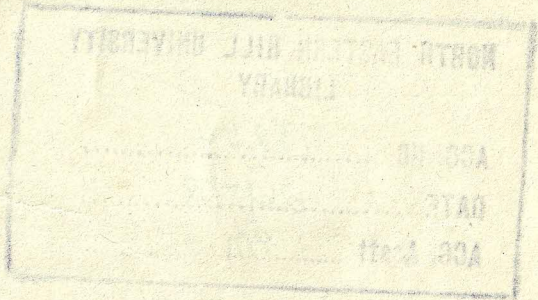


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# ASSAM SECRETARIAT 1874-1947

*An Administrative History of North-East India*

BASUDEB DATTA-RAY



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*To*  
*The Memory of my Father*  
*Hari Mohan Dutta-Ray*

## PREFACE

This thesis traces the growth of the Assam Civil Secretariat during the period of 1874-1947 and incidentally deals with some aspects of the Assam Public Works Department Secretariat.

A Secretariat is the brain trust of the government concerned. It is the agency through which government operates. The efficiency or the inefficiency of administration depends on the Secretariat. It is the place where the major governmental policies originate. It is the pipe-line through which ideas flow from the people to the seat of government and **vice versa**.

The method of approach is essentially historical, analytical and critical.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter describes the historical growth of the Assam Secretariat during the period of 1874 to 1947. The second chapter deals with the structure of the Secretariat Departments. The third, fourth and fifth chapters are concerned with personnel administration of the Assam Secretariat. The sixth chapter deals with the Rules of Business in the Secretariat. The seventh chapter is connected with the auxiliary services. The final chapter contains conclusions arrived at different places in the text of the thesis.

The thesis bears originally the title—Assam Secretariat 1874-1947. A sub-title—An Administrative History of North-East India has now been added to make the book explicit.

The study is based entirely on government records available in the Assam Secretariat Record Office. So far as I know, no one has worked on this subject. For the period 1941, I had to depend on secondary sources as records of this period are not available to research workers.

In the preparation of this book, I incurred a number of obligations. First, I must express my gratefulness to the Keeper of Records (retired), Assam Secretariat (Civil), Mr. P. C. Sarma, M.A., for his unfailing and familiar courtesy and helpful attitude in the collection of material in his office.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not express my appreciation of the services rendered by the staff of the Record Room and the Secretariat Library. Mr. Harendra Kumar Das, Mr. Manik Chandra Barman and Mr. Yearlynneson Lyngdoh were helpful and kind to me at all times. I thank them all.

I thank Mr. B. Sastri, M.A., Director of Research, (retired) Arunachal Secretariat, Shillong and Mr. B.K. Barua, Under Secretary, (retired) Assam Secretariat, Shillong for all the help rendered in the preparation of this book.

In my guide Dr. V. Venkata Rao, B.A. (Hon.), M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D., D.Litt., Professor Emeritus and the former Head of the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, I have discovered true friend for research workers. He has been a perennial source of inspiration to me. I am most grateful to him for all his kindness and help he rendered.

I owe an apology to my wife Minati Datta Ray, M.A., and our children Biswanath and Ratna, for my long hours of absence from them almost everyday for about two years when I was busy in collecting material in the Record Office. I am grateful to them for their understanding and co-operative attitude towards me.

I record my gratitude for the help and advice that I have received from Dr. Amalendu Guha, Professor of Economic History, Mr. Susanta Ghosh, Registrar and Mr. Arun Ghosh, Deputy Librarian, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta for the publication of this book. I deeply acknowledge the kind technical help rendered by Mr. Arun Ghosh in this connection.

This book owes a considerable debt to Mr. P. K. Bagchi, Managing Director, M/s. K. P. Bagchi & Co of Calcutta for his readiness to publish it expeditiously. I express my sincere gratitude to him.

I thank also Rev. Brother R. B. Vieyra for all his help and encouragement in my academic pursuit.

