Citizen’s Consciousness and Impact of Political Development on Municipal Politics
At the initial stage when the Station Committee was formed in Silchar like some other urbanised localities in the country, it was under compulsion to be very loyal to the British Government. Without the help and co-operation of the British Government, it was not possible to carry on the activities of Municipality smoothly.

In 1850 A.D., when the first Municipal Act was passed, there was no reference of election. In the act of 1864 A.D., and 1868 A.D., it was mentioned that Deputy Commissioner was to nominate the members with the consent of Divisional Commissioner. In the Act of 1876 A.D., it was mentioned that if the 1/3 of the ratepayers of any town demand for election through application than members of the municipality would be elected. But the members of the Station Committee were to be nominated by Divisional Commissioner and members of the Unions were to be nominated by deputy Commissioner.

When Lord Ripon came to India as Viceroy, he always tried to train the Indians for Self Government and democracy. Ripon had the idea that members of the Municipality would be loyal to the British Government. By awarding the titles like Rai Bahadur and Rai Saheb the Government would make them their firm supporter. When Congress party was formed, Lord Dufferien had also the same idea. And particularly like Silchar Municipality, most of the Municipalities in the country were loyal to British Government. Whenever any high English officials visited Silchar, the Silchar Municipal Board tried to honour him with a grand reception. The Municipality had a tradition to be happy whenever there was an occasion of happiness in the British royal family and passed resolution of condolence whenever there was any incident of sadness in the British royal family. But in the proceedings of the Municipality, in the beginning there were no resolution of even the sad demise of any Indian national leaders including Tilak.

Kamini Kumar Chanda was the leader of anti-partition movement of Bengal in Cachar. During this period Bipin Chandra Pal visited Silchar several times but he was not honoured by the Municipality. In 1921 A.D., when Mahatma Gandhi visited Silchar, Kamini Kumar Chanda was the Chairman of the Board as well as the Congress leader. But no one in the Board dared to give
proposal for his reception. Most probably the nominated members used to resign from their post in case of any discussion to honour Mahatma Gandhi.

Lord Ripon wanted non-interference of the Deputy Commissioners in the affairs of Municipality so that the members could express their opinion freely. In Silchar Municipality, the expression of this attitude found in a meeting of the Station Committee held on 27th July, 1882 A.D., where Deputy Commissioner Wight as Chairman, said the justification of the election of a Vice-Chairman to put into force the principle of self-government.

It was mentioned that “Mr. Wight, dwelt upon the necessity of appointing a Vice-Chairman. He said that for the despatch of business the appointment of such an officer was urgently needed. He pointed out the evils of divided authority in the execution of public affairs. He said, that the principles of self-government may be put into force first in the municipalities where there is a great number educated and enlightened native gentleman, and that the example may be followed gradually in the district committees. He urged that a beginning may be made by appointing a Vice-Chairman by election”.

After Mr. Wight’s valuable suggestion to elect a Vice-Chairman the members of the Board passed a resolution in favour of the suggestion. The Chairman at once gave a notice to submit to him nomination of the candidate in sealed envelope or in other way before the next meeting.

The next meeting was held on 23rd August, 1882 A.D. “The members gave their votes under sealed covers and handed them over to the Chairman and the latter after canvassing the votes and announced that Jagat Bandhu Nag is elected as Vice-Chairman by a majority votes”. There was no mention about the name of the candidate who contested against Jagat Bandhu Nag. Therefore, Jagat Bandhu Nag was the first elected Vice-Chairman of the Silchar Municipality.

After the election of Vice-Chairman, Chairman Mr. Wight used to remain absent in the session and Vice-Chairman carried on the works of the session. After Mr. Wight, most of the Deputy Commissioners followed his footsteps. In the first session of the year, the members used to elect the
Deputy Commissioner as the Chairman till 1912 A.D.

Slowly and gradually the feelings of political consciousness along with the rest of country developed among the natives of Silchar. In this regard mention may be made of the Sylhet Municipality, where all the members were elected in 1882 A.D. In the towns of Brahmaputra Valley difference of opinion was still there on the question of election. At Silchar, though Divisional Commissioner was against election but the success of Sylhet Municipality election encouraged to start election in 1883 A.D.

The resolution to introduce election in a limited way was adopted in a meeting held on 12th October 1882 A.D. And among 15 members, ten members were to be nominated by government and 5 members to be elected. It was further resolved that "With these safeguards the committee think that the principle of election may be introduced without endangering the safety and well-being of the town. From this resolution it appeared that the committee had a fear regarding the system of election. It was also declared in the resolution that if the new elective system worked well, than in near future non-Government nominated members were to be elected.

Following the new system, in 1883 A.D., the Municipal Board was formed. When the system of election started the number of voters in a ward started from 15-20 up to highest 50-60. Ballot papers were sent to the houses of the voters. A ballot box was used to kept outside the Municipality office with a notice mentioning the last date of dropping ballot paper in the box. Usually the candidate collected the ballot papers with the help of the school boys, who used to drop the ballot papers inside the box. The Deputy Commissioner used to open the box on the fixed date and declared the name of the candidates who won the election. The Chief Commissioner has been pleased to approve the election by the rate-payers and nomination by the Deputy Commissioner of the following gentlemen to be members of the Station Committee of Silchar for the year 1883-84:-

250
Ward - I

Babu Jagat Bandhu Nag ..... Elected
Babu Sib Charan Sarkar ..... Elected
Babu Hair Charan Das .......

