the third portion, containing an area of 9,705 *bihgās* was leased from the 13th April 1900 at an ultimate revenue of Rs. 1,820 under the same rules, and was resumed by Government, for failure to construct the protective works, on the 29th September 1904. Up to the year 1915 when definite proposals for *rāiyatwāri* settlement were first formulated the revenue derived from the 1st portion amounted to Rs. 25 being the rent paid by the Port Commissioners for a Semaphore Station; no revenue was derived from the 2nd portion. In the 3rd portion however a considerable amount of cultivation existed, and in 1909 a rent-roll was prepared showing 1,794 *bighās* assessed at a rental of Rs. 1-8 per *bighā*; in 1915 the total revenue amounted to Rs. 2,662 assessed on 1,774 *bighās*. Owing to the incompleteness of the rent-roll it was determined to survey the estate and prepare an accurate record-of-rights and rent roll under the Bengal Tenancy Act. These operations commenced in 1916-17 and were completed in 1918. The operations were confined to the reclaimed area, which, excluding 13 acres held rent-free for the Sāgar Light House, covered 700 acres, of which 25 acres were unassessable. The remaining area, 675 acres, in occupation of 126 *rāiyats*, was assessed at Rs. 4,085 at the rate of Rs. 2 per *bighā*, against the former revenue of Rs. 2,662. Before the commencement of the colonisation scheme accordingly the total revenue of the three portions of Sāgar Island amounted to Rs. 4,110. In the original programme prepared for the colonisation of Sāgar Island in 1917 it was proposed to repair the embankments in the reclaimed area of Sāgar Island (3rd portion) in 1917-18, to complete the reclamation of that portion between 1919 and 1921 and to reclaim the first and second portions in 1921-23. In the revised programme of 1918, the work of reclamation was to be advanced on the following lines:—

1917-18—	Rs.
Repair of existing embankment in 3rd portion	4,928
Reclamation of 2,550 <i>bighās</i> (partly) in 3rd portion	4,988
1918-19—	
Completion of reclamation of 2,550 <i>bighās</i> in 3rd portion	4,732
Reclamation of 4,550 <i>bighās</i> in 1st and 2nd portion	11,000

	Rs.
1919-20—	
Reclamation of 3,000 <i>bighās</i> in 1st portion	
... ..	10,000
Total	35,648

Actual progress has not entirely tallied with the programme. In 1917-18 a sum of Rs. 7,458 was expended on old and new embankments in the 3rd portion, against the estimate of Rs. 9,916. In the following year the work was extended to cover an area of 2,750 *bighās* in the 3rd portion which were completely embanked at a cost of Rs. 10,686. Embankments were commenced in 4,570 *bighās* of the 1st and 2nd portions and in an additional 110 *bighās* of the 3rd portion but the work was greatly hampered by an outbreak of a virulent epidemic of cholera. 2,749 *bighās* in the 3rd portion were colonised with 305 settlers at a rental of Rs. 2 per *bighā*, commencing from 1921-22. In 1919-20 the area in which embankments were commenced in all three portions was completely reclaimed at a cost of Rs. 12,002, and 3,900 *bighās* were settled with 360 new colonists almost entirely in the 1st and 2nd portions. A slight setback occurred in this year owing to a decision to abandon the reclamation of 2,570 *bighās* in the 1st and 3rd portions on an objection of the Port Commissioners. The total area reclaimed in this group of estates now amounts to 9,480 *bighās*, practically the whole of which has been actually colonised.

## CHAPTER XV.

## The problem of the Sundarbans.

Develop-  
ment now  
guided by  
fluvial  
laws.

141. In his "History of the rivers in the Gangetic Delta 1750-1918" Mr. Addams—Williams builds his narrative round the quotation "Rivers first create the land, then fertilise it and finally distribute its produce." The history of the Sundarbans constitutes such an account of river action and it is merely the fact that revenue is more concerned with land than with water that has tended in this book to hide the importance of the rivers of the Sundarbans. In Bākarganj, the land has already been created and fertilised, and the rivers distribute the produce of the granary of Bengal. To a lesser extent creation and fertilisation of the land is complete in the Khulnā Sundarbans, but the value of the natural produce of the soil—the *sundri* tree—has compelled the tiller of the soil to yield precedence to the hewer of wood. In the 24-Parganās, however, the stage of fertilisation is not yet complete, and over the greater part of the area the time has not arrived when the rice field will supplant the less precious jungle—with its produce of reeds and firewood, of bees-wax and honey. After exactly a century and a half of experiments, commencing in 1770 with the *pātilābādi* leases granted by Claude Russell, the Collector-General, the importance of river regime has now been recognised, and the development of the Sundarbans in its several parts now bows to the laws of the rivers which formed the land. A few words will suffice to summarise the results of work done and the problem of future administration.

The  
Bākarganj  
Sundar-  
bans in  
1920.

