Institutions like Municipal Boards and local Boards that come within the denotation of Local Self Government are creation of British colonial administration which established its political authority over India sub-continent from 1757 A.D., onwards. However, an indigenous form of local self Government had been in existence in this country since the days of Harappa Civilization. Otherwise well-organized civic amenities available in the excavated sites would not have been there. Arthasastra of Kautilya, that depicts the situation of the Maurya period, elaborately depicts formation of civic bodies and the responsibilities performed by them¹. In the south, similar system existed during the reigns of Pallavas and Pandyas and in the chola Kingdom the system assumed a quite developed form². During the Mughal period the rulers confined their rule in towns and cities. So, the introduction of local self-Government by the British in India was not an innovation in rural sense of the term, though modernization of the system brought about a change which can be termed qualitative.

The history of modern self-Government institution dated back to the year 1687 A.D., when an order of the court of directors of the East India Company directed the formation of a corporation of European and Indian members for the city of Madras³. Similar type of corporations were set up in Calcutta and Madras in 1720 A.D., and 1793 A.D., respectively. Outside the presidency towns, attempt were made to set up local bodies of the urban areas after 1842 A.D. In 1850 A.D., an act was passed by which the Government of any province was given the power to implement the act in any town if it was demanded by 2/3 of the population of the town. But this attempt was not successful because of the less of response from the people.

After the great Revolt of 1857 A.D., certain factors particularly financial stringencies, paved the way for the growth of Local Self Government bodies⁴. From the year 1857-1861 A.D., the British Government had a deficit amounting 36 millions and to meet such deficit it was essential to decentralize authority. Since the time of Lord Canning, every year the Government of India transferred the local receipts of various sources of income, more or less of a local character to be administered by local Governments. Moreover, the outbreak of cholera in Bengal on 1861 A.D., it was felt necessary to improve the unhealthy conditions.
Meanwhile, the Indian Act, 1861 A.D., decentralize legislative powers and the provinces were given authority to pass local legislation. This stimulated the growth of local institution and self-Government.

In 1869 A.D., the Government of India took the final step and transferred a part of the burden throw upon them to the local bodies. In 1871 A.D., a bill was introduced, which provided for the election of Municipal Commissioners and concentrated real power in the hands of the Chairman who were also in the Magistrate rank. In 1876 A.D., Bengal Municipal Act was passed. Under this Act the urban areas were divided into four classes, First and Second class Municipality, Stations and Unions.

In 1882 A.D., Lord Ripon passed the famous resolutions, which directed the Provincial Governments to establish Local Board in each districts. Most of the members of the said Board were to be non-officials and the members of Government officers should not exceed 1/3 of the total members. The resolution stressed the principle of election. However, Government control must be there but that should be minimized. The act further suggested to encourage Indians to become members of the local bodies with the intention to give them popular and political education. The resolution permitted the Commissioners to elect their own Chairman.

In Assam, there was practically no local self Government prior to 1826 A.D. After its annexation by the British, the sanitary condition of the town of Guwahati deteriorated which increased the mortality rate among troops stationed in the cantonment area. Voluntary Municipal institutions existed in 1836 A.D., in Assam when Captain Matthie submitted settlement of the Town tax, where he suggested the European be taxed. In 1839 A.D., Town Improvement Committee was formed in connection with improvement of sanitary condition of Guwahati shockingly bad. In 1840 A.D., the Town Improvement Committee of Guwahati was constituted and functioned successfully. It levied tax on hawkers and dealers. In 1846 A.D., the Town Improvement Committee of Nawgaon was formed by the Magistrate particularly to collect the ferry funds to undertake Municipal activities.

In 1849 A.D., Commissioners of Assam with the permission of Bengal Government levied Municipal tax except house tax in Barpeta, Mangoldoi,
Golaghat and North Lakhimpur. In Dibrugarh an improvement Committee was constituted in 1847-48 A.D., for the permanent appropriation of the land revenue within the limits of station for Municipal purpose.

However, the Town Improvement Act, 1850 A.D., was found defective in several aspects, though it was existed for fourteen years. As a remedy the District Municipal improvement Bill 1863 A.D., was introduced in the legislature which became act in 1864 A.D. Under this act Guwahati Municipality was brought into force on 1st May, 1865 A.D. The Act of 1864 A.D., was amended in 1867 A.D., with two fold objects. Firstly, for the collection of tax on houses, buildings and lands from the occupier and partly to improve the constitution of the Municipalities.

Silchar came to be recognized as the sadar Headquarters of the District of Cachar administrators in 1833 A.D. At the initial stage emphasized was given on making Silchar a cantonment as the company concentrated on consolidation under superintendancy. They used Silchar as base of operation to deal with the problems of the neighbouring hill tribes effectively. Gradually Silchar gained importance as a strategic and military operation. The major portions of the town was under the control of cantonment. And though at that time municipality did not exist but a municipal branch was there in the superintendents office. The municipal branch used to maintain account of the police expenditure, to light five/seven street light of kerosene, construct small roads and to look after whether any adulteration is done in the market.