Mr. W.G. Black ................. Nominated
Mr. J.A. Browne ................. Nominated
Mr. Munshi Halim Ullah ....

Ward - II

Babu Abhay Charan Sarma ..... Elected
Babu Har Kishore Gupta ..... Elected

Babu Girish Chandra Gangopadhyaya ............ Nominated

Ward - III

Babu Mathura Nath De ................. Elected

Babu Gobinda Chandra Mitra .... Nominated
Babu Ishan Chandra Datta ....... Nominated
From 1882 A.D., onwards up to 1896 A.D., the Boards were formed every year. On 26th August 1896 A.D., an appeal was made to Government to extend the tenure of the Board to three years. So from 1897 A.D., the Boards were formed after every three years.

After the partition of Bengal, Assam was united with the East Bengal and Lieutenant Governor Fuller was supposed to visit Silchar. Silchar Municipality decided to honour him with an address of welcome. But a member named Nagendra Nath Dutta opposed the decision because according to him, Fuller was coming to Silchar not for official tour but for his personal reasons. And when Fuller came to Silchar in December 1906 A.D., and not in February, he refused to accept the address of welcome. Though not officially admitted, this negative attitude was definitely a fall out of the earlier controversy. In 1912 A.D., it was decided that 10 members of the board were to be elected and 3 were to be nominated by the government. In the beginning of 1912 A.D., election of the members of the Board was held ward wise.

In this election the members elected were Mohesh Chandra Dutta, Lalmoohan Saha and Munshi Habibulla from Janiganj ward, Dr. Nagendranath Dutta, Kailash Chandra Ghosh and Mohimchandra Biswas from Ambicapur ward, Durgashankar Dutta from Madhurbhand, Brojonath Shome and Upendranath Ghosh from Malugram and Kamini Kumar Chanda from Tarapur. The Government nominated members were Rai Bahadur Haricharan Das, Dr. Abdul Gafur and J.A. Crozier. To elect the chairman of the newly elected board a meeting was held on 23rd may,
1913 A.D. In this board an Indian named Kamini Kumar Chanda was elected Chairmen for the first time. This was a noteworthy event in the history of Silchar Municipality.

The changing attitude of the Board was also evident in a proposal of the Board in 1915 A.D., when Sanitary Commissioner criticised the non-government Chairman in his report. The Board passed a resolution to counter the remark of the Commissioner. “That is in any case the wholesale accusation charging unworthy motives to all unofficial Chairman and Commissioners for any supposed shortcomings which is perhaps imaginary, is calculated to disincline self-respecting persons to assume such honorary functions of Chairman and Commissioners”. It was only possible to pass such a resolution only because Kamini Kumar Chanda was the Chairman of the Board.

In the meeting of the Board held on 19th May, 1919 A.D., it was declared that Viceroy Chelmsford was to visit Silchar and the board sanctioned Rs. 500/- to welcome him. But in another meeting held on 27th October 1919 A.D., the Chairman himself opposed on the ground that it was illegal according to the Section 69 of the Municipal Act. Actually on 13th April, 1919 A.D., the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre took place. Though the British government tried to suppress the incident but slowly the news spread like fire. In this situation the programme of Viceroy was settled. Therefore in 1920 A.D., when Viceroy Chelmsford visited Silchar, Municipality gave him reception at Hospital and not at Municipality office. Because after Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Congress took a resolution that no Congressi would participate in any function honouring any Government officials. But in the case of Chelmsford as he was invited before the incident, therefore to avoid embarrassing situation Chelmsford was given reception at Hospital.

The degree of loyalty of the Indians was lessening is evident when there was a difference of opinion between Chairman Kamini Kumar Chanda and Divisional Commissioner. Divisional Commissioner was very much annoyed over Chairman as the Chairman delayed to give reply to the
Inspection Report. The letter was discussed in the meeting of the Board held on 10\textsuperscript{th} July, 1920 A.D. This meeting is very important in the history of the Municipality. During that period Divisional Commissioner was all powerful in the Municipality and it was not an easy task to confront with him. When Divisional Commissioner tried to harass Mr. Chanda, all the members of the Board wholeheartedly supported him against Commissioner. In spite of sanctioning a grant to repair the Sadarghat ferry road proposed by Municipality, Divisional Commissioner ordered the Board to pass resolution against Chanda on the ground that Chairman did not adequately discharged his duties. And on this order of the Commissioner, the Board passed the resolution in the following words that the Board did not find any justification for the advice he had been pleased to give them.