142. In Bākarganj, a fiscal system of such complexity, as is unknown in other parts of the Presidency of Bengal, has been reduced from chaos to order. This complexity was due to the fluctuating system of resumption and grants of forest areas for the purpose of cultivation grafted on the confusing mania for subinfeudation, rampant throughout the district. But order has not been achieved without effort. In the older leases and grants the present state of order is due to the thoroughness of the survey and settlement operations—"a model for Sundarbans settlements for all time." In the area, which

in 1905 lay waste and unprofitable, credit must be given to the colonisation scheme and its rapid and efficient extension of cultivation. Before 12 years have elapsed, should no calamity of nature intervene, every acre of available waste land will be under lease, producing its wealth of rice for the cultivator and its quantum of revenue to Government. But the credit that may be due to the administration, has depended entirely on the work of the rivers. The land has been well-raised, and the Haringhātā, Bishkhālī and Buriswar rivers continue to raise and fertilise the land with their silt-laden waters drawn from the main streams of the Ganges and Brahmaputra. Such is the activity of the rivers in these parts that the Irrigation Department has withdrawn all its powers of control.

143. Between the Haringhātā and Rāimangal rivers, the Khulnā Sundarbans present a less pleasing aspect. 45 years have passed since the idea of reclamation was abandoned, and the greater part of the area was declared to be reserved forest. There is no questioning the correctness of that decision, and, even apart from the question of fluvial necessities, the value of the forest produce has justified the policy adopted. But the disappearance of the possibility of reclaiming the forest appears to have resulted in a parallel disappearance of interest in the area cultivated or available for cultivation. It is difficult to apportion the blame between the system of administration and the officers in control. Records are in confusion; little is known of the grants already made; whether any land remains for reclamation is a matter of considerable doubt. Order cannot be restored until a survey and record-of-rights have followed in the path of the Bākarganj pioneers. The question of reclamation on an extensive scale does not arise. In Khulnā the policy of restricting reclamation has fortuitously harmonised with the necessities of river action. The Reserved Forest constitutes a vast area for tidal spill, which enables the rivers of the area to pursue their natural career of development, untrammelled by the existence of embankments which restrain their spill. The land at the mouth of the estuaries is subject to a natural process of elevation, and when this is completed an extension of the delta southwards may be expected. In the meantime the natural process of flood and spill has conferred on the area a condition of health, probably unequalled in the remaining tracts of the Sundarbans.

**The Khulna  
Sundar-  
bans in  
1920.**

**The 24-  
Parganas  
Sundar-  
bans in  
1920.**

144. The problems of the 24-Parganās Sundarbans are probably more complex than those of Khulnā or Bākarganj. There is little doubt that up to the year 1904 reclamation proceeded at too rapid a pace; consideration of the problems of irrigation was unthought of, despite the fact that the security of the channel to the port of Calcutta depended largely on the treatment of the Sundarbans tract. Of the area reclaimed by 1904 it cannot be said that knowledge is complete; the area still awaits the test of survey and settlement operations, and it would be futile to suppose that the test will be passed more easily than in Bākarganj. Subsequent extension of reclamation has practically been confined to Sāgar Island—a tract with characteristics *toto caelo* heterogeneous from the remainder of the area and suffering still from excessive doses of experiments. How far and within what period reclamation operations can be extended into the vast area of protected forests is still unknown. But here the claims of the wood-cutter must yield eventually to those of the cultivator, while those of the cultivator, in his turn, must be dependent on the requirements of the river system. A survey of levels to decide on the rival claims has been sanctioned, but not yet undertaken, and as the work of reclamation in Sāgar Island proceeds towards its close, the survey has now become a matter of some urgency. River action in the area is a complex problem and one of vital importance. The delta near the mouth of the river Hughli is in a peculiar stage of transition, complicated by the requirements of the town of Calcutta and the channel to the Port. Since the change in the course of the Ganges some centuries ago cut off the headwaters from the river Hughli to the river Gorāi, the area of the delta that forms the 24-Parganās Sundarbans has depended for its development on tidal action alone, not on the action of the rivers mainly as in Bākarganj, nor on the combined action of tides and rivers as in Khulnā. The delta is accordingly developing backwards from south to north, and the seaward face is more elevated than the interior; the erection of embankments at an early date in the interior has further complicated the situation, and has resulted in the creation of a series of ridges interspersed with low lying areas protected by embankments from the benefits of tidal spill. In the Protected Forest area where embankments do not yet exist there is still time to avoid this unnatural development;

and it must be the policy of the future to arrest reclamation in that area till the tidal spill has done its work—to avoid heavy embanking until the height of the land is a sufficient protection against the highest tides, at the same time guarding against the dangers involved in the rise of the tidal wave as development progresses. The complexity and importance of the problem have now been realised and in this area river requirements must ever remain the essential condition of any extension of reclamation.

145. Had the river problem been the same in the several parts of the Sundarbans, it is possible that an easier solution might have been found to the problem, not so much of the method as of the possible extent and rapidity of reclamation. Without doubt the method would soon have adapted itself to the realisation of the prevalent conditions. It is impossible now to wipe clean the slate; human agency has defeated the rivers in their normal process of creating and fertilising the land; vested rights and interests have been created in vast areas to rob the rivers now of their curative powers. But where no individual rights have yet been created, where Government still retains complete freedom of action, in the colonisation tracts of Bākarganj, the reserved forests of Khulnā, and the protected area of the 24-Parganās the lesson is being applied and the problem of the rivers must control all future development in the Sundarbans. The real problem is not the rival claims of tillage, forest and waste, but the claims of nature and man.

**The policy  
of the  
future.**



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