On 1st May, 1865 A.D., the Bengal District Town Improvement Act, 1864 A.D., was introduced in Gauhati. In the same year it was extended to the town of Silchar. The municipality had eight European and three native members besides a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman. The District Magistrate was the Chairman, while the Executive Engineer, the Superintendent of police and another Magistrate were among the members. It could levy duty on houses and landed property and utilize the revenue for maintenance of municipal police force and improvement of sanitation. However the experiment was not very satisfactory and the municipality was withdrawn in 1868 A.D.
The Municipal Administration faced a great chaos, as the financial position of the Government of India deteriorated very much between 1834-1870 A.D. To overcome their financial difficulties, the Government thought of several devices. The one was the partial transfer of the charges of local character to local accounts. But so far as Assam was concerned it can not be said that financial difficulties of the Imperial Government had effected the local self Government in Assam. Practically there were no local self Government institutions in Assam till 1874 A.D., except the lone Gauhati Municipality and Silchar Union.

When Lord Ripon came to India as Viceroy, Indians were inspired by the idea of democracy and liberty. Appreciating the Indian feelings Ripon suggested democratization of local-self Government institutions for the political training of Indians. So he issued a notification in 1882 A.D., and Assam Government accepted most of the suggestions of Ripon. Naturally this acceptance had also its impact on Silchar.

However, in 1882 A.D., under Bengal Municipal Act 1876 A.D., which divided the urban areas into First and Second class Municipalities, Stations and Unions, based on population, Silchar was constituted into a station. The station committee had 15 members (10 elected and 5 officials) and of the 10 elected members, 7 were Government officers. On 26th February, 1882 A.D., the first meeting of the station committee was held. The Ex-officio members present in the meeting were J. Wight Nox as President, Dr. Montith (civil Surgeon), Mr. G. Black (Senior E.K.B.) and the nominated members were Jagat Bandu Nag, Abhayacharan Sharma, Dakhshinacharan Sen, Baikunta Chandra Gupta, Harikishore Gupta, Halimullah Munshi, Shivcharan Sankar, Ramdulal Deb and Kalimohan Deb.

In the proceedings of the meeting it was mentioned that this was the first meeting appointed to administer the affairs of the newly created station of Silchar. In the meeting all the members were present. The word appointed used in the proceedings means all the members were nominated. In the first meeting, President without any formalities started preparation for the budget of next year. He said that municipality will no longer bear the police expenditure of Rs. 1844/-.

It may be mentioned here that during British period to maintain peace and order in each and
every town, police men were recruited by the Police department. These police were known as Municipality Police. For their expenditure the deputy commissioner used to collect taxes from the resident of the town especially the businessmen. From the next meeting the word chairman was used in place of president.

The Station Committee had no authority to impose tax on latrines, carriages, animals and for the supply of water. Naturally its resources were limited and with the fast growth of population the sanitary condition of the town was very unsatisfactory. In 1872 A.D., the population of the Silchar town was 4,925 and it increased to 6,567 in 1881 A.D. In 1891 A.D., population was 7,523 the density per square mile being more than 4,000 souls, while more than ¼ of the people were engaged in pursuits other than agriculture. Persuaded by Kamini Kumar Chanda, a nationalist leader and a lawyer, who headed the station committee, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar in 1891 A.D., recommended to the Government of Assam that the Silchar station be converted into a second class Municipality. Accordingly on 1st April, 1893 A.D., the station committee was upgraded to the status of a second class Municipality and this was retained during the remaining years of British rule.

Most probably there was a cell of some persons in Deputy Commissioner’s office to look after the maintenances of the town who later on became the members of the Station Committee. Since 1832 A.D., Deputy Commissioners were trying to establish schools, but failed as most of the people were agriculturists and had no interest in education. It was Prize William, who in 1863 A.D., was successful to establish High grammar school. After few years the school was undertaken by the Government and it was named Silchar District School. There was an infant class also where only the children of Government officers used to study. Due to high rate of fees the poor students could not take admission in the school. Therefore, in 1882 A.D., after the formation of the station committee, in its first meeting passed the resolution to establish a school for poor students. And the school was founded at Sadarghat which was made of thatch and bamboo. In the beginning there were no school for female students. One missionary woman named Miss Williams used to teach privately in their houses. Later on station committee founded a girl’s school at Shillong Patty near modern Women’s College. Bharat Chandra
Bhattacharjee was appointed head master of the school. People named the school as Hindu Balika Vidyalaya. Another girl’s school started by the missionaries at Premtola. In 1906 A.D., Miss Williams left India. In 1907 A.D., both the schools were combined together and extended up to Middle English level. In 1911 A.D., class VII was started and in 1916 A.D., for the first time girl students appeared in the High school examination. This school later on became the Girls Higher Secondary and Multipurpose school. In 1912 A.D., the school was shifted to its present place.

