

A SURVEY
OF
THE INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES
OF EASTERN BENGAL AND
ASSAM

FOR
1907-1908]

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SHILLONG :

PRINTED AT THE EASTERN BENGAL AND ASSAM SECRETARIAT PRINTING OFFICE.

1908.

INTRODUCTION.

THE primary object of the present survey has been to ascertain the existing condition of the indigenous industries of the province, with the object of enabling Government to determine what practical measures might be adopted to encourage and develop the most promising amongst such industries. But as the birth of modern industrial enterprise amongst Indians of the province is of a very recent date, and as it is not unlikely that the resources of the country will be exploited by them to a far greater extent in the future, than has been the case in the past, a short account of its resources and industrial possibilities, and the actual achievements of European enterprise, has not been considered out of place in this report. Besides, no hard-and-fast division of the spheres of indigenous and foreign enterprise actually obtains in practice, and the whole trend of the advance of modern India has been for the Indians to follow in the footsteps of the material conquests of the West.

A similar survey for the Upper Provinces and for Bengal have just been completed; and the excellent reports of Mr. Chatterji and Mr. Cumming are now before the public. Indeed, the brilliant and clear-sighted elucidation of the present day industrial problems of India, by those and other writers like Mr. Chatterton, has left me very little more to say about the broader aspects of the question. As regards the industries of this province, there already exists a far more numerous literature on the subject, in the shape of Monographs, Gazetteers, Administration Reports, etc., than is generally supposed to be the case. The line which I have followed therefore has been to collect as much first-hand information as possible, and to engraft this on the body of information already available, and thus to present a self-contained note on each subject. Perhaps this report would have gained both in brevity and incisiveness, if I had made it less descriptive and more critical, but having regard to the limited character of my own personal observations, and the want of any expert training, I decided to adopt the less ambitious plan of making this note more a synopsis of all the information to which I had access, than a criticism of existing methods and institutions.

The report has been divided into two parts. The first contains a detailed account of the industries, and possible industrial openings of the province. In the second, I have attempted to offer a few suggestions about the measures which might be adopted by Government, for the encouragement of indigenous enterprise, chiefly in the light of the recommendations already made by the Governments of Madras, United Provinces and Bengal. I have not, however, hesitated to recommend deviations from any line of policy laid down for the other provinces, where the special requirements and possibilities of this province seemed to demand an independent or a more cautious plan of action. The last part also contains information on the subject of the existing system of "Technical Education" of the province, with some general observations about the economic and industrial condition, and industrial capabilities of the people inhabiting the province. I have also thought it my duty to be quite outspoken in pointing out, that it would be impossible for Government to undertake any far-reaching and comprehensive measures in this matter, unless there is greater co-ordination between the leaders of public opinion in the country and the Government, than is unfortunately the case at present.

As regards the treatment of "industries" in the first part of this report, I have not followed any scientific or economic principle of classification. For whether we base our classification on the materials consumed by the industries, or the method of work followed, it is impossible to adopt any principle of subdivision in which the major heads will not overlap. Besides, any scientific principle of classification seems quite unnecessary for the purposes of this report. I have, therefore, dealt with the industries more or less in the order of their importance, from an indigenous point of view. Naturally also, prominence has been given, and more space allotted, to describing the existing indigenous industries of the province, amongst which "weaving" is by far the most important, than in outlining either the resources, or the possible industrial openings of the province.

Lastly, I have to express my gratitude to all District Officers, for their ready assistance in furnishing me with much useful information about the industries of their districts. The notes prepared by Babu Shitala Kanta Ganguli, Deputy Collector, on the industries of Dacca were specially full and instructive.

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