With the consent of the Board, the Chairman gave reply to the letter of Divisional Commissioner. “As temporary Commissioner, you are alleging that I am not performing my duties of Municipality perfectly. It may be right, because I am busy with the imperial council at Delhi. But the permanent Divisional Commissioner requested me before leaving. Give me commitment that you will be ready to become the Chairman for another term”\textsuperscript{8}. The Commissioner wrote that he had sanctioned Rs. 5234/- for construction of drain and the work should be completed as soon as possible. In reply the Chairman wrote that the officiating Divisional Commissioner has no such power to alter the budget. He can in the first instance only make suggestions for the consideration of the Municipality vide Section 76. Out of regard for his position, this was not pointedly mentioned but it was stated that if the Commissioner’s suggestion was accepted by the Municipality action would be taken thereon. This incident is an example to the development among the Indians the feelings of hatred towards British imperialism and the consciousness of their rights and duties.

In 1921 A.D., the situation was changed totally and the Municipality was no longer under any obligation to the Deputy Commissioner. And
sometimes Municipality had entered into controversies for its right with the Deputy Commissioner. In one occasion when Deputy Commissioner G.D. Walker had clean his bunglow by 49 Nagas, Municipality had sent a bill for this. But Deputy Commissioner refused to pay the bill. Municipality passed a resolution to take necessary steps in order to collect the bill. Therefore, a demand notice should be given to Deputy Commissioner. Today, it is beyond imagination that how this incident resulted tension in the town. Freedom Movement had greatly changed the mentality of the people and this incident of Municipality was a part of the freedom Movement. In 1921, the members of the board in protest against the activities of the missionaries founded the Dinanath Nabakishore Balika Vidyalaya. The Municipality provided financial help to the school because it was decided not to take any help from the Government.

Acharjee Prafulla Chandra Roy was honoured by an address of welcome by the Municipality when he visited Silchar on 20th March, 1924. Before this no Indian leaders were honoured by the Municipality except the British Chief Commissioners and Lieutenant Governor. When Bipin Chandra Pal and Gandhiji came to Silchar, Municipality did not make any arrangement to honour them. When Kamini Kumar Chanda was the Chairman of the Municipality, at his initiatives Gandhiji visited Silchar and stayed at Chanda Bhanwan. The meeting of Gandhiji at Fatak Bazar was arranged by the non-government members of the Municipality and the Congress of the town but Municipality had no connection with meeting.

When Abhayacharan Dutta was the Chairman (1922 April-1925) of the Silchar Municipality, the feelings of Swadeshi developed among the people of Silchar after the Non Co-operation Movement. Abhayacharan Dutta was a Revenue Seresthadar as well as Chairman of the Board. Congress never liked a government servant to be the chairman of the Municipality. Thus Abhayacharan Dutta often had to face the opposition of the members in the meetings of the Board. But before him, this type of situation was never faced by Kamini Kumar Chanda, as Chairman of the Board. Abhayacharan Dutta was fortunate that he completed three years
term as chairman because majority members of the Board were loyal to the government.

It is already mentioned, that after the Non Co-operation Movement the loyalty of the members of the board was lessened. This feeling was further aggravated in all the Municipalities of the country taking instances from the activities of the Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das of Calcutta Corporation. Because after 1920, when Deshabandhu Chittaranja Das was the Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation, he used the Corporation as medium for Swadeshi movement. All other municipalities in the country were influenced by the Calcutta Corporation.

Therefore, though there were still some loyal members of government in the Board, on the question of keeping a photograph of King George V in the Silchar Municipality some anti Government members were not satisfied. Thus the matter was avoided on the excuse of financial crisis in the meeting held in October, 1925. But reverse was the case when Deshabandhu died and a resolution of condolence was passed by the Silchar Municipality in the following words’ ....the great and self sacrificing soul, Deshabandhu C.R. Das, the beloved and trusted Tribune of Bengal....

The patriotism of the Board was more manifested when Simon Commission came to India in 1928 A.D. A commission under the leadership of Sir John Simon came to India to recommend reforms in the administrative system. The Congress all over India decided to boycott as well as called a hartal on 3rd February against the Commission on the ground that there were no Indian members in the Commission. Satindra Mohan Deb, a member of the board gave a proposal in the meeting held on 31 January, 1928 A.D. Municipality office and schools under Municipality should be close on 3rd February. Many members of the Board were alarmed due to the proposal. Brindaban Chandra Dey, Chairman of the Board was himself a retired government servant and he argued against the hartal. Instead of that Satindra Mohan Deb, Rukmini Kumar Gupta and Dr. Nagendranath Dutta tried to justify their proposal in different ways.
But the loyalist group strongly opposed the proposal. At last the resolution was dismissed by 11-7 votes. But this incident had a strong repercussion in the town. Gradually, Municipality became battlefield between Congressists and loyalists. In April, 1928 A.D., Dhirendra Kumar Gupta, a Congressman became the Chairman of the Municipality, the people in the town regarded it as victory of nationalists. So it was natural that he would not be in the good book of the government. In August, 1930 A.D., Chairman Dhirendra Kumar Gupta and board member Satindra Mohan Deb were arrested for their participation in the Civil disobedience Movement. On 29th August, 1930 A.D., Silchar Municipality suspended its work for 15 minutes to show respect to them. After judgement of the court they were jailed. As a result, Divisional Commissioner removed him from Chairmanship and after that municipality worked without Chairman for four months.