With the passage of time people’s interest increased for education and it is proved by the demand from every ward for schools. On 21st March, 1910 A.D., Municipality passed a resolution “Resolved that steps be taken to open Model pathsala from 1st April 1910 A.D.”, and this pathsala later on came to be known as Abhayacharan pathsala founds at the Municipal Ground.

In 1864 A.D., a charitable hospital was founded at Silchar which later on come to be known as Silchar Civil Hospital. In the beginning the Europeans of the tea gardens used to provide fund for the hospital. After the formation of station committee, Municipality granted Rs. 200/- in its budget for providing a more liberal scale of diet and other comforts to poor patients. The hospital was under the charge of a civil surgeon. In 1906 A.D., Municipality raised the fund for hospital to Rs. 600/-. Most of the patients of the hospital were from rural areas and tea garden. Municipality also rendered financial help to Sylhet Leprosy centre. In 1898 A.D., Silchar Municipality was terrified and alarmed due to plague epidemic. From Hong Kong, epidemic was spread to Bombay and later on to Calcutta. As a precaution to prevent the spread of epidemic in Silchar, Silchar Municipal Board in an emergent meeting passed a resolution The Deputy Commissioner be requested to arrange that steamer be not allowed to remain close to the bank in the view of the rats coming from holds of steamer to the bank with plague.

When the epidemic was spread to Calcutta there was panic at Silchar. Municipality organised meetings frequently and adopted remedial measures. On 3rd June, 1905 A.D., vigilance committees were formed in each locality. In this committees besides the members of the Municipality volunteers were also
included, who were instructed to keep a vigilant over their individual locality. In case of any doubt, to inform the Municipality instantly.

In the meeting of 3rd June, a resolution was adopted due to the non-availability of rat poison that if any one could show a dead rat he would be awarded 1 paise and if any one could catch a rat alive he would be awarded 2 paise. Then Principal Medical Officer of Assam sent rat poison to Cachar's civil surgeon. Municipality adopted resolution that ‘Civil Surgeon be requested to select some shops the Janigonj Bazar for experimenting with rat poison.’ Fortunately Silchar was not affected by the epidemic.

When Silchar became the administrative headquarters of the British it was almost like a village and the limited people who lived had no proper arrangement of sanitary latrine. Therefore, it was a major problem before the newly established Station Committee in 1882 A.D. In this regard on 8th January 1883, a resolution was adopted by the Station Committee to entrust the responsibility on the civil surgeon and the first public latrine was constructed at Janiganj. Different steps were taken by the Station Committee as how to maintain hygienically the private latrine.

In 1903 A.D., Municipality issued a notice for the construction of concrete latrine but some of the municipal dwellers expressed their financial inability to construct. On the basis of this a resolution was passed at the meeting held on 30th June “Resolved that they be referred to make latrines over pucca plinth according to standard plan”. From this it can be assumed that the Municipality had a standard plan.

But the most important problem was where and how to dispose of the waste. For 12/13 years the wastes were burnt at Rangirkhari. In 1894-95 A.D., with the approval of the Government Latrine tax was imposed and again it was doubled because existing rate was absolutely inadequate and insufficient for the staff of sweepers employed.

After the formation of the Municipality another important issue was the supply of drinking water. Ponds and tanks were the only source of drinking water before the coming of Municipality. In the beginning, Station Committee in order to supply drinking water engraved many wells in different parts of the town. In 1910-
11 A.D., Municipality applied to the Govt. for financial assistance to construct water works.

Silchar Municipality in the year 1898-99 A.D., in the first meeting of the Board granted Rs. 26/- in the budget for the purpose of Public Heath and maintenance of ponds for drinking water. Due to the lack of financial resources Municipality was not in a position to make arrangements for supply of water. Therefore, Municipality engraved wells in different parts of the town. During the period 1910-11 A.D., Municipality was trying to secure financial assistance for water works from government. People were also becoming conscious about drinking water is evident from the test to examine purity of the drinking water at Provincial Bacteriological and Chemical Laboratory.

In the year 1898-99 A.D., Silchar Municipality had the greatest increase in the income under the toll head derived from the sale of ferries. The income rose by Rs.1,453/- the increase being due to merely higher bids. In the same year in Silchar the cost of up-keep of the dispensary rose from Rs. 1,200/- to 1,700/-. Vaccinations were employed in eight municipality of Assam including Silchar.

The work of the water works at Silchar was successfully completed during the year 1917 A.D. An important work undertaken in Silchar was the removal of huts from the middle of the town and excavation of a tank on the site. A donation of Rs. 1000/- from B. Narsing Dutta was devoted to this object.

