PRE-SUPERINTENDENTS RULE IN CACHAR

The Princely Regime: To have a better idea about the topic it is necessary to examine the pre-Superintendents rule of the princes in Cachar. This will provide a background of the activities of the Superintendents and what progress was made upon the previous systems. The reign of last Cachari King, Govindachandra (1813-30) was marked by various disturbances that led to the decline of Cachari rule. Because, various political dynasties like Tripuris, Koches and sometimes Manipuris came in existence in Cachar.¹ Hard-pressed by the Ahoms, the Cachari Rajahs had to shift their capital frequently from Dimapur to Maibong and lastly to Khaspur in plain Cachar on the bank of the river Madhura.² Khaspur was made the last capital of
Cachar in 1750 by the Cachari Rajah Lakshmi Chandra. This is the beginning of the rule of the princely regime in Cachar. But the Cachari Rajahs had to face internal and external threats from Manipuri princes, Burmese and from Tularam Senapati of North Cachar Hills. For about thirty years, the History of Cachari Rajahs and their manifold activities remained in darkness. As nothing is known in details from 1750 to 1780 when Krishnachandra assumed power as the ruler of plain Cachar and ruled from Khaspur. The socio-economic and political situation was not sufficiently stable during the reign of the two last Cachari Rajahs, Krishnachandra (1780-1813) and Govindachandra (1813-30). Of course, it was obvious that the Cachari Rajahs set up a well organised administration in plain Cachar. This arrangement was helpful to the Superintendents for establishing the British Raj instead of Princely Raj in Cachar. The Rajahs were the absolute authority in the socio-economic and political segments of Cachar. But in the truest sense of the term the Superintendents were not so.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION DURING THE PRINCELY REGIME (1750-1830)

SOCIAL SITUATION

The plain Cachar over which the princes ruled first and the Superintendents later on was an important abode of various ethnic communities. Most prominent among them were Cacharis, Bengalis, Muslims, Manipuris and some tribal groups like Kukis, Nagas who lived together in Cachar. The
Rajahs provided freedom to all ethnic groups in practising their social customs and institutions where the Superintendents did not even interfere. The princes followed a liberal attitudes in regard to religious matters. The Cachari Rajahs had their own tribal faith and religion but accepted Hinduism after their migration to Khaspur as majority of their subjects were the Hindus at that time. Of course, the slow progress of Hinduism among the Cacharis had probably began before shifting their capital to Khaspur. Rajah Krishnachandra formally accepted Hinduism in 1790 and made extensive pilgrimages to Kashi, Prayag, Navadeep etc. taking loan of Rs. 80,000 from his subject people. He also imported Brahmins from Sylhet, Khasi-Jaintia Hills and granted Devottara and Brahmatara lands. Pirmuttara was given for the maintenance of religious places of Muslim saints. The Hinduisation process started with the later princes as they came very close to the Hindus while they were ruling from Khaspur. Accordingly, the existence of various Dargahs or Tombs except Mosques of reputed saints, Mokam etc. in Cachar clarify that Islam or Sufi philosophy existed during the Cachari rule specially in 1799-1800 when Krishnachandra ruled Cachar. The Cachari Rajahs worshipped different Gods and Goddess like Ranachandi, Jagannath, Shyamakali, Kanchakanti, Madan Mohan, Ghorchandi, Shiva etc. The Cachari royal household did not follow a fixed religion. Christianity was unknown in Cachar during the princely regime as the Rajahs remained inactive in this case. But Hinduism basically Vaishnava and Sakta form of
Hinduism was the prevailing religion in Cachar during the last part of princely regime. Krishnachandra was a devout monarch and followed those Gods and Goddesses earnestly. The architectural remainings - Ranachandi Temples, Shyamakali Temple etc. of Khaspur that we find now in a dilapidated condition. It confirmed that the royal household was the worshipper of all those Gods and Goddesses. Rajah Krishnachandra performed Hiranyagarbha Yagna (Gold Sacrifice). The compilation of Folksongs by Krishnachandra indicated the inclination of the Rajah to Ranachandi. Krishnachandra inclined towards Vaishnavism influenced by Indraprava, daughter of Jaisingh of Manipur. Vaishnavism was the religion of the people during the reign of Krishnachandra and Govindachandra. Of course, Hinduism also continued successfully as the follower of it was also large. Krishnachandra constructed two Vishnu Temples at Khaspur. Moreover, under his patronage, Siva Mandir and Nandi Mandirs were constructed at Sivtilla near Sonai.

