



# Immigrations And Settlements: Exploring Population Patterns In 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Cachar

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## Abstract:

The paper explores the intricate facets of Cachar during the 19th century, covering governance, geographical boundaries, land tenure systems, and demographic shifts under British rule. It unravels the historical fabric of Cachar, tracing its journey from pre-British independence under the Cachari Rajah to the transformative period post-British annexation in 1832. The focus is on understanding population dynamics in 19th-century Cachar, with a specific lens on immigration and settlement patterns, utilizing a historical perspective to grasp the variables influencing population movements. The study delves into the evolution of land settlements and the roles played by diverse communities in shaping the socio-economic landscape of Cachar. It provides insights into the administrative changes, economic development, and governance that contributed to the dynamic forces shaping Cachar's historical trajectory. Fundamentally, the paper seeks to recount the narratives of individuals and communities who migrated to Cachar, delving into the nuanced factors that influenced immigration. By examining the push and pull forces influencing population trends, the paper sheds light on how these movements impacted the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the region. The paper underscores the significance of comprehending these historical movements for a subtle understanding of Cachar's intricate 19th-century narrative.

**Keywords:** Cachar, Economic Development, Immigration, Population, Land Tenure, Settlement

## 1. Introduction

CACHAR, also known as HAIRUMBO, was governed by the Cachari Rajah, also referred to as Dimasa Cachari. Until 1832, it was under British governance, largely subordinate to the Bengal presidency [1]. Prior to British annexation, Cachar enjoyed independence under its hereditary dynasty of princes, with a significantly larger territory [2]. Geographically, it is situated between latitudes 24° and 97° North and longitudes 92° and 94° East, bordered by Assam to the north, Cassay to the east, Tipperah to the south, and Sylhet and Jyanthia to the west. Its north-south length spans approximately 140 miles. The British first encountered Cachar when Mr. Vereist led a small expedition into the region in 1763, prior to which it remained unknown to them. In 1774, the Burmese attacked Cachar, subsequently establishing it as a tributary. In 1810, they installed the Rajah of Munipoor on Cachar's throne, leading to a civil war between him and his brothers from 1818 to 1823. Through the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826, Cachar came under British protection, reinstating the rightful raja. However, upon the raja's death in 1830 without an heir, Cachar was fully assimilated into British territory in 1832 [3].

After the assassination of Raja Govind Chunder in 1830, Cachar was integrated into British territories and placed under the administration of a Superintendent. The transfer of Cachar's province to British governance occurred upon Raja Govind Chunder's demise as per the terms of the 1826 Treaty. Captain T. Fisher was dispatched as a military officer to assume control of the region, vested with the authority of a collector and magistrate, on June 30, 1830, establishing headquarters initially in Cherrapunji. In 1833, headquarters were relocated first to Dudpatil and then to Silchar. On August 14, 1832, the Governor General in Council proclaimed the formal annexation of the plain region of Cachar to British dominion. Captain T. Fisher was appointed as the inaugural Superintendent of the District, succeeded in service by individuals such as Messrs I.G. Burns, E.R. Lyons, E.S. Person, P.G. Verner, among others. Following the death of Senapati Tularam in 1854, North Cachar was absorbed into British Dominion and amalgamated with Cachar. By proclamation on February 6, 1874, Cachar was incorporated into the Chief Commissionership of Assam, and the position of Superintendent was redesignated as Deputy Commissioner, with Mr. R. Stuart serving as the first Deputy Commissioner of the District. The province was encompassed by high mountains on three sides, with a few minor hills scattered across the densely forested plains, giving the appearance of lakes during the monsoon season. In 1834, the Barak River overflowed its banks, leading to the inundation of the entire Cachar region and the destruction of numerous villages. With 236 villages or 10,341 houses, and covering a surface area of 7,600 square miles, Cachar had no large or populous towns; villages were situated along the banks of the Barak River from Luckhipoor to Budderpoor, while the interior remained sparsely populated. The northern part was characterized by extremely mountainous terrain and was inhabited sparsely by Cacharies and Nagas [4].