Between the period from 1882-1912 A.D., the Deputy Commissioners were the chairman of the Municipality. But from 1913 A.D., onwards the chairmen of the Municipality were elected. During the last part of 1912 A.D., elections for the members of the Municipal Board was held ward wise. Among the members 10 were elected 3 were nominated. On 23rd May, 1913 A.D., Kamini Kumar Chanda was elected as the Chairman of the Municipality and Mahesh Chanrda Dutta was elected as the Vice Chairman.

Immediately after taking over the charge Kamini Kumar Chanda decided to purchase 50 Bighas of land for trenching ground\(^{18}\). Another important contribution of Chanda was foundation of water works and in 1917 A.D., water was supplied by pipe connection only to those who used to pay Municipal tax. Moreover, to compensate extra expenditure for water works Municipality imposed latrine tax.
Municipality also took other steps to curtail expenditure, like during the full moon street lights of kerosene were not lighted.

As a result of repeated flood in the years 1913 A.D., 1915 A.D., and 1916 A.D., the roads were badly affected. Municipality took measures to repair the roads. Swami Bhumananda and Swami Basudebananda of Bellur Math came for flood relief in 1915 A.D., and 1916 A.D., respectively and at their encouragement the followers of Thakur Ramkrishna founded permanent mission.

In 1914 A.D., the First World War started and as a result there was rapid rise of price of the essential commodities in the market. To discuss the situation, a meeting of the Board was held. The meeting of Commissioners and members of the ward committees were held on the 15th August, 1914 A.D., to discuss the present situation about the rise of the prices in the market.

Members Present
The Chairman
The Vice Chairman
Babu Durga Sankar Dutt
Babu Mohim Chandra Biswas
Babu Nagendra Nath Shome
Babu Brojo Nath Ghose
Babu Upendra Nath Ghose
Babu Dr. Abdul Gaffur
Munsi Habib Ulla
Rai Shaib Behari Lal Dhar
Babu Mukunda Mohan De
Babu Baikuntha Chandra Dutt
Babu Krishna Kumar Dutt
Babu Sarat Chandra De
Babu Padma Lochan Sen
Babu Abhaya Charan Das
Babu Aghar Nath Adhikari

Mathura Nath Choudhury representing the “Surma” (newspaper) was also present.

40
The meeting resolved after considerable discussions in addition to the Commissioners and members of committee using moral persuasion and advice to shop keepers not to enhance price and the following opinion published by beat of drum throughout the town:—

“No genuine reasons are there to enhance the price of the commodities”

It was further resolved that the commissioners and members of the ward committees be requested to inquire into the condition of market on Thursday and report.

Before 1913-1914 A.D., except Mr. Oliary, no one had any motor vehicles. At the advice of Mr. Oliary, Bishun Lala purchased a car cost Rs. 4000/-. In 1916 A.D., again election of the members of the Municipality was held. Kamini Kumar Chanda and Dr. Nagandra Nath Dutta were elected Chairman and Vice chairman respectively. But in 1916 A.D., again Kamini Kumar Chanda was elected as the member of the Legislative Council by Assam’s Law Council and for this he had to visit Delhi frequently. In his absence Vice chairman used to act on Chairman.

In 1917 A.D., some of the Municipality tax payers complained to the Govt. that tax rate fixed on some of the Municipal Commissioners was less than other payers. But no step was taken to meet the complaint. In 1918 A.D., many people died of Influenza in different parts of the country. Silchar Municipality, in order to prevent the epidemic purchased medicine of about Rs. 500/- from Calcutta and distributed among the local people.

On 12th April, 1919 A.D., election of the Municipality Commissioner was held and again Kamini Kumar Chanda and Rukmini Kumar Das were elected Chairman and Vice chairman respectively. The new chairman took steps to improve the condition of many roads. These were Janiganj Road, Municipal Road, Cachari Road, Janiganj Public Latrine Road, Kalibari Road, Thana Road, Kalibari Riverghat Road, Naga Line Road, Police Line Road, Shillong Patty Road, Fechaimia Road, Jhalupara Road, Ambicapur Latrine Road, Malugram Road, Itkhola Road, Nutanpatty Road No. 1, Madhurband Approach Road, Public Works Department Godown Road, Tarapur Latrine Road and Road inside Khas Bazar.
In the middle of 1919 A.D., when the cost of rice became very high, Municipality sanctioned grains compensation allowance to its employees. Further with the advice of Divisional Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner announced that no one could raise the price more than 6 rupees. On 20th August, 1919 A.D., in a meeting of the Municipality it was declared that viceroy Chelmsford was to visit Silchar and the Board decided to gave a grand reception to the viceroy. But after the Jalianwala Bagh incident Municipality dropped the idea of grand reception. One of the noteworthy incident of 1920 A.D., was difference of opinion between Kamini Kumar Chanda and Divisional Commissioner on the issue of inspection report. Though Divisional Commissioner tried to harass Chanda but the other members of the board whole heartedly supported Chanda.

