Introduction of Urbanization in Silchar

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Abstract— Urbanization has become a common feature of Indian society and as well as in northeast India. Urbanization denotes a diffusion of the influence of urban centers to rural hinterland. Urbanization can also be defined as a process of concentration population in a particular region. It is also a process of becoming urban, moving to cities, changing from agriculture to other pursuits common to cities. The process of urbanization in Silchar is unknown to many people. It was the Colonial powers who took initiative for the urbanization of Silchar. It is said that introduction of urbanization in Silchar started after the shifting of British headquarter from Duthpatil to Janiganj and the spread of urbanization is started after the municipality election in 1913. From 1882 to 1913 the selected government officers and some civilian operates the municipality matter but the real election process of municipality was started in 23rd May 1913. In 1912 AD when partition of Bengal was annulled, Assam was constituted a separate province. Accordingly, Cachar and Sylhet as its districts and it was decided to make municipality more democratic. So, with the election of non-official Chairman a new era started in the history of Silchar municipality. Kamini Kumar Chanda was elected as chairman. The election of non-official Chairman was a remarkable incident because due to the election Silchar Municipality was to a great extent freed from British government interference. In my study I, would like to highlight introduction of urbanization in Silchar in the colonial period.

Keynotes:- beginning of urbanization, Municipality, Transport and communication, Market and business Associations and higher educational institutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Silchar is a city and the headquarter of the Cachar district in the state of Assam and it is also the second largest city of North Eastern Region after Guwahati. In the process of urbanization of an area some elements played a vital role and they are population, municipality, markets and business, educational institutions, road and transports etc. The urbanization process and growth of Silchar as an urban area in the colonial period will be very interesting to know and how, the name Silchar came into circulation is a subject to conjecture. Jyoti Lal Chowdhury in his work '*Glimpse of the British Raj in Barak Valley'* noted *"according to an account, Silchar finds mentions as Shilachal in 'Sreehatter Tamrashan' and 'Cachar raj Bangshavali' written by Kailash Chandra Singh as well as two of his write ups in 'Bharati' wherein the capital of Hedemba is referred to as Shilachal. Chinese traveller, Hiuent sang's Bangla Brahman too has reference to Silachal, besides in Ranchandi by Haran Chandra Raha, Silachal finds mention as sardar station of Cachar. Another account says as along both sides of river Barak, boulders are rocks were found, the place has been named 'Silchar', a compound of Sil (rocks) and Char (bank)."* There is no authentic record has been found regarding the name of Silchar. Up to 1835, there was no mention place name Silchar in British record and most of the dispatches of the period were issued from Cachar district but never from Silchar. In 1835 AD it was R.B. Pamberton mentioned the name Silchar in his report. So, it can be assumed that prior to the annexation of Cachar that is 1832 to 1833, Silchar did not exist in any written records. It was captain Fisher, who spotted a patch of land on the bank of river Barak to lay down the foundation of the town. His name may be associated with Silchar same way the name of job Charnok is associated with Calcutta. Captain Thomas Fisher established his Sadar office at Janiganj Bazar and the Bazar existed in the pre annexation period. Soon after Silcahr developed into a urban area after captain Fisher shifted the headquarter from Duthpatil to Silchar. After shifting headquarter, Captain Thomas Fisher immediately constructed Treasury, kutchery, jail and an outpost for Sylhet Light Infantry and this was the beginning of urbanization of Silchar. Silchar was the only place in the Cachar district which could be said to be town but it did not have a single building except a church and circuit house. The houses of the British were on the open ground and the natives had huts with thatched roofs. Among the British, Captain Stewart, the successor of the Captain Fisher took initiative for the development of Silchar. He prepared a blueprint of Silchar for proper settlement and civic. In 1850 Steamer services became operational. John Edgar, a British officer took initiative for the constructions of office buildings, residential quarters, office of the deputy commissioner. Roads were built to connect interior areas. Head post office in Silchar came up in 1852 and daily mail services were maintained with Hailakandi, Katigorah and Halflong. By 1855, Silchar became a hub of tea town. With the establishment of the first English school in 1863, girls' school in 1865 in first college in 1935, the urban development became steady and fast. In 1861 Telegraph services were introduced. Silchar Civil Hospital came up in 1864 and schools and markets too came up. But the Gazetteer of Cachar which was published in 1905 state that Silchar as a town on 2.4 square miles, it had pathways, some pucca, lighted by 98 lamps and three reserve tanks supplied drinking water. By 1930, electricity came to pull Silchar town out of darkness after sunset. The spread of urbanization in Silchar was started during colonial period with the introduction of municipality in Silchar in 1883.