## 2. Objectives

- To explore the historical context that shaped population patterns, considering political, economic, and environmental factors.
- To identify push and pull factors influencing immigration to Cachar during the 19th century.
- To illuminate the stories of various communities that migrated to Cachar and their contributions to the region's development

## 3. Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study involved a thorough historical analysis focused on unraveling the complex dimensions of 19th-century Cachar. Extensive exploration of historical records and archival documents, such as administrative reports, treaties, and official correspondence, formed a foundational aspect of the research. A critical aspect of the methodology included the analysis of land settlement records, shedding light on the evolution of land tenure systems, economic development, and the impact of immigration on the region. Furthermore, demographic data, drawn from census reports and population estimates, was systematically analyzed to discern patterns and shifts in Cachar's population dynamics throughout the 19th century.

## 4. Land Tenure and Governance in Colonial Jungle Lands

In a country characterized by dense jungles, colonizers believed it was natural for settlers to establish corporations for safety, support, and socialization. These individual settlers were known as mirasdars, a term globally used to describe colonists or conquerors who cleared the land and initially settled, earning what was perceived as a strong title that could be inherited to some extent and was seen as permanent for agricultural purposes [5]. However, it's important to note that the Kachari ruler's authority was that of a conqueror, and wherever the mirasdars settled, they did so with the understanding that their rights were no greater than those recognized by the ruler. In reality, the rights acquired by the mirasdars in earlier times were likely limited, as highlighted by the Chief Commissioner in 1881: "The tenure of the mirasdars is relatively recent, having developed under our administration, as the majority of the district was uncultivated when we assumed control in 1830. They have no further rights beyond those determined by the government, the sole landlord, either rightfully or wrongfully, except those granted by the government or allowed to emerge. The idea that they could hold the land on any other terms besides paying the government-imposed tax has not been endorsed, either explicitly or implicitly [6]"

### 4.1. Evolution of Administration and Economic Development in Cachar: Superintendents and Land Settlements

Thomas Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar from 1832 to 1835 [7], implemented reforms to improve the rural economy, transitioning revenue payment from kind to cash and conducting land surveys [8]. Despite the uninhabited nature of the region upon his arrival, Fisher's tenure saw the discovery and assessment of significant arable land, attracting migrants from Sylhet and resulting in increased revenue collection and population growth

[9]. During the initial eighteen months of Fisher's administration in Cachar, Captain Pemberton approximated that around 12,000 individuals had migrated from Sylhet [10].

J.G. Burns, appointed Superintendent of Cachar in April 1836 [11], conducted the first regular scientific land settlement from May 1838 to April 1843, aiming to attract new settlers by slightly lowering revenue rates [12]. Dividing the land into categories, he imposed revenue rates, with jungle lands settled for three years at Rs. 2-8-0 per kulba, and bari lands left rent-free, benefiting Mirasdars who had cleared and farmed jungle lands for more revenue than they paid [13].

Lieutenant E.R. Lyons served as the interim Superintendent of Cachar from June to December 1839, before becoming the full-fledged Superintendent until 1849 [14]. He focused on improving Cachar's economic status, establishing the Rai Bahadur settlement in 1842, covering 97,904 acres and maintaining previous revenue rates. Jungle lands were assessed at increasing rates over 15 years, with Mirasdars given permission to relinquish excess jungle land, resulting in the addition of 1,458 new estates and increased revenue totaling Rs. 67,660 by 1854-55 [15].

G. Verner, with assistance from Lieutenant R. Stewart, aimed to improve Cachar's financial standing. In 1850–1851, he allowed Mirasdars to relinquish jungle concessions from the Rai Bahadur Settlement of 1842-43, compensating for revenue loss through periodic new settlements [16]. Additionally, Verner settled specific jungle tracts for fifteen years, establishing 972 estates totaling 70,216 acres and generating a total land revenue of Rs. 81,676 by 1857–1858 [17].

The district's administration was led by R. Stewart, the last Superintendent and first Deputy Commissioner of Cachar (1857–1866), with assistance from other officials like as J.F. Sherer, Dr. Clement Scone, Dr. S.M. Shircore, and J.W. Edgar [18]. He started a new settlement in 1858–1859, imposing a 20-year term based on Lieutenant Thuillier's survey and delaying its expiration date by one year [19]. This settlement covered cultivated areas collected for assessment, and with the exception of Major Verner's previously settled jungle lands, reduced the number of estates to 6,120, totaling 132,542 acres and generating a minimum revenue of Rs. 90,631 [20].