The Board which was formed on 22nd April, 1922 A.D., its Chairman and Vice-Chairman were Abhayacharan Dutta and Rashid Ali Laskar respectively. In the first meeting of the board a female tax payer applied to relieve her from payment of house tax and light tax and her application was granted. This Board also raised the amount which was granted to local hospital from Rs.700/- to 1000/-. During the tenure of Kamini Kumar Chanda as Chairman there was no difference of opinion among the members of the Board. But, Abhayacharan Dutta often had to face opposition of the other members of the Board. One of the noteworthy matter about the social condition of that period also evident from a resolution when some of the resident of Tarapur gave application to the Board to replace a male teacher by appointing a female teacher in Tarapur girls Patshala. In this issue it is clearly evident about the mentality of the people of that period. The Board had the capacity to provide water pipe connection to 280 people but it provided to only 215 and in a resolution of 17th July, 1922 A.D., it was mentioned that 26 connections were reserved for Europeans and aristocrat people. This type of class discriminating resolution is possible is modern days. Regarding the private drain cleaning by Municipality another resolution was passed on 16th September that Municipality will clean private as well as public drain. But this resolution could not solve the problem of private drain.

On 20th March, 1924 A.D., Prafulla Chandra Roy visited Silchar and Municipality on behalf of the citizens of the town presented him address of
welcome. Before this no Indian leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Mahatma Gandhi were greeted by Municipality. The next Board election that was held on May 1925 A.D., and the number of elected numbers were 15 instead of 10 and the total number of members including nominated members were 20. Brindaban Chandra Dey and Dhirendra Kumar Gupta were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively.

During the terms of this Board, the demand for water pipe connection was so high that Municipality made a rule that no one could use pipe bigger than 2½". After the First World War, motor cars were introduced in the town and for the first time a petrol pump was started at the meeting point at Janiganj Latrine Road and Bhunyan Road. In 1926 A.D., a conference of the Board of all Assam Municipality held at Gauhati in which representative of Silchar Municipality also attended. Another contribution of this Board was that it sanctioned Rs. 2000/- to the hospital for a female ward for the first time which indicates a change in the outlook of people in the society. After the Non-Cooperation Movement the feelings of patriotism and that the Municipal Board was influenced by the spirit became evident when a resolution was passed after the death of Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das which says: “the great and self sacrificing soul, Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, the beloved and trusted tribune of Bengal .... And again when Simon Commission came to India some of the members protesting against the commission proposed to observe Hartal”.

The Board which was elected on 24th Feb, 1928 A.D., its Chairman and Vice-Chairmen were Dhirendra Kumar Gupta and Upendra Shankha respectively. In August 1930 A.D., Chairman Dhirendra Kumar Gupta and Board member Satindra Mohan Deb were arrested because they participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. One of the important events that took place during the tenure of this board was that for the first time electricity was introduced in Silchar Town. Municipality repaired and reconstructed many roads damaged by the flood in 1927 A.D. Moreover, it made a rule about the size of the wheel of Bullock cart i.e. 3 inches because of the complains of the people against the bullock carts which were damaging the roads.
In the Municipality board that was elected in the beginning of 1931 A.D., the numbers of elected members were 20 and nominated members were 5. Rukmini Kumar Das was elected Chairman and Dr. Hussain was elected Vice-Chairman. Rukmini Kumar Das was a very strict administrator. But during his time there was a division among the members of the Board. Some of them were Congress Supporters who always opposed Rukmini Das and his supporters.

The Board under Rukmini Kumar Das took steps in 1931 A.D., to improve the condition of Goldighi which lost its original beauty. In a resolution of the Municipality on 2nd November, 1931 A.D., it is evident that the board used to repair and maintain about 61 number of roads. The total length of the road was 12 mile and of these 11\(\frac{1}{2}\) were made of gravels and \(\frac{1}{2}\) mile was unmetalled road. In 1933 A.D., there was a difference of opinion among the members of the Board on the question of giving permission to a carnival. But as the carnival was not within the Municipality area the matter was dropped. But this incident had made one thing clear that people of that period had a dislike and hatred for carnival.

Slowly and gradually the loyalty of the Municipality towards British Government were lessening proved by the fact that when Gandhiji started fast against British Government’s communal division policy, Municipality passed a resolution proposed by Satindra Mohan Deb.

The next board held its first meeting on 25th May 1934 A.D., with Rukmini Kumar Das and Dr. Hussain as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. On 24th Feb, 1935 A.D., in a meeting of the Municipality, Dhirendra Gupta said “Shillongpatty is the nerve-centre of the town and that the drainage of Shillongpatty is not likely to improve unless and until its outlet is improved”.