II. INTRODUCTION OF MUNICIPALITY

Municipality played an important role in urbanizing an area and the urbanization of Silchar has a long history. In 1st of May 1865 AD, the district improvement Act 1864 was introduced and it was extended to Silchar on 29th November 1865 AD. So, Silchar town was constituted to a municipality under the Bengal District Town Improvement Act 1864 and the municipality had eight Europeans and three local native members, besides a chairman and vice chairman. The district Magistrate was the Chairman, while the Executive Engineer, the superintendent of police were the members. In 1868 the Silchar municipality was withdrawn because the District Improvement Act 1864 did not prove satisfactory. Before the introduction of Station Committee, Silchar had a Chowkidari union under the Act xx of 1865 and a Station Committee was established in 26th February 1882. The Station Committee had no authority to imposed tax on latrines, carriages, animals and for the supply of water. Therefore, its resources were limited and with the growth of population the sanitary condition of the town was very unsatisfactory. In 1872 AD the population of the Silchar town was 4925and it was increased up to 7523 in 1891 AD. In 1891 AD a meeting amongst the members of Station Committee took place to upgrade Station Committee to a municipality. In the proceedings of the meeting it was recorded that as the population of the station was over 7000 and more than three fourth of whom were employed in pursuits other than agriculture, Silchar may be declared to be municipality under Sec. 8 and 9 of Act V (B.G.) 1876 AD. Persuaded by Babu Kamini Kumar Chanda, a nationalist leader and a Lawer, who headed the station Committee, the deputy commissioner of Cachar, J. Clark in 1891 AD, recommended to the government of Assam that the Silchar municipality to be converted into a Second Class Municiplality. Accordingly on 1st April 1893 AD the Station Committee of Silchar was upgraded to the status of a Second Class municipality. From 1882 to 1913 the selected government officers and some civilian operates the municipality matter but the real election process of municipality was started in 23rd May 1913. In 1912 AD when partition of Bengal was annulled, Assam was constituted a separate province. Accordingly, Cachar and Sylhet as its districts and it was decided to make municipality more democratic. So, with the election of non-official Chairman a new era started in the history of Silchar municipality. Accordingly in 1913 AD., along with Guwahati and Dribrugarh, Silchar got the status of electing their own Chairman. At Silchar, in the beginning of 1912AD, the election for the Bord was held and the first meeting to elect Chairman was held on 23rd May 1913 AD. Contest for the post of Chairman took place between Kamini Kuar Chanda and Meckoy, Ex Officio member of the Bord and the former was elected as chairman by defeating Meckoy. The election of non-official Chairman was a remarkable incident because due to the election Silchar Municipality was to a great extent freed from British government interference. In 1922 AD a bill was introduced in the Legislative Council provided for the appointment of a member committee and the delegations of power to them. According to this bill the Municipal Bord had full freedom, in regard to the levy taxes and power relating to sanitation, water supply, lighting and drainage were elaborated. This bill became Act in 1923 AD. With the proper functioning of the municipal Committee boosted to the urbanization process of Silchar.