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## GLOSSARY

Dak	...	Post
Lakh	...	One hundred thousand
Muffassil	...	Outlying Area
Sylhetis	...	Inhabitants of the district of Sylhet

## ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.S.	...	Assam Civil Service
Appt.	...	Appointment
B.A.	...	Bachelor of Arts
B.L.	...	Bachelor of Law
Dt.	...	Date
Dept.	...	Department
E.A.C.	...	Extra Assistance Commissioner
F.A.	...	First Arts
Govt.	...	Government
I.C.S.	...	Indian Civil Service
I.A.	...	Intermediate of Arts
L.D.	...	Lower Division
M.A.	...	Master of Arts
P.W.D.	...	Public Works Department
U.D.	...	Upper Division

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## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS

We have so far traced the development of the Secretariat of the Government of Assam from 1874 in some detail. This study, which is mainly historical, analytical and critical induces us to come to certain conclusions. First, the Secretariat was not made at any time by the wisdom of one man or few persons. It has grown. Expediency and not philosophy was the basis of its organisation. It reflected accurately the philosophy of the age—the philosophy of individualism. Since the principle of laissez-faire was the basis of the State, the Secretariat was organised to implement this philosophy. Till the end of our period (1947) the Secretariat was mainly concerned with police functions, the maintenance of law and order and the protection of property of the individual. It was only during and after the Second World War the State became positive, although not in the full sense of the term. The change in the philosophy of the State resulted in the addition of new departments. There was no Department of Sericulture before 1940. There was no Department of Supply in 1940. But the scarcity of essential commodities during and after the Second World War induced the State to bring into being the Supply Department which is at present one of the major departments. Similarly, a new department was necessary to undertake the preparation of plans for the post war reconstruction and development. Thus, at first there were only three departments—General, Judicial and Revenue. In 1947 there were thirteen departments. It was a small house in 1874 but received additions with the growth of the family.

A doubt has been raised whether there is need for a Secre-

tariat. Our answer is in the affirmative. It has been suggested that the functions of the Secretariat and of the heads of the departments may be combined together and the Secretariat may be abolished. We do not agree with this suggestions, because it is not desirable from the point of view of administration. We think that the agency for the formulation of policy must be separate and distinct from the agency for its execution for obvious reasons. First the persons responsible for the execution of policy must not be entrusted with the responsibility for the assesment of its achievements and failures. Where these two functions were entrusted to one and the same person the consequences were disastrous. Major failures will be glossed over and minor achievements will be magnified. There will be a constant attempt to shift the responsibility for failures to the shoulders of others. Second, an attempt will be made to cover up defaults and mistakes, and policy will be framed in such a manner to cover up deficiencies so that they may not be noticed. Finally, the agency responsible for the execution of policy will concern itself with details and it may not have a broader outlook which is absolutely necessary for the framing of a policy. Therefore, the functions of the head of the department and of the Secretariat should not be combined in the hands of one and the same person. If this principle is accepted the head of the PWD in the Secretariat must not be the Chief Engineer, PWD. The Secretary to Government PWD must be a lay man. Where the expert is also the Secretary to Government the consequences were disastrous.

From the above it logically follows that the Secretariat should confine itself to policy formululation, consequent legislation, co-ordination of the activities of the various agencies and general policy direction. All other functions should be entrusted to the departmental heads. For instance the Secretariat may lay down the principles to be obsered in sanctioning grants to the local authorities but the actual payment of grants should be entrusted to the Director of local authorities. Similarly,

the Secretariat may lay down the principles to be observed in regard to transfers but the actual transfers may be ordered by the concerned departmental heads. In the ultimate analysis, the Secretariat should concern itself with policy formulation, with the co-ordination of inter-departmental activities, with the interpretation of or relaxation of the existing rules and regulations issued by the government, with the preparation of Bills for introduction in the Legislative Assembly, with delegated legislation, with the exercise of financial, legal and administrative powers vested in the State Government, with matters to be placed before the Central Government, Legislative Assembly and their Committees, with the appointment of Commissions and Committees, with All India and State Level Conferences, with the creation of new districts and sub-divisions, with the changes in the boundaries of the districts and sub-divisions, with the creation of administrative units, with the change of headquarters of offices, with the creation of new offices, with the amalgamation, bifurcation and abolition of the existing offices, with the determination of the emoluments of the services, and the general service conditions, with the training of the government personnel with the determination of its relations with the Assam Public Service Commission, with matters relating to All India Services, including transfers, postings, promotions and disciplinary proceedings of the All India Services under the administrative control of the State (Provincial) Government, with the economic and industrial development of the State, with the scrutiny of the budget estimate of the departments, with the sanctioning of supplementary grants and finally with the preparation of State plan. The functions enumerated above are not exhaustive. But they indicate that the Secretariat should concern itself with broad functions.