The Board which was elected in June 1937 A.D., Rukmini Kumar Das was elected Chairman for the third time. Mohd Nur Mohammad was elected Vice-Chairman. Municipality honoured Jawaharlal Nehru in 1937 A.D., and Subhas Chandra Bose in 1938 A.D., with address of welcome when they visited Silchar. Municipality passed a resolution supporting the coalition ministry formed by Gopinath Bordoloi. On 6th March, 1939 A.D., Municipality expressed its anxiety and concern when Gandhiji started fast at Rajkot. Silchar Municipality also
expressed its anxiety in July 1939 A.D., when some of the political prisoners in Dumdum and Alipore Jail were at the commencement of fast.

On March 1941 A.D., when the construction of Kamini Kumar Chanda Smriti Bhawan was completed by the Municipality and Keatinze library was shifted to this building and renamed it as Arunchanda Granthaghar.

On 29th July, 1942 A.D., the first meeting of the next new board was held and Rukmini Kumar Das and Mukabbir Ali were Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. In 1941 A.D., Japan joined the Second World War simultaneously and Indians were also very eager for independence. In 1942 A.D., when Japan dropped a bomb on Derby Tea Estate, people abandoned the town in large numbers. In this abnormal condition it was very difficult for Municipality to carry on its work and some members of the board belonging to opposition party resigned from the board. As a result of the war there were shortage of water, electricity, paper, wood and kerosene.

In 1942 A.D., cycle rickshaw was introduced in Silchar for the first time and Municipality fixed the rate of the rickshaw fares. In the middle of 1943 A.D., premier of Assam, Saadullah visited Silchar and in spite of opposition of Anupam Bhattacharjee, a member of the board a resolution was passed in the meeting of the Board to welcome Saadullah.

With the end of Chairmanship of Shri Rukmini Kumar Das, an era of Municipality also came to an end. During his period truck was used for the first time to carry the waste and also to supply water by Municipality to far flung areas. He had the credit to found Kamini Kumar Chanda Bhawan. He converted Keatinze library to Arun Kumar Chanda granthaghar. With limited resources he tried to keep the town neat and clean. During war time he was successful to collect major portions of the taxes. On 1st January, 1943 A.D., the government awarded him the title of Roy Bahadur because he very efficiently discharged his duties as chairman during war time.

After the election that held on 12th March 1945 A.D., Satindra Mohan Deb and Gabru Mia Choudhury were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. Satindra Mohan made arrangement for Rabindra Kaksha within
keatinze Library for the collection of Books written By Rabindranath Tagore. Today there is no trace of Rabindra Kaksha.

In 1945 A.D., one of the indirect result of great War was great crisis of clothes in the town. Government supplied clothes in controlled price and Satindra Mohan helped Government by distributing clothes though ward committee. During Second World War, radio for the first time imported in the town and Municipality for the conveniences of the people kept a radio at Sapnala.

In 1946 A.D., when Muslim League started agitation at Calcutta the minority community in different parts of East Bengal were victims of violence. In the first part of 1947 A.D., many Hindu people took shelter at Silchar railway station and Satindra Mohan came forward to help them with his limited resources.

In June 1947 A.D., Lord Mountbatten after taking over charge of Indian’s administration declared Muslim dominated areas are free to form separate nation. Hindu majority people of Cachar were not ready to accept the transfer of Cachar to Pakistan. Silchar Municipality was also not in favour of transfer of Cachar to Pakistan and therefore passed a resolution on 25th July, 1947 A.D.- “In view of the fact that it had been decided by the Silchar Municipality Board that the District of Cachar should not be demarcated for transfer to the Pakistan and also in view of the fact that it is considered necessary to press this point before the Boundary Commission set up under the Mountbatten plan be it resolved that Babu Dhirendra Kumar Gupta is hereby authorised to proceed to Calcutta and take all necessary steps in this connection including preparation and submission of memorandum to the Boundary Commission and appointment of lawyer to represent the Municipal Board before the Boundary commission. The chairman is authorised to incur all expenditure”.

At last Cachar remained with India by the decision of the Boundary Commission and Silchar Municipality celebrated the occasion with great enthusiasm. After independence all the members of the board started taking oath expressing their loyalty to Indian administration instead of British monarchy like earlier. After the assassination of Gandhiji, Silchar Municipality in a resolution expressed sorrow and grief and in his honour named Sapnala as Gandhibag. Another important step taken by Municipality on 6th June 1949 A.D., was that it
passed a resolution for appointment in fire brigade, one station officer, 2 head fireman and 2 fix men.

After the election of the Municipal Board on 21st February 1949 A.D., Satindra Mohan Deb and Paresh Chandra Choudhury were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. During the first part of 1950 A.D., thousands of non-muslims after their eviction from east Bengal took shelter in Cachar. In consequence, on the one hand arose the problems of refugee and on the other hand communal riots took place in Cachar. Municipality with its limited resources tried to solve the problem of refugee and it also declared that without the permission of Municipality no one could hand over holding to others. But inspite of that the town became so congested that absence of proper drainage system became one of the critical problems. With the increase of population along with other things there was a necessity of schools and for this purpose Municipality donated land near Tarapur Police out post where Shyamacharan Bidyapith was founded.