III. INTRODUCTION OF TRANSPORT SYSTEM

The British has taken measures to improve the communication system and the rail link to Silchar with the outside world was opened with the extension of the Dribrugrah-Lamding-Badarpur-Chitagong MG which British completed in order to facilitate the planters of the time for the transportation of tea products as well as its export. The Assam-Bengal Railways covered Silchar town Barak Valley in 1899 A.D., extending the railway line fro Badarpur junction past Katakhal, Salchapra and Masimpur. Since then, rail-cum road bridge has played an important role not only in a communication link but also in the movement of both trains and vehicular traffic. The roads of Cachar district were of little importance as compared to waterways in the point of trade. In 1853 AD there was only one major road in Cachar but during the 30 years from 1870 A.D., a number of roads were constructed at the initiative of the Public Works Department, the District Road Committee and other local organisations. Transport and communication also played a great role in urbanizing an area but it is interesting to know that up to 1913 there was no motor vehicle and pitch road in Silchar. Before 1913 the naïve people used bullock card, elephant and horses for transport and communication and for business. In 1913 the first pitch road was constructed from Duthpatil to Fatak bazaar via Cachar Club. In 1913 Baratson, the manager of Duthpatil tea garden first used four-wheeler vehicles in Silchar. During that time the cost of the four wheelers was between Rs 1050 to 2000. In present day in Silchar there is 83000 four wheelers. In 1942 Rikshaw started playing in Silchar and since then the town has grown manifold, both in areas and populations. More and more houses of the natives, mostly made by semi pucca, came in the Central Road, Nazirpatty, Premtola, tulapatty, Narshingtola, tarapur, Malugram and Itkhola.

IV. INTRODUCTION OF MARKETS, AND BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

While reconstructing history of the markets and business in Silchar, two markets was remarkable one was Fatak *bazaar* and other was Adgardganj market. These two were the big markets for daily life in Silchar in British period. The first and popular colonial period market for daily life in Silchar was Adgardganj market and it was at Tarapur, Silchar, present day Annarpurna Ghat. In 27 July 1882 the 'Silchar Station Committee' proposed to start another market near Janiganj as 'Khas bazaar' and this Khas bazaar is known as Fatak bazar at present day. In the colonial period there was no place in Cachar of much commercial importance and trade was usually carried on at bazaars or permanent markets. The largest of these was at Janiganj, a suburb of the Civil Station of Silchar and Janiganj is located on the river Barak. Janiganj *bazaar* was mainly popular for water trade and a number of merchants, villagers came there for marketing and business. Numerous people from outside Silchar also came there through water route for trade and the

external commerce of Cachar was entirely conducted by water, and it passed through the neighboring district of Sylhet. Near to Janiganj there was Fatak and Fatak is the Bengali term meaning jail. The Khas bazaar was near to Janiganj and finally Khas Bazaar was began to known as Fatak *bazaar*.

In the early decade of 20th Century a numbers of business associations were formed in Silchar for upgrading business and "Cachar Merchants Association" was one of them and it was formed in 1929 but registered under the society act in 1959. Present day its head quarter is at 17 Bardan complex, first floor electric supply road Silchar 788001. Raja Sahib Naba Kumar, a *Zamindar* cum businessman of Janiganj, became the first president and Ram Chandra Sarada, a businessman and Sri Kishan Seth of Janiganj became the vice president. In that association there were one secretary and an assistant general secretary, not only these there were also another 11 members. Cachar Joint Stock Company Limited was also one of association which was formed in colonial period.

V. INTRODUCTION OF HOSPITAL

In 1864, Present day 'S.M. Dev Civil Hospital' in Silchar, previously known as 'Civil Hospital' or 'District Hospital' and it was established. Regarding the introduction of this hospital, it is regarded that after the introduction of tea garden in Cachar in 1855, the hospital was established for the treatment of tea garden laborer. The hospital was running by the British official from the income of tea garden. Debabartta Dutta in his work "Paurasavar Itihas" regarded that for the establishment of a hospital in Silchar, the 'Station Committee' had contributed Rs 200. He also said that in the beginning the hospital was running both by the colonial government and tea garden officers and each and every year station committee also contributed huge amount of money for the running of the hospital. There was no specialist doctor in the hospital and a number of villagers and tea garden laborers coming to the hospital for their treatment.