In 1930 A.D., Cachar High School was established in protest against the Cunningham circular. In this respect the Chairman Upendra Shankar Dutta, also took the initiatives. In the beginning, the classes were used to held at Abhayacharan Patshala. Deputy Commissioner made objection and at last under pressure from the government the school was shifted. When Upendra Shankar Dutta was the Chairman of the Municipality, Jyotindra Mohan Sengupta visited Silchar in April 1931, A.D., for student conference; Municipality honoured him with address of honour.

On 4th May, 1931 A.D., Rukmini Kumar Das became Chairman. As he was a government nominated Chairman, naturally the board was under the control of the loyalist group and often there were differences between the nationalist group and loyalist group. Certain events indicated that gradually Municipality was freeing itself from the allegiance of the Government. When Gandhiji started his fast protesting against the British Government's policy of communal division in 1932 A.D., there was a strong repercussion all over the country supporting Gandhiji. In this regard, Silchar Municipality passed a resolution proposed by Satindra Mohan Deb.

The Municipal Commissioner of Silchar Municipal Board joined the rest of India in giving expression to the universal feeling of sorrow and
grave concern at the fateful resolve and commencement of fast by Mahatma Gandhi. That although Mahatma Gandhi had began his fast, this meeting fervently appealed to the British Government to change its policy which will result in isolating the so called depressed classes from the Hindu community and also offer their fervent prayer to the Almighty that the country may yet be saved from the terrible catastrophe that is threatening it.  

In another incident in April, 1933 A.D., there was a serious difference of opinion in the Municipality on the issue of water pipe connection to Deputy Commissioner and Divisional Commissioner. Some members were of the opinion that it would be an act of partiality on the part of Municipality if it facilitated Deputy Commissioner and Divisional Commissioner for pipe connection depleviring common men. The resolution was ultimately passed in favour of the two high officials. But such opposition of the resolution by the members of the Board was beyond imagination before the Non Co-operation Movement of Gandhiji.

In July, 1933 A.D., Chief Commissioner Keatinze visited Silchar. Before his visit a resolution was adopted by the Municipality to receive him with honour. But Satindra Mohan Deb opposed the motion on the ground that the situation in the country was not favourable for this kind of function. Most of the members had not the courage to support the proposal of Satindra Mohan Deb and it was rejected by the 14-2 votes. Only Dr. Nagendra Nath Dutta supported the proposal of Satindra Mohan Deb.

In 1935 A.D., the Silver Jubilee for coronation of King George V was held. By this time there was a great change in the attitude of Indians towards the British Government. As a result, after Non Co-operation and Civil Disobedience Movements Indians were not delighted at the Silver Jubilee of King George V when one of the loyalist member proposed that to commemorate the occasion, Municipality should grant a scholarship either for medical education or technical education, the proposal was averted on the excuse of financial scarcity. Only it granted Rs. 125/- to
anniversary foundation, Rs. 25/- to decorate Municipality Office for the occasion which was unavoidable.

Subsequently, the impact of the freedom movement became more dominant in the activities of the Board. In 1937 A.D., when Jawaharlal Nehru came to Silchar, Municipality honoured him with an address of honour and spent Rs. 100/- for this purpose. Subhash Chandra Bose came to Silchar twice. In 1937 A.D., Subhas Chandra Bose came to Silchar and gave a very humiliating speech against British imperialism and the British officers who were present in the meeting left the venue after hearing the speech. In 1938 A.D., after becoming Congress President, he came to Silchar from Sylhet via Karimganj. Like other Congress leaders Subhas Chandra Bose also stayed at the house of Arun Chanda. Municipality honoured him with an address of honour in silver casket. For this purpose Municipality spent hundred rupees. "From the honour conferred on of two great political leaders by the Municipality it was evident that the spirit of political consciousness was developing in Silchar and Cachar as a whole." In 1938 A.D., when Gopinath Bordoloi formed the coalition ministry, Silchar Municipality declared its confidence on the ministry in a meeting held on 21st December, 1938 A.D. In 1939 A.D., when Gandhiji started fast at Rajkot, Silchar Municipality expressed its concern for the health of Gandhiji. Similar resolution was passed by the Municipality when political prisoners of Alipore and Dumdum jail started fast.

On 26th March, 1938 A.D., in a meeting of the Municipal Board a member name Dr. Brojendra Bhattacharjee gave a proposal to hoist the national flag in the Municipality Bhawan. At that period the flag of Congress was regarded as national flag. The proposal was dropped by Chairman by saying it will be considered later. The election of the Board held on 17th January, 1941 A.D., was noteworthy and remarkable in the history of Silchar Municipality. In this election, the Congress party participated for the first time as a political party. Congress candidates who won election from different wards were Arun Kumar Chanda, Hemendra
Kumar Dutta, Anupam Bhattacharjee, Shreemant Lal Gupta, Khushimohan Das, and Debendra Shankar Dutta.

The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, Mr. Flechar declared the election of Arun Kumar Chanda as invalid because he was in jail for participating in the Satyagraha Movement. A case was filed against this action of the Deputy Commissioner by Priyanath Deb and Moulabi Mosharraf Ali. The District Judge gave his verdict in favour of Arun Kumar Chanda. Instead of that the Deputy Commissioner continued his opposition. At last in the budget session of the Assam Legislative Assembly the government clarified the decision of the Deputy Commissioner as wrong. This incident indicated on the one hand the development of political consciousness of the Indians and on the other hand that the law was equal for the rulers and to be ruled. The proposal was suppressed by saying to be decided later.