Another major issue before this Board was the rehabilitation of Nagas of Nagapatty. But the Nagas refused to shift from Nagapatty and the problem remained the same. In 1950 A.D., Assamese demanded that Assamese language should be sole language of the state. But the Bengali dominated people of Cachar strongly protested against this and Silchar Municipality also protested and passed a resolution, “Bengali be used as extensively as possible in all affair of this Board with a view to replace English by Bengali ------- Bengali be regarded as the official language of the Cachar District”.

On 12th November, 1952 A.D., again election of the members of the Municipal held. The number of votes in each ward were as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janiganj</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>1067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhurband</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambicapur</td>
<td>2416</td>
<td>2308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malugram</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>1357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarapur</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first meeting of the Board was held on 21st March, 1953 A.D., and Satindra Mohan Deb and Ramchanda Babu were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. With the rise of the number of vehicles on the road for the safety of the people Municipality tried to limit the speed of the vehicles. In March 1954 A.D., after the great fire at Fatak Bazar, at the persuasion of Municipality, Government took over Fire Bridge directly. During the tenure of this board Municipality donated land to many educational Institutes. These were Vidhyapith, Malugram M.E. School, Joy Kumar Girl’s School, Netaji Vidhyabhawan, Arunchandra Law College. In 1954 A.D., Municipality strongly criticized against forceful imposition of Assamese language and Tarapadha Bhattacharjee was the greatest critic.

On 15th March, 1957 A.D., the first meeting of the next Board was held. Satindra Mohan Deb contested the post of Chairman as a candidate of citizen party. But on the day of election Congress party nominated him. Therefore Satindra Mohan Deb and Govindalal Paul were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. The main problems before the new board were (i) To reconstruct the stalls destroyed by fire in 1954 A.D., (ii) To develop the drainage system in the town, (iii) To solve the problem of water supply.

With the influx of population from East Pakistan, the town became very congested due to construction of unplanned buildings. As a result the drainage problem became very acute and Municipality did not have the vast resources to tackle the problem. Satindra Mohan in this respect failed to attract the attention of the Govt. The refugees also founded many colonies in the surroundings of the town. Silchar Municipality for the convenience of the people built many culverts and small roads. Another major problem with the growth of population was sanitation. Under the chairmanship of Satindra Mohan a resolution was passed by Board to encourage people for the construction of sanitary latrine. In the field of education and culture the board had provided financial assistance to many schools and cultural organisations. Moreover, the board appointed a midwife. But later on the post was abolished.

The election of the next new Board was held on 16th December, 1960 A.D. In this board the numbers of nominated members were only two. In this board
Mohitush Purkayastha and Ramchand Sarada were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. In 1961, the people of Barak Valley strongly protested against implementation of Assamese language as the state language and in consequence the army killed 11 people at the Silchar railway station. Silchar Municipality in protest against the act of army passed a resolution and in memory of the martyrs, some of the roads were named after the martyrs. Municipality took active part in this regard.

In 1963 A.D., rice crops were destroyed by both floods and insects and in consequence there was high rise in the price of rice. Municipality appealed to the Government to help people by supplying rice with ration facilities. The result was that sufferings of the people knew no bounds. This was further aggravated by the scarcity of drinking water. People died in large numbers. Municipality took steps to cremate the dead bodies. On 28th March, 1966 A.D., Mohitush Purkayastha was elected as the member of the Rajyasabha and he left for Delhi. In his absence on 27th April, 1966 A.D., the election for the new board was held.

In this new board Paresh Chandra Choudhury and Pushparanjan Gupta were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman. After the construction of District Library, it was occupied by the army and it was due to the pressure from the Municipal board the army vacated it. When in December 1966 A.D., Indira Gandhi visited Silchar for the first time as Prime Minister Silchar Municipality arranged a grand reception for her.

Municipality had financial crisis from the beginning and payment of taxes by the people was also not regular. Thus it was not always possible for Municipality to implement all the plans properly. On 1st May, 1969 A.D., Municipality passed a resolution for May Day for the first time in the history of Silchar Municipality. On 14th June, 1969 A.D., a resolution was passed by Municipality to increase the number of ward to 27. On 29th August, 1969 A.D., a resolution was passed when V.V. Giri became President by defeating Congress Candidate Sanjiba Reddy, Board expressed great sense of joy at the astounding victory of V.V. Giri as it was the victory of democracy. On 28th Oct, 1969 A.D., after the resignation of Tarapadha Bhattacharjee, Vice Chairman, the Board lost its majority and therefore the chairman also resigned.
In this critical condition some of the members with the help of the Deputy Commissioner decided & elected Vice-Chairman on 1st December, 1969 A.D. Thus, Bimal Kumar Das elected Vice-Chairman. Then Dr. Nalinakshya Choudhury was elected Chairman.