Table 1: Progression of Settlement Coverage and Corresponding Revenue Demand with Jungle/Forest Land Utilization

Year	1830	1838-39	1842-43	1855-56	1858-59
<b>Settled Area (Acres)</b>	20663	36430	97904	70216	132542
<b>Revenue(Rs.)</b>	21411	24974	43146	37123	90631
<b>Jungle land</b>	Not specified	6261	30043	70216	Not specified

The data provided in table 1 shows the settled area and revenue generated in Cachar over the years 1830 to 1858-59.

- The settled area gradually increased over the years, starting from 20,663 acres in 1830 to 132,542 acres in 1858-59. This indicates a significant expansion of cultivated land in the region, likely due to efforts to clear jungle areas for agriculture and settlement.
- Similarly, the revenue generated also increased over time, reflecting the growth in agricultural productivity and economic activity in Cachar. Revenue rose from Rs. 21,411 in 1830 to Rs. 90,631 in 1858-59, indicating a substantial increase in income from land taxation.
- The data also highlights the significant role of jungle land in the settlement and revenue generation process. Jungle land was not specified in 1830 but became increasingly important, reaching 70,216 acres in 1855-56. This suggests that the clearing and cultivation of jungle land contributed significantly to the expansion of settled areas and the increase in revenue over time.

The data suggests a phase of agricultural and economic advancement in Cachar, marked by the expansion of cultivated regions, enhanced agricultural output, and the noteworthy role played by jungle land in fostering the region's progress and prosperity.

#### **4.2 Tea Cultivation in Cachar: A Land Survey Analysis**

Captain Thuiller surveyed a portion of Cachar in 1845 and found that it covered 650 square miles, or 416,190 acres, of which 70,928 acres were under cultivation and the remaining portion was designated as wasteland [21]. By 1859–1860, it was estimated that Cachar had about 200,000 acres of land ideal for tea planting, however none had been formally surveyed by the Indian government [22]. More than 600,000 acres of uncultivated land in Cachar are set aside for the tea business; a large portion of this area is still suitable for cultivation despite being used for other purposes, such as grazing and forest production. Mismanagement has resulted in underutilization of land allocations for tea cultivation, although certain enterprises have successfully employed them for this purpose [23].

#### **5. Geographical Delimitation of British Dominions**

The region transferred to British dominion is delineated by Sylhet and Jynteeah to the west, Assam to the north, Muneepoor to the east, and Tripurah to the south. Originally divided into three segments, two situated north of a substantial mountain range, forming the western terminus of the Garo hills, while the third, formerly Northern, Central, and Southern Cachar, lies to the south of this significant geographical feature [24].

Table 2: Division and Demographics of Cachar Regions under British Dominion [25]

Cachar Kingdom	Area (Sq. mile)	Population	Density People/Sq.m
South Cachar	2866	50,000	17.44
Central Cachar	2924	14,000	4.78
North Cachar	1,417	6000	4.23
Total	7207	70,000	9.71

With an estimated 50,000 people, the people of Southern Cachar are divided into several communities, each with its own distinctive traditions. When it came to combining Hindu and native customs, the Cacharies, while not the most numerous, were crucial to the administration of the area. Mainly following Dayabhaga law, most petty Talookdars, who are descended from Muslim emigrants from Bengal, are ignorant of Islamic law. With more intelligent leaders, the third group is made up of Hindu ancestors from Bengal and Assam. The growth of the area has been greatly aided by notable settlers such as the Munipoorie, but tribes like the Kookies and Nagas are mainly restricted to the nearby hills [26]. A population of about 14,000 people lived in the Central Cachar hill area, according to the census taken under Rajah Krishna Chandra. Among them, 6,000 were Cacharies, 7,500 were Kookies, and the rest were Loloongs. The region's modest income was significant due to its role in connecting major districts to the north and south. The table provides details on the population and density of Cacharies during that period [27].

### 5.1 Impact of Wasteland Grant in the Demography

The British administrators implemented various land settlements in Cachar from 1832-1867, overseen by different superintendents. These settlements, aimed at revenue generation, resulted in significant demographic changes. The population, estimated at 50,000 [28] in 1841 [29] by Capt. Stewart, increased to 60,000, and later Major Stewart reported a substantial rise 85,000 [30] and later in 1865 as per Major Stewart estimation, the population has increased to 2,20000 [31]. However, Superintendent E. R Lyons reported a population of 80,000 as early as 1842, indicating the successful impact of immigration on population growth in Cachar [32].