After the election of a new Board on 29th July, 1942 A.D., in its first meeting all the 25 members of the Board were present to elect of the Chairman. The candidates for the post of Chairman were Rukmini Kumar Das and Arun Kumar Chanda. As tension was prevailing for the election, a large crowd gathered outside the Municipality office. In the meeting Arun Kumar Chanda had raised question on the legality of some issue but the President rejected his plea. Therefore, 12 members including Arun Kumar Chanda did not cast their votes. And other 13 members voted Rukmini Kumar Das to the post of the Chairman.

After becoming chairman, Rukmini Kumar Das made some objectionable comments aiming the people gathered outside the Municipality office. In protest the 12 members of the Board left the meeting. This kind of protest happened to be first of its kind in the history of Silchar Municipality. There was a political reason behind the confusion regarding the election of Chairman.

When the Second World War started in 1939, the Congress ministry of Assam resigned and the reactionary group formed the ministry. As this reactionary group was nominated by the government, therefore, most of the
people of towns were not satisfied when Rukmini Kumar Das became the Chairman. Rukmini Babu was also successful to place on the chair of Vice-chairman the person of his choice Mukabbir Ali. The conflict between the two group turned so serious that group of 12 members boycotted the meeting of the Municipality in which different committees were formed. This group of twelve members were called Congressis by the people. From this period the groupism was displayed in the municipality.

In the middle of 1943 A.D., Premier of Assam Saadullah visited Silchar, during that period (the word Chief Minister was not yet started). Before his visit, Chairman Rukmini Kumar Das proposed a resolution to welcome him. But a member of the Board named Anupam Bhattacharjee opposed the motions by regarding Saadullah as non functioning Premier. Sir Saadullah formed ministry five times between 1935-1945 A.D., but never had the majority. Each time he formed ministry with some self-interested persons taking advantage of the unstable condition of the country and supporting the British Government. He was not a very popular person. But the loyalist group of the Silchar Municipality was supporter of Saadullah and thus the motion of welcome was passed in favour of the Chairman.

The development of political consciousness among the different communities in the 40s was reflected in the records of Local Self Government, deparment of Municipal Branch. Regarding nomination of Silchar Municipal Board, “Silchar Municipal Board consists of 25 members- 5 appointed and 20 elected. The list of elected members were Girish Chandra Bhuiya, Jyotirmoy Sen, Gabru Mia Choudhury, Jamini Das, Chunu Mia, Mubeswar Ali Choudhury, Sultan Ali Mazumdar, Dr. Brojendra Bhattacharjee, Sunil Mohan Endow, Surbhanjan Khandelwal, Gopika Ranjan Paul, Hariprasanna Choudhury, Devendra Shankar Dutta, Paresh Chandra Choudhury, Ambar Ali Sadiol, Dhariknath Tewari, Jitendra Dasgupta, Dhirendra Kumar Gupta, Satindra Mohan Deb, Rabindra Kanta Sen. The nominated members were Rai Bahadur Rukmini Kumar Das,

"Total population of Silchar is 16,601 of whom the number of different communities are as follows:-

1. Other Hindus – 11,324
2. Scheduled Caste – 1,193
3. Muslims – 3,474

Among the elected members 5 persons are Muslims and 15 persons non-Muslims. It seems the Muslims have got their share. Other Hindus are entitled to 17 seats and scheduled castes to 2 seats. And Assam tribes, Tea garden tribes, Buddhists, Jains, Sikas, Europeans and Indian Christian are about 630 souls. Perhaps one seat may go to one of them".

This political consciousness was further reflected after the election of Chairman of the Silchar Municipal Board held on 12th March 1945. "The record of the present Chairman who is a nominated member is one of the unabashed misuses of power. A number of judgements copies of which are certainly in the files of Local Self Government Department will tell a lot about the conduct of this gentleman, which from all considerations is unworthy of one occupying position of such responsibility.

The public opinion here has been gravely wounded already as the previous minister in charge of Local Self Government took no action against this gentleman though repeated representation was made from the public and very severe criticisms appeared in the Assam and Calcutta press". The repercussion among the people of Silchar town was also reflected in another telegram "Silchar public opinion deeply perturbed by present Chairman’s activities several court judgements justify public resentment pray don’t re-nominate publicly discredited persons to Municipality". After great excitement the election for Chairman was held on 12th June, 1945 A.D. Deputy Commissioner D.C. Murray entrusted the responsibility to preside over the meeting on Hemchandra Chakraborty. There were three candidates Rukmini Kumar Das, Satindra Mohan Deb and Dr. Brojendra Bhattacharjee for the post of Chairman. At last Dr.
Brojendra Bhattacharjee withdrew his nomination. Satindra Mohan Deb was elected Chairman by defeating Rukmini Kumar Das by 13-11 votes.