VI. INTRODUCTION OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Information on the condition of educational institutions as found by the British in Cachar can be gathered from a letter written in June 1834, by T. Fisher, the superintendent of Cachar, to the Commissioner of Dacca Division. On the incorporation of Cachar into the administration Unit of Dacca Division of Bengal Presidency, Mr. T. Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar, suggested that the school be set up in Cachar following the model of Bengal Presidency. J.G. Burns proposed to set up schools at Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah. The *Amolas* started three schools at Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah. In this way setting up of educational institution was started but till 1935 there was no question for higher educational institution in Silchar and entire Barak valley and for imparting higher education peoples from Barak Valley visited Calcutta, Guwahati and Sylhet. First higher educational institution in Silchar was established in 1935 in the form of Guru Charan College.

VII. GURU CHARAN COLLEGE

Guru Charan College Silchar, abbreviated as GC College is one of the oldest college in north-east India and during the colonial period after Cotton College, it was the only college which imparted higher education in Barak valley. In 4th June 1934 there was meeting amongst the prominent leaders of Silchar for the establishment of higher educational institution that is college in Silchar. The meeting was held at the residence of Kamaini Kumar Chanda, central road, Silchar and the meeting was presided over by Bishnu Charan Dey. At the mean time the widow of late Gurucharan Nag, Mrs. Kiran Sahsi Nag proposed that the college should be established in the name of her late husband Guru Charan Nag and she was also willing to donate Rs 10000 for the establishment of college. In this way Guru Charan College was established on 15 July 1935 with the enrolment of 55 students and Arun Kumar Chandra was the first principal. In the beginning the college was housed in a deserted bungalow of Promode Chandra Dutta at Rongpur on the bank of river Barak. Unfortunately riverbank erosion began to engulf the College premises and it was shifted temporarily to the campus of Silchar Normal school. This temporary phase of accommodation was soon over and with the help of insistence from different quarters the college was able to acquire a vast area of about 7.1 acres in the Silchar municipal area. Initially the college had been affiliated to Calcutta university and in 1949 the college got an affiliated to Guwahati university. Finally with the establishment of Assam University, Silchar, in 1994, GC College has been affiliated to it.

In present day the college is listed under 2 (F) and 12 (B) by the university grant commission and offers higher secondary and three years degree course in its arts science and commerce streams. The college was also accredited by NAAC during 2006 and grade 3d as B++. It also achieved the status of college with potential for Excellence from UGC in the same year. GC College is a premier and one of the oldest educational institutes in the northeastern region of India with a growing list of accolades earned nationally through out 75 years.

So, with the establishment of municipality, pitch road, introduction of motor vehicles, introduction of markets, hospitals, trade or business association the urbanization process of Silchar was started. Talking about the establishment of higher educational institution Guru Charan College was the only college which imparted higher education before independence. Urbanization in India began to accelerate after independence, due to the country's adoption of a mixed economy, which gave rise to the development of the private

sector. According to census of 1901 population in urban area was 11.4% but according to 2001 census it increases to 28.53%. The urbanization of Silchar was also started during colonial period and the process of urbanization is still going on. In Silchar a numbers of higher educational institutions emerged after independence which contributed to the urbanization process of Silchar, they are namely, Teachers Trainee College (1959), A.K. Chanda Law College (1960) Cachar College (1960), Women's College Silchar (1963), National Institute of Technology (1967), Silchar Medical College (1968), Assam University (1994) etc.

VIII. CONCLUSION

After the formation of Station committee in 1882 A.D. and Second Class Municipality in 1893A.D., Silchar has been expanding in both terms of area and population. Not only the Britishers, people from Sylhet and other places used to come to Silchar. Many were employed as Clarks, office assistants, stamp vendors and copyists as well as employees engaged in different departments of the British. Silchar has been strategically located and this was the prime consideration with the British to choose and make Silchar as the epicenter of their military power. Before the partition of India Sylhet is also part of Surma Valley and it was very nearer to Silchar. In Sylhet Murari Chand College was established in June 1892 and in 17th June 1901 Cotton College was also established in Guwahati. The natives of Barak Valley and Silchar went Sylhet and Guwahati for pursuing higher education. But after the establishment of Guru Charan College, Silchar in 1935, the native people got opportunity to get higher education in Silchar.

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