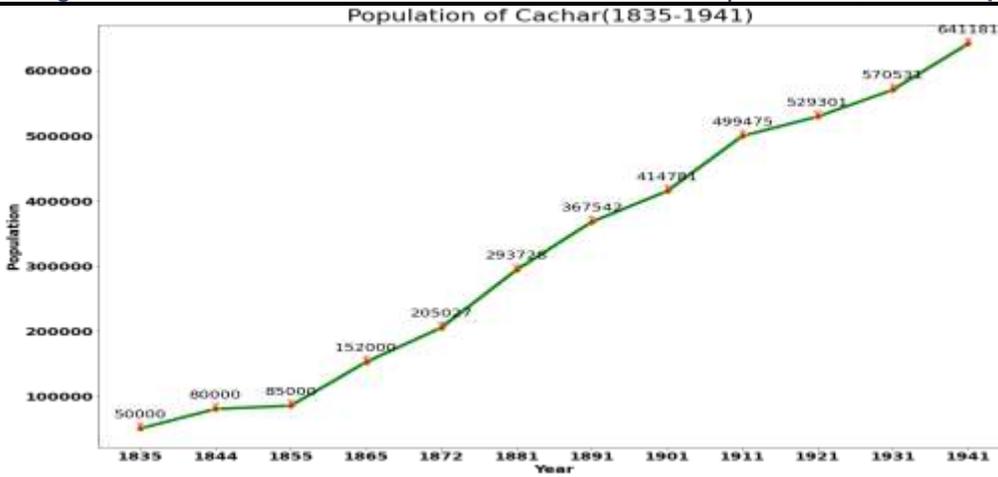


Fig 1: Growth of population of Cachar (1835-1941)

## 5.2 Transformation and Diversity through Land Settlements and Demographic Shifts

In the late 19th century, Cachar experienced significant changes in its land settlements under British administration, leading to demographic shifts. The estimated area of the district was 3750 square miles, with various portions allocated for farming, waste but cultivable land, and uncultivable waste. Agricultural practices, timber industry, and the cultivation of tea played crucial roles in the district's economy. The Bengali population, both Hindus and Muslims, migrated from Sylhet, engaging primarily in agriculture and small-scale trade. The Muslim Bengalis, descendants of Sylhet settlers, closely resembled their counterparts in Sylhet. The Muniipoories, a significant race in Cachar, practiced agriculture and initially followed a nomadic approach before establishing prosperous villages permanently. The population distribution, as estimated by Capt. Stewart, highlighted the diverse communities, including Hindu-Bengalees, Muslim-Bengalees, Hindu-Manipuris, and others. The demographic landscape reflected the impact of immigration and various communities coexisting in Cachar [33]. The percentage distribution of the various communities of people in Cachar, 1865, was also highlighted in figure 2.