The newly elected Board had another important feature which reflected the growing consciousness among the people. By 1945 A.D., the scheduled caste communities consisted about 1200 people within the Silchar town and as such they were eligible for 2 seats in the Board. But as they had no representative in the Board, they demanded for their representation in the Board to the government. To fulfil their demand the steps were taken by the Government, “Regarding nomination to the Silchar Municipal Board, Mr. Mec O’ Leary will have to submit his resignation to the Municipal Board as required by Section 19 of the Assam Municipal Act. After his resignation has been accepted by the Board, action will be taken for the appointment of a substitute in his place under Section 21 of the said Act. In this connection it may be mentioned that as Silchar Municipality consist of a population of over 16,000 out of which nearly 1,200 are scheduled castes. As such Government find that two members are eligible in the Board from scheduled castes community. As none from scheduled casts had been elected or nominated as a member to the Board, Government would, therefore, like to nominate a suitable person from that community in the above vacancy. The name of a suitable candidate from the scheduled caste may, therefore, be recommended to the Government in due course.18 “Therefore, accordingly, after the resignation of O’Leary a scheduled caste candidate named Babu Nitai Chand Patni, Bachelor of Law had been nominated. “under Section 10(3) of the Assam Municipal Act., 1923 (Assam Act I of 1923), as subsequently amended, the Governort of Assam is pleased to appoint Babu Nitai Chand Patni, Bachelor of Law to be a member of the Municipal Board of Silchar in the district of Cachar vide Mr. M. McCarthy O’Leary resigned”19.

After 1945 A.D., the political scenario of the country was changing rapidly and it was not possible for the Municipality to remain confined with the activities of the Municipality only. After independence, duties and responsibilities of the Municipality increased. Thus from 1945 A.D.
onwards a new era started under the Chairmanship of Satindra Mohan Deb. On 31st August, 1945 A.D., in a meeting of the Board a motion of condolence passed after the death of Subhas Chandra Bose. Jawaharlal Nehru came to Silchar on 19th December, 1945 A.D., to campaign for election and Municipality arranged public meeting at India Club to honour him with an address of welcome. This arrangement was first of its kind in the Silchar Municipality. The responsibility to arrange the meeting was entrusted to a sub-committee and the members of the said committee were Sunil Mohan Endow, Surajbhan Khandelwal, Rabindrakanta Sen, Jyotirmoy Sen and Paresh Chandra Choudhury.

In August, 1946 A.D., when communal riot broke out in Calcutta following the Direct Action Day (August 16) observed by Muslim league the overall law and order situation deteriorated in East Bengal and particularly from Noakhali and Comilla, a number of Hindu families came to Silchar as refugees. Silchar Municipality with its limited resources tried to help them.

During the post independence periods, factionalism became a dominant feature in Silchar municipal politics. On 21st February, 1949 A.D., election for the next new board held and on 25th June 1949 A.D., the first meeting of the new board took place for the election of the chairman. From political point of view this board was very important because different political party with their respective identity formed the Board. Satindra Mohan Deb was elected chairman of the Board. Tarapada Bhattacharjee belonged to Progressive party and Rabindrakanta Sen was the leader of the Popular party. But some member still did not belong to any party. As because of the existence of different party competition started among themselves when different sub-committees were formed within the Municipality.

In the last part of 1950 A.D., thousands of people belonging to minority community were uprooted from East Pakistan (Modern Bangladesh) due to severe oppression and extortion. Many refugees took shelter at Cachar. The repercussion of violence in East Pakistan resulted
communal violence in Cachar. Though Silchar Municipality had not the responsibility to maintain law and order in the town, but Municipality could not remain silent in such a critical situation. In the meeting of the Board held on 31st March 1950 A.D., the members of the Board discussed in detail the situation and gave the Chairman financial power to spend in times of emergency.

In 1950 A.D., the Assamese people demanded to the government to declare Assamese as the only state language. Strong protest was raised from Cachar against this demand. Silchar Municipality also protested against the demand and passed a resolution in these words "Bengali be used as extensively as possible in all affairs of this Board with a view to replace English by Bengali. Bengali be regarded as the official language of the Cachar District."

The earlier elective system in the Municipality was known as cumulative voting system, in this system a voter had the same number of votes as many number of Commissioners were elected from a ward. The voter could cast all his votes either to one candidate or to different candidates if he wished. Naturally this system had many defects. Therefore, the Board requested the Government to change the system in the meeting held on 29th February 1952 A.D. At the same time it also demanded to increase the number of Commissioners due to the growth in number of population in the town.

In the beginning of 1954 A.D., when again an attempt was made to implement the Assamese language as the state language, Silchar Municipality strongly condemned it. In this respect the most aggressive critic was Tarapada Bhattacharjee. In 1960 A.D., the Bengali speaking people living in the Brahmaputra Valley were again subject to oppression. Though Silchar Municipality had nothing to do directly, but criticising this act passed a resolution for imposing forcefully the language of 1/3 people on the 2/3 people of the state. Already before Tarapada Bhattacharjee, a member of the Board criticising it brought a motion and gave a vigilant statement that this attitude of Ultra Assamese may threat unity of Assam.
The Board that was elected on 24\textsuperscript{th} August 1956 A.D., had its first meeting on 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1957 A.D. to elect the Chairman of the Board. Satindra Mohan Deb submitted his nomination as the candidate of Citizen Party. But on the day of election he was given nomination from Congress party. It may be mentioned here that, Satindra Mohan Deb left Congress party in 1952 A.D and joined PSP party. In the election he was elected Chairman without any contest as Congress candidate.

