

Origin of Silchar as the Sadar Station of Cachar

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Silchar, the head quarters of the district of Cachar, is situated on the 24.49° N Latitude and 92.48° E Longitude. An area comprising of 13.24 Sq. Kilometres and 81000 (Approx.) population, it had been a place of great historical importance since time immemorial. The present town is surrounded by Barak River, Rongpur Part-IV, Dudpatil village on the North, Silchar Part-II, Kanakpur Part-I & II in the East, Ombicapur Part-X, Uttar Krishnapur Part-I in the South, Tarapur Part-VIII, village Malini Beel, Ombicapur Part-VIII on the West.

Having spent so many years under the regime of the Dimasas rulers the Kingdom of Cachar or Heramba as it was called, on the 14th of August 1832 by a proclamation, "in compliance with the frequent and earnestly expressed wishes of the people", the Governor General in Council annexed the plains of Cachar to the British dominion under the administration of Captain Fisher, an Officer of approved ability. For some time, Cachar continued to be administered from Cherapunji as the head quarter of the Agent to the Governor General, but in consideration of practical difficulties early in 1833 Capt. Fisher had his head quarter at Dudpatill, which however were soon shifted to Silchar for the sake of convenience¹.

How the plain land of Silchar was selected by the British authorities to be the head quarter had a history of its own. Letter No. 865 of 19 December 1871 from Mr. Mac William, the Offg., D. C. of Cachar to the Commissioner of Dacca Division, can be extracted as follows : "It appears that the land on which the Janeegunge Bazar is built, is part of some talooks settled by one of the Rajahs of Cachar upon the Meerasdars of Ombicapur towards the end of the last century, but resumed by Rajah Govind Chunder sometimes before his death 1830. After his death his state was annexed and farmed into the district of Cachar, and in 1833 Capt. Fisher who had then charge of the district, fixed upon this spot as the site of the Sudder station and commenced building upon the resumed land. Upon this the lessees, who had been ejected by Govind Chunder,

applied for compensation 'for the twenty three halls resumed by Govind Chunder, to sue as much of this land as might be 'required for Govt. purposes, and to grant the remainder rent-free to persons settling here for trade or as Govt. servants².' The Government in reply directed Capt. Fisher to grant compensation to the claimants for as much of the resumed lands as was actually required for public purposes.

"Upon this Capt. Fisher paid over to the claimants compensation for about two halls occupied by Govt. buildings, directed that certain Amlah and traders, who had occupied other portions of the resumed lands, should pay Rs. 18 per hall compensation so much as they occupied. The Commissioner however, reversed the order and directed that the ejected lease holders should be referred to the Civil Court. The Meerasdars did not take any further step at the time and for the following 10 years the position of the land remained an un-settled waste in the records of the Collectorate³."

During the next 10 years the District was re-settled twice, once in 1838, again in 1843, where the lands of Janeegunge Bazar were shown as Khas. In 1844 the representative of the ejected Meerasdars brought a Civil suit to have the possession, but unfortunately the case was not decided in the Court, and the Meerasdars were persuaded to resign all claims to the the land and they executed a bill of sale. However, the position of land at the time of the last Cachar settlement in 1859 continued to remain as Khas land. In 1859-60 Major Stewart, who made the settlement of those years, granted the occupants a rent-free pattah "for 20 years, subject to cancelment if at any time during its currency the Chowkidaree Act or any other Municipal Act was introuduced." By Notification dt. 29th Nov., 1865, Act III of 1864 was extended to Silchar, and consequently the pattah for the bazar lands, "became liable to be cancelled."⁴

It appears from a letter of the Govt. of Bengal to the Board of Revenue that the profits of these bazar lands were made over to the Municipal Commissioners. The pattahs of 1859-60 were considered to be null and void. The Commissioner proceeded to assess that "the lands should be settled upon the occupants at the highest rate paid for rice land in the district." The proposal was supported by the Commissioner of Dacca and also by the Board of Revenue and accordingly a sanctioning letter No. 995 dt. 20th February 1868 had been issued by the Under Secretary to the Govt of Bengal to the officiating

Secretary to the Board of Revenue for necessary action.

Accordingly, a fresh settlement followed in 1869 where the Jummah amounted to Rs. 35-7-1 per annum for 23 Acres² Roods-21 Perches. The daily and weekly hats were to take place by the side of the Old Jail.

In the year 1871 Mac William, the Offg. Deputy Commissioner of Cachar concluded a settlement of lands known as Bazar Janeegunge where, 23 Acres—2 Roods—21 Poles were settled excluding the lands occupied by Govt. buildings and used for other public purposes. Out of the area thus settled, an area of 2 Roods 23 Poles was said to have been occupied by the Billiard room and compound, which was formerly granted to the Billiard-club by Major Stewart.

The Pattah as surveyed in Chucks by Mr. Saroop Ch. Dutta's Nukshanavis in Silchar station, Mouza Ombicapur, Barakpar, Zillah Cachar, for the period of 30 years from 1st April, 1871 corresponding 1278 (B.S.), have been followed by certain conditions which could be summarised as follows.

That a leasee would take possession of the land hereditary subject to the payment of an annual rate of Rs. 1-8 per acre in time ; the person concerned would meet the payment by instalments as directed ; he would have full power to erect substantial building marks ; the leasee would assist the Govt. at the time of survey and would assist the collector to protect the Janeegunge bazar from fire etc ; after 30 years the land were supposed to be brought again under re-settlement ; any dispute of border would be settled by the Collector ; it would be the power of the Collector to regulate the holding of the hat or bazar or to change it to another place and to preserve roads etc.

Thus it appears from the old records that the present Sadarghat and the Janeegunge bazar area left behind it an interesting history since the advent of the British. Uptil now, the Sadar station of Cachar district is mainly based on Janeegunge and Sadarghat area where the Court and other important administrative offices are situated.

References

1. J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar Under British Rule in North-East India*, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 172-74.
2. Assam Secretariat Records (A.S.R), Bengal Govt. Papers, File No. 167 of 1872.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*