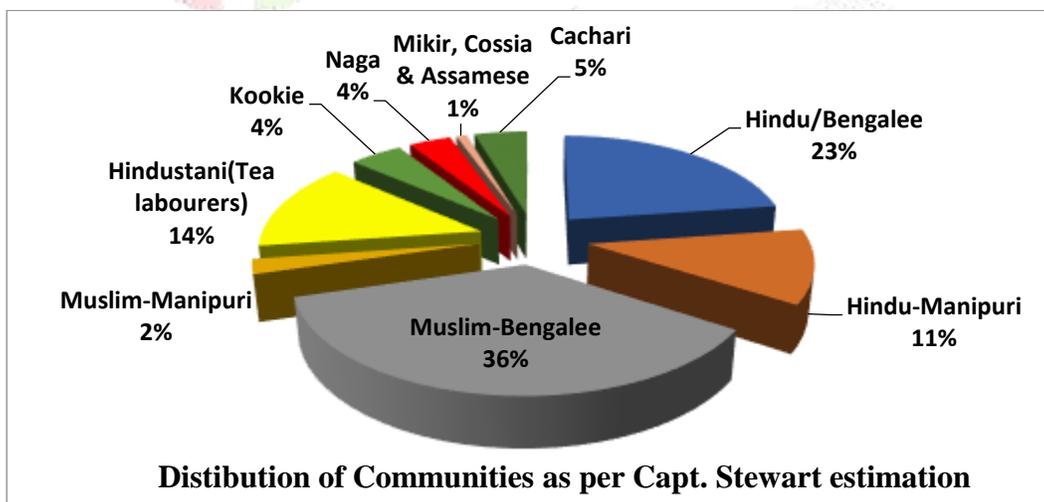
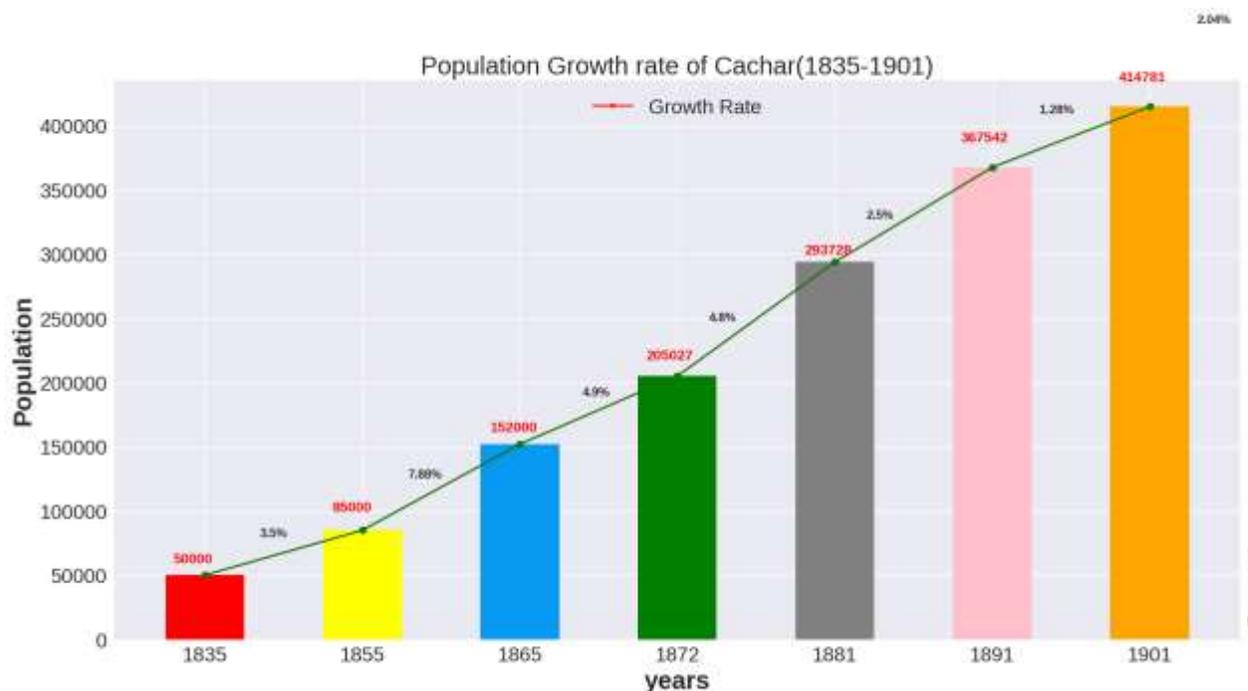


Fig 2: Ethnic Composition in Cachar – Insights from Capt. Stewart's Estimates (1865)

### 5.3 Change in Population

Figure 3 shows that the population of Cachar has been continuously increasing over time. It can be seen from the figure that between 1835-1931, there was increased in population around fivefold. During colonial times, immigration continued, resulting in the expansion of tea plantation agriculture, which led in the removal of trees. The practice of importing labour for Cachar's tea estates continued until 1931. They settled in tea gardens and nearby vacant lands in the regions of Cachar since they did not return to their own villages.