In April 1961 A.D., the term of Satindra Mohan ended and a new chairman named Mohitush Purakayastha, a congress man was elected chairman of the Municipality. During the tenure of this board again the movement against the Assamese language took a serious turn in Cachar. In consequence, eleven innocent agitators were killed by the Police on 19th May 1961 A.D at the Silchar railway station. On 23rd May 1961 A.D., the members of the Silchar Municipal Board demanded judicial inquiry of the incident. In another resolution of the meeting was said "The meeting authorises the chairman to form a representative public memorial committee and raise funds for perpetuating the memory of the martyrs". Later in a meeting on 11th May 1962 A.D., a resolution was passed to construct a Martyrs Pillar at Gandhibag and when it was constructed common people financed it.

Mohitush Purakayastha was elected member of the Rajya Sabha on 28th March 1966 A.D., and he went to Delhi though for two months but did not return. In his absence vice-chairman was in charge of the chairman. During the election of the next board cumulative voting system was abolished. Therefore one voter could cast his vote for one candidate only. It was a great reform in the history of the Municipality. The town divided was into 25 wards. The number of nominated members were only two.

In December 1966 A.D., Indira Gandhi came to Silchar for the first time as Prime Minister and Municipality arranged a grand reception for her honour. As the President of Congress she visited Silchar twice in 1959.

In June 1967 A.D., a news published in newspaper that a conference was going to be held between Central Government and 41 M.L.A.s of
Assam for the reorganisation of Assam and also to create a separate Hill state for the people of Hill District. Therefore Municipality in this regard passed a resolution that "This meeting welcomes the proposal for a Round Table conference on the question of reorganisation of Assam and expresses the hope of that an agreement to all parties will be reached. This meeting reiterating its resolution dated 20th January 1967 A.D., most emphatically demands that if any scheme on reorganisation is made, Cachar should be given the status of a full-fledged unit and due consideration should be given to views of Cachar in this matter.

In 1969 A.D., the vice-chairman of the board Tarapada Bhattacharjee resigned because his party lost majority in the Board. Chairman Paresh Chandra Choudhury also resigned as his party lost majority in the board. Thereafter though Nalinakshya Choudhury was elected but due to groupism in the Board he had to resign within nine months. Then Paresh Chandra Choudhury and Mujibur Rahman were elected without contest Chairman and Vice-chairman respectively. As a result Municipality again came under Poura Unnyan Sangstha. This was an unpredictable incident in the history of Municipality. Though in 1928, Dhirendra Kumar Gupta was removed from chairmanship because of his arrest for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement, but defection was unknown to the politics municipality of that time.

The Board which was elected in the beginning of 1971 A.D., held its first meeting on 15th June 1971 A.D., to elect Chairman and Vice-Chairman. But as the corum was not fulfilled, the next meeting held on 22nd June 1971 A.D., in which twenty nine members were present. Contest took place between Dijendralal Sengupta supported by Poura Unnyan Sangstha and Nagarik Samithi and Prabhash Sen Majumdar, a candidate of Nagar Kallyan Samithi. Dijendralal Sengupta became the chairman.

Among the three parties in the Board Nagarik Samithi was the party of Communist and it was the first appearance of the Communist as a body. The Communist were in a advantageous position as the other two parties had almost the same strength. Though Poura Unnyan Sangstha and Nagar
Kalyan Samithi tried for an understanding but failed and on the contrary understanding was made between Poura Unnyan Sangstha and Nagarik Samithi. Both the parties agreed to elect Chairman and Vice Chairman by sharing among themselves the term. But it was a very difficult task to carry on the work of Municipality unitedly by more than one party. On the question of election of Vice Chairman, conflict started between the two parties. At last Mujibur Rahman, a candidate of the ruling party was elected Vice Chairman.

Karimganj was made a separate district in 1983 A.D. But before this when the issue was raised some of the members of the Municipality protested saying some self-interested persons trying to weaken the strength of the Bengali people by dividing Cachar. A resolution was also passed protesting against the division of Cachar.

During the last part of 1971 A.D., due to the activities of the terrorists of the East Pakistan the relation between India and East Pakistan became strained. Municipality gave a proposal to the government to look after the security of the people living in the border areas.