Regarding water supply the Chairman informed that in 1972 A.D., the total population of the town was 60,000 and water works was not sufficient to meet the demand. After many obstacles National supply and sanitation programme agreed to grant Rs. 60 lacs to Municipality for water supply. And at the initiatives of Municipality the responsibility was given to Public Health engineering. Due to conflicts among the members Nalinakshya resigned on 5th August, 1970 A.D. Then again Paresh Chandra Choudhury and Mujibur Rahman were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. Election of chairman for three terms was an unprecedented incident in the history of Municipality.

Before 1970 A.D., Gandhi mela and exhibition was under the control of a committee through which Municipality also provided help and assistance. But on 5th December 1970 A.D., by a resolution it was decided by Municipality to conduct the mela by itself through a committee and members consisted both from Municipality and outside. In 1970 when Mukti juddha started in East Pakistan many refugees took shelter in Cachar. Tarapada Bhattacharjee, a member of the Board tried to attract the attention of Deputy Commissioner towards the problems and difficulties of refugees.

During the first part of 1971 A.D., the election of the next new board was held. In this new board Dijendralal Sengupta and Mujibur Rahman were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively.

During the tenure of Chairmanship of Dijendrababu, the board did more work for the interest of the greater Cachar than the work related directly with the Municipality. Among these one of the demands of the people of Cachar was to open a Divisional Office of the Life Insurance Corporation at Silchar not only for the benefit of people of this valley but for the states of Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur as well. Therefore, in support of this demand Municipality passed a resolution that “It was unanimously resolved that Life Insurance Corporation be moved to open a divisional office at Silchar in the interest of all”.

50
Secondly when the state Government decided to shift the division of Flood control & Irrigation to Karimganj, Municipality protested and requested the Government to consider all the aspects giving due respect to the construction of Barak Dam and to keep in abeyance the proposal for shifting of the Divisional office from Silchar to Karimganj. And the third demand of the Municipality was to complete the repairing work of the Jawai-Badarpur Road within a short time.

Another major problem faced by the people of Barak Valley in which the Municipality protested was medium of instructions in the Pre University level under Gauhati University. Silchar Municipality opposed the proposal of Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha declaring Assamese language as the only medium of instruction in the Brahmaputra Valley and creation of a separate University in the Cachar region.

Besides this, Municipality also tried to solve some of its direct responsibilities. The Board strongly protested against the Government’s proposal for appointment of an Executive officer for the Municipality. During this period, there was a crisis of rice and essential food in the market. The Chairman assured to take steps to solve the problem. In August 1972 A.D., there was difference of opinion among the members of the Board on the question of formation of different Committees under the Municipality. On this issue Dijendralal Sengupta resigned. After him Paresh Chandra Choudhury was elected Chairman of the Board. And after few days Ramchand Sarada was elected Vice-Chairman in place of Mujibur Rahman. During the tenure of this board, the linguistic problem reached its climax. And the board continuously protested against the policies of the Government.

After the declaration of emergency, the Government took over the responsibility of Municipality in its own hand on 22nd September 1975 A.D., for a period of more than four years. Again in November 1979 A.D., election for the board of Municipality was held in which 28 members were elected and 2 members were nominated. Santosh Mohan Deb was elected Chairman of the Board. Within a few days Mr. Deb was also elected member of the Lok Sabha. As a result the new Chairman was in a position to get sanction of many projects for Municipality from central as well as from the state government. For example on 27th December, 1979 A.D., World Health Organization adopted a policy of constructing sanitary latrine
with a low cost and in Assam Silchar was one of the towns under this scheme. Silchar was also included under the Integrated Urban Development Programme in which the central as well as state government will provide financial help for the improvement of roads and drainage system. Another important project adopted by the Municipality was building of four new markets at Itkhola, Rangirkhari, Anukul Ashram Road and Nutan Bazar. At the initiatives of the Chairman a children park was built at Gandhibag in which financial help was also provided by the Government. Local Lions Club donated same play materials for the children.

On 25th February, 1982 A.D., a sub committee was formed for the centenary celebration of the Municipality. To co-memorate the occasion Municipality adopted some projects and also decided that if these projects were not completed then these will be continued by next board. The task of compiling the history of the 100 years Silchar Municipality was entrusted to Debabrata Dutta. Among many other works of Municipality one of the notable works was the foundation of the statue of Rabindranath Tagore and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at India Club and Rangirkhari respectively.

On 4th August, 1983 A.D., the function for the centenary programme was organized at District Library. The chief guest of the programme was Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief minister of Assam. On this occasion some of the roads were renamed by the Municipality. So, after studying 100 years history it is evident that Silchar Municipality had a great contribution towards the development of Silchar as an urban centre. Critically speaking, the Municipality failed to keep the town clean and decongest. It may be said Municipality was not wholly responsible but the growing population and non co-operation of the people made the town dirty and congested.

Notes and references:-

15. Ibid., P-175.
17. Ibid., P-20.
18. Ibid., P-45.