Intimately connected with the functions of the Secretariat is the question as to who should be the Secretaries to Government—Generalist or Specialist.

**Generalist versus Specialist :** This is a perennial theme. There are two schools of thought and the discussion is still going on. Let us discuss this question. While the heads of the departments should be specialists, Director of Medical Services as the head of the Medical Department Chief Engineer as the head of the P.W.D. and so on, the Secretaries to Government in the Secretariat should be generalists, because the specialists will not be able to understand the relative importance of his own functions as a part of the whole. As a matter of fact very few specialists seem to care about anything beyond their own speciality. This does not mean that specialists are narrow minded human beings. But concentration and preoccupation with their speciality breeds in them impatience with anything not directly in their line of vision. An excited and conscientious Director of Education or Director of Public Health Services is likely to see all else as an adjunct.

This mental development on the part of the specialists has created disunity rather than order, confusion instead of coherency and digress instead of progress. Human happiness cannot be promoted until each technologist has learnt to subordinate his expertness to the common purpose. If this principle is accepted the Chief Engineer should not be the Secretary to the Government,

**Division of Subjects :** In the distribution of subjects in the Secretariat closely related and allied subjects were not placed under one department. Further for political reasons, sometimes the entire department was not placed under one minister. In several cases, the departments were split up and placed under two or more ministers. We, therefore, suggest that all subjects dealt with by one department must be under the administrative control of one minister. The department should not be split up for political reasons. Again, parts of one and the same department should not be entrusted to different ministers.

In the allocation of subjects definite principles were not adopted. As a consequence, the allotment of subjects to different

departments was haphazard. We therefore suggest that subjects which are closely related or allied to one another should be allocated to one and the same department. A breach of this principle is to be found in the Excise and Registration Department where Excise and Registration were entrusted to one and the same department even though Excise and Registration are not related to one another. Thus, related subjects should be combined together and placed under one department.

**Nomenclature of the Department :** We also found that the designation of some departments was not accurate. The designation of a department should inform as precisely as possible the functions of the department so that there may not be any confusion in the mind of the public. For instance the Revenue Department was not concerned with the revenue of the Provincial Government. It was concerned with land revenue and matters relating to land. Therefore, the name of the department should have been Land and Land Revenue Department.

Again, the designation 'Veterinary Department' was not the proper nomenclature because veterinary means concerned with the diseases of animals. This nomenclature was not an appropriate one. It should have been named as Department of Animal Husbandry.

We also think that there was need for the creation of some new departments. For instance, social welfare. At present matters relating to social welfare are dealt with in the Social Welfare and Probation Wing of the Planning and Development Department. We think that a new department should have been created, the Social Welfare Department, to deal with the following subjects, social welfare and social security, co-ordination of social welfare activities, social hygiene, welfare and resettlement of ex-servicemen and assistance to their families including soldiers, sailors and airmen amenities or relief to dependants of those killed in action or

missing armed men, Flag Day in aid of ex-servicemen and personnel of the armed forces, removal of untouchability, probation services and the administration of the Probation of Offenders Act, jails, welfare programmes of ex-convicts, juvenile delinquency, and reformatory schools, youth welfare, welfare activities for women and children, beggary orphanages, rehabilitation of the destitute women, suppression of immoral traffic in women, burial and cremation of paupers, welfare of the mentally retarded and the physically handicapped children, welfare of the political prisoners, social and charitable associations and institutions, training of social workers etc.