Already narrated in Chapter 3 about the agitation on the issue of medium of instruction. Gauhati University decided in July 1972 A.D., that at Pre University level the medium of instruction should be Assamese and two years course in place on one year. Municipality strongly protested against Gauhati University's decision to abolish Bengali as the medium in examination also. Municipality arranged a public meeting and invited all the M.L.A.s and M.P.s of Cachar to create public opinion in favour of it. Temporarily Academic Council of University kept English as the medium of instruction. Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha gave a proposal in the Assembly supporting University decision to be implemented in Brahmaputra Valley and to establish a separate university for Cachar. This proposal created strong resentment among both the Assamese and Bengalee community. Paresh Chandra Choudhury, Chairman of the Municipality strongly condemned the Assam Government and appealed the Central Government to interfere in the matter.
In the middle of the 1971 A.D., a conflict between the Municipality and the Government started on the question of appointment of an Executive Engineer by the Government. Each and every member of the Board opposed government decision and passed resolution in the meeting held on 9th July 1971 A.D., "It be made clearly known to the Government that in spite of Board's objection an Executive officer is thrust upon them and there is bound to be serious consequence". Though Government was creating pressure but the Municipality overlooked the matter and placed it before Municipal Association. During the tenure of this Board differences were created among the members of the board regarding the formation of different committees. It may be because of the emergence of different parties in the municipality. Originally there were only 3 to 4 committee in the municipality and now the number rose to 11 to 12. In the meeting held on 4th July 1971 A.D., when the name of 11 members were proposed for appointment in the finance committee, 10 members of the opposite group left the meeting. As they were also not ready to accept the new secretary because in this committee no members from their group were included. The meeting continued with remaining 17 members and all the committees were also formed. The Board which was formed in October 1972 A.D., Paresh Chandra Choudhury of Poura Unnyan Sangstha was elected Chairman without contest according to the earlier condition with Nagarik Samithi. During the tenure of this board the Gauhati and Dibrugarh University proposed to implement Assamese as medium of instruction in university, College as well as high school level. And beyond the expectation of the people of Cachar, Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha approved the bill. Silchar Municipality strongly protested against the decision of the Chief Minister and demanded that the colleges of Assam should be given the right to affiliate itself under any university.

Again the board expressed its resentment against Chief Minister, when Mohitush Purakayastha was deprived of any portfolio in the ministry because of his involvement in the language movement. The board passed a resolution in the following words "This action of the Chief
Minister appears to be ill-conceived and motivated with the intention of creating further bad blood between Assamese speaking people and linguistic minorities in Assam and to divert them from the path of conciliation by negotiation to confrontation much against the wishes of all peace loving people, and what is worse this will surely act as a great set back to the efforts hitherto made and are still being made by the Prime Minister and other Union Minister to resolve the language issue to the satisfaction of all communities and citizens of Assam.

This meeting, therefore, request the Chief Minister to revise his decision and to lend a helping hand to the Prime Minister and other Union Ministers to resolve the language issue which has been in the forefront for the last six months”.

In 1975 A.D., during emergency Government dissolved the Board of Municipality and took the charge directly into its own hand on 22nd September 1975 A.D., for four years. During this period Executive officer was in charge of the Municipality. During the period of emergency Deputy Commissioner was the Chairman and on his behalf the particular officer who used to execute the work of the Municipality is known as Executive Officer. In Silchar Municipality, Nipendra Chakraborty, Assam Civil Service was the executive officer from 22nd September 1975 A.D. to 2nd October, 1976 A.D., Narayan Chandra Borkotoy, Assam Civil Service was the Executive Officer for 10th February 1976 A.D. to 22nd July 1977 A.D., Barun Hom Choudhury, Assam Civil Service was the Executive Officer from 22nd July 1977 A.D. to 29th November 1979 A.D. In November 1979 A.D., again Municipality was handed over to the elected members. The new board consisted of 30 members and among them two were nominated. In this board all the members were new except three members of earlier board. In the first meeting of the board Santosh Mohan Deb was elected the chairman of the board.

Within a few days after the formation of the new Board the Chairman became the member of the Loksabha. Therefore the new Chairman had influence both in state and Central government and was in a
position to get sanction of large schemes for the Municipality. Moreover
due to absence of groupism Chairman got full fledged support of all the
members. But there were different parties in the board, for example Poura
Unnayan Sangstha, Nagarik Samithi, Poura Kalyan samithi and
Pragathishil Poura Parishad. The party in power was Pragathishil Poura
Parishad.

Till 1985 A.D., the Board was run by elected Board. But from 30th
December 1985 A.D. to 1990 A.D., there was no elected Board. From 30th
December 1985 A.D. up to 1990 A.D., the Silchar Municipality was run
either by Executive officer or Ad-hoc Board. From 30th December 1985
A.D. to 22nd January 1986 A.D., B.K. Dutta, Assam Civil Service was the
Executive officer. From 22nd January to 6th May 1986 A.D., Shymal Kanti
Deb Assam Civil Service was the Executive officer. From 6th May 1986
A.D. to 19th September 1987 A.D., Ahmed Hussaain Assam Civil Service
was the executive officer. When the Asom Gana Parishad party came to
power in the state Government they formed Ad Hoc Board in all the
Municipalities of Assam. From 19th September 1987 A.D. up to 24th
September 1990 A.D., Ad Hoc Board govern the Municipality under the
Chairmanship of Sandipan Endow. Then from 24th September 1990 A.D. to
4th December 1990 A.D., the Ad Hoc Board was govern under the
chairmanship of Santanu Das. Again with the coming of Congress party in
the State Government executive officers were appointed to carry on the
works of Municipality. And as such from 5th December 1990 A.D. to 1st
October 1991 A.D., R.N. Sharma was the Executive officer of the Silchar
Municipality.

Notes and references:–


5. File No. 59/70, Letter from J. Knox Wight to the secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 28th April, 1883.