Source: 1835 [34], 1844 [35] (1855, 1865) [36], (1872-1901) [37]

Fig 3: Evolution of Population and Growth Rates in Cachar (1835-1901)

Table 3: Comparative Census Data on Population and Immigration (1891 and 1881) [38]

Year of Census	Total Population	District Born	Immigrants	
			From districts	From other Provinces
1891	367,542	249,365	25,380	92,797
1881	293,738	190,831	24,667	78,240
• Gain or Loss	+73,804	+58,534	+713	+14,557
• Percentage of gain or loss	+25.1	+30.6	+2.8	+18.6
• Percentage on total Population	+25.1	+19.9	+0.2	+5.0

The comparison of census data between 1891 and 1881 reveals notable trends in Cachar's population dynamics. In terms of the total population, there was a substantial gain of 73,804 individuals, representing a 25.1% increase. District-born residents also experienced a gain of 58,534 (30.6%), while immigrants from other districts saw a modest increase of 713 individuals (2.8%). The most significant change occurred in the immigrant population from other provinces, with a gain of 14,557 individuals, marking an 18.6% increase. These changes reflect a shifting demographic landscape, with a substantial percentage gain in both district-born and immigrant populations contributing to the overall growth. Analyzing the percentage on the total population, it is evident that immigrants from other provinces played a noteworthy role, constituting a 5.0% share, while district-born individuals and immigrants from other districts contributed 19.9% and 0.2%, respectively. This data underscores the impact of immigration on Cachar's population dynamics during the specified period.

Cachar emerges as a distinctive region within Assam, characterized by the significant impact of the tea industry on its demographic landscape. The influx of population into Cachar is intricately linked to the growth of the tea sector, a trend that has steadily increased with each successive census. However, there are indications that this population surge, largely driven by the tea industry, may be approaching a plateau. As of the 1891 census, foreigners, individuals born outside the province, constitute 24 percent of Cachar's population, showcasing the substantial influence of external factors on the region. The proportion of foreigners is notably high in districts with a substantial number of tea gardens, such as Lakhimpur (41%), Sibsagar (25%), and Darrang (25%). Cachar, with 24 percent foreigners, reflects the dynamic interplay between the tea industry, immigration patterns, and the overall demographic composition of the district. The intricate relationship between the tea industry and population dynamics in Cachar sets it apart as a unique entity within Assam, shaping its socio-economic fabric in profound ways [39].

## 6. Results and Interpretation

The provided data and figure illustrate the population growth rate of Cachar from 1835 to 1901. The population of Cachar shows a consistent increase over the given years. In 1835, the population was 50,000, and by 1901, it had reached 414,781. The growth rate is not uniform, with periods of faster and slower growth. The highest growth rate is observed between 1855 and 1865, where the population nearly doubles (from 85,000 to 152,000). The overall growth rate is substantial, considering the population increases fivefold during the period. Immigration seems to play a significant role in population growth, particularly during the mid-19th century. The continuous growth aligns with the influx of immigrants, as evidenced by the increasing population and the establishment of tea plantation agriculture. The expansion of the tea industry in Cachar correlates with population growth. The influx of immigrants, especially for tea labor, contributes to the rising population.

While the growth rate decreases after the peak in the 1860s, there is still a steady increase in population. This suggests sustained development and settlement in the region. The data doesn't provide explicit information on population density, but the growth in population indicates increased settlement and possibly urbanization. The demographic changes could have socio-economic implications, affecting land use, labor markets, and

community structures. The analysis suggests that immigration, particularly for tea plantation labor, played a crucial role in shaping the demographic landscape of Cachar during the 19th century. The steady population growth reflects the dynamic economic and social changes occurring in the region, with implications for land use, labor markets, and community structures. Further investigation into specific historical events and policies during this period could provide a more detailed understanding of these population trends.

## 7. Conclusion

The study of 19th-century Cachar reveals a dynamic and evolving landscape shaped by complex historical forces. The annexation by the British in 1832 marked a significant turning point, leading to transformative changes in governance, land tenure, and demographics. The role of key administrators, such as Thomas Fisher, J.G. Burns, E.R. Lyons, G. Verner, and R. Stewart, in implementing land settlements and economic reforms, played a crucial role in shaping the region. The impact of immigration on Cachar's population growth is evident, particularly in the context of tea plantation agriculture. The demographic shifts and the coexistence of diverse communities, as highlighted by Capt. Stewart's estimates, underscore the social and cultural dynamics resulting from immigration. The findings emphasize the importance of historical understanding in unraveling the complexities of Cachar's 19th-century narrative. The region's historical trajectory is intricately linked to factors such as land settlements, economic policies, and population movements. By illuminating these historical nuances, the study contributes to a nuanced comprehension of Cachar's socio-economic and cultural landscape during this transformative period.

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