We also think that a separate department of Cabinet affairs should have been created to deal with certain subjects which are at present dealt with by the Cabinet Cell of the Political Department. The Cabinet Affairs Department could be entrusted with all matters relating to the Cabinet affairs such as the circulation of Cabinet memorandum, action taken on decisions made by the Cabinet, collection and analysis of the information required by the Cabinet and co-ordination of all the activities of the various departments.

It is also suggested that the Cabinet Affairs Department should have a separate section, called Parliamentary Affairs cell to deal with all Parliamentary Affairs. It may also have another branch to deal with administrative reforms. We think that the reform of the administrative machinery must be a continuous affair.

We also suggest that there should have been a cultural section to deal with all cultural affairs as a part of the Education Department.

The Cultural Section of the Education Department might deal with promotion of regional languages and literature, minority languages, films, drama, library movement, preservation of ancient monuments, State archives, grants to religious and cultural institutions and cultural affairs.

Again, the administrative control of Jails should have been

under Social Welfare Department and not under the Home Department.

Now the question is how the Secretariat should be organised. We think that the distribution of work among the different departments must be based on the principle of equity.

The Chief Secretary should be the administrative head of the Secretariat as a whole. The Chief Secretary to the Government is the king-pin of the Secretariat administration. The efficiency or the inefficiency of the administration depended upon him. Fortunately all the Chief Secretaries were eminent men. Sir Harold George Dennehy is a notable example of what a Chief Secretary ought to be. He gave his best to the very end and would never shirk a knotty file. He was a perfectionist and believed with Aristotle that one is happy only when he functioned to the best of his abilities. He was tremendous source of inspiration and strength to those who worked under him.

The relationship between the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary was extremely cordial. When Provincial Autonomy was introduced the Chief Secretary saw to it that the relations between the Permanent Secretaries and the Ministers were harmonious. Muhammad Saadulla and Gopinath Bardoloi held the Chief Secretary Dennehy in high esteem.

Similarly, most of the Secretaries were also eminent administrators. But the tendency was that once a person was appointed as Secretary he did not wish to get back to the district. He moved from department to department and retired as Secretary to Government. This was due to the fact that Secretaries had less responsibility and more power. Further life in the capital was pleasant. Again, those who entertained an ambition to shift to Delhi liked to stay in the capital. But this is not a healthy practice. By continuous stay at the headquarters, they lost touch with the realities of the situation. They were not able to understand the needs and aspirations of the common

man. It is therefore suggested that no one should stay as Secretary to the Government for more than three years. At the end of three years he should get back to the District to gain first hand experience.

There was no pillaging and plundering of the public treasury by the payment of liberal salaries. Salaries were revised from time to time with every decline in the purchasing power of the rupee.

Secretariat service offered few opportunities for promotion. Very often one who entered the Secretariat as a clerk retired as a clerk. This was inevitable since Secretariat was a distinct entity by itself.

The rules of business framed for the transaction of business were sound though there was no formal rules of business in 1874.

The recruitment of personnel for the Secretariat Service was at first haphazard. Services were not classified, Qualifications were not prescribed. Scales of pay were not determined. As a consequence, there was chance. Gradually, however, classification of services was introduced ; qualification for the various services were determined and scales of pay were prescribed. But we think that there was no need to classify clerks as Upper Division and Lower Division. Both the classes performed more or less the same functions. With the wide spread of education, graduates were easily available for recruitment as clerks. We, therefore, think that the present classification of clerks into Lower and Upper Division should be done away with and only one class of clerks—Assistant should be brought into existence.

As regards pay, there was no standing machinery to revise the pay structure, in accordance with the purchasing power of the rupee.

So far as recruitment of personnel was concerned an effort was made to recruit the best men available. It is true that in the beginning there was some kind of nepotism and favouritism in the recruitment of personnel. Later on, however, the

recruitment was entrusted to a selection committee. The selection by committee was fair and just. The committee made an effort to see that the services were not dominated by a particular community. There was fair distribution of offices among the various communities.

Since 1937, the Public Service Commission worked as an efficient recruiting agency for the Secretariat.

Thus the administration of the Secretariat during the period 1874 to 1947 was by and large efficient.