Another social dimension during the princely regime specially during Govindachandra can be traced out from the following fact. As the Dhamadis, the chief priest of Cachari Rajahs, moved to Khaspur along with the transfer of capital to Khaspur. They received Devottara grants and got scattered to settle in Jatrapur, Tarapur, Barkhola, Phulbari etc. in Cachar. Raj Pandit, a notable Dhamadi, was the official priest of royal household of Govindachandra.
The princely regime in Cachar was tolerant to all religions existed in Cachar except Christianity. Because, Christianity was absent in Cachar due to the inactiveness of the Rajahs in this regard. Cacharis had their ancestral tribal faith. They did not have any fixed religion except their tribal faith. They accepted Hinduism, Vaishnavism, Saktism for their liberal outlook to other religious groups. Islam also flourished under the royal patronage of Cachari Rajahs. So, it can be said that Cachari Rajahs were liberal and tolerant in religious matters. They provided religious freedom to all the religious groups in practising their religious beliefs, customs and institutions.

Cachari Rajahs were the patron of learning and literature. They had their own language and literature (Kachari) but inclined towards Bengali literature and the same was practised in the royal court. Besides, education is the backbone for the progress of every nation and plain Cachar was not exceptional to it. Cachar was lagging behind in education during the princely regime in comparison with the colonial regime in Cachar.

However, the royal court was adorned by a galaxy of scholars imported from Bengal and Sylhet. They were provided royal patronage. Such a phenomenon was absent at the time of the British rule. Mentions may be made of Bhubeneswar Bhattacharyya Bachaspati who translated Naradiya Rashamrita into Bengali and Bengali poems of Maniram Barman, Chandra Mohan Barman had been highly acclaimed. The last two Rajahs
of Cachar Krishnachandra (1780-1813) and Govindachandra (1813-30) were prominent scholars in Bengali and Sanskrit. They composed beautiful songs in Bengali like Rasha, Malasi songs, Shyama Sangit, Govinda Kirtan, Gitmala etc.\(^{17}\) Ramlilamrita, Basanta Bihur of Krishnachandra were his scholarly work in Sanskrit.\(^{18}\)

A large number of royal orders assigning lands and appointing officials, were indeed fine specimens of the development of Bengali prose in this region. Rajah Krishnachandra assigned a plot of Brahmatara land in Kalain to Atmaram Bhattacharyya by a royal order in 1790 and allotted land to a number of Hindus and Muslims in Hailakandi in 1791. The appointment letter of Sonaram Sharma as the Uzir of Udharbond issued by Govindachandra in 1824 was another important historical document. All these documents were in Bengali prose.\(^{19}\) The letters, Sanads, treaties, diplomatic correspondences etc. made by the last two Cachari Rajahs with the English East India Company were written in Bengali. Amongst them, letters of Krishnachandra to Calcutta, Treaty of Badarpur, 1824 etc. were worth mentioning.\(^{20}\)

In promoting education, both Sanskrit and Bengali literature was patronised during the princely regime. So, Cachari Rajahs patronised Bengali and Sanskrit pandits no doubt, but education was confined only amongst few Brahmins. Accordingly only religious education was imparted in Pathisalas and Maqtabs by the Pandits and Maulavis respectively at that
time. The picture was opposite when the British came to rule Cachar after 1832. The English education began to make entry.

The princely regime was marked for the construction of some minor roads under the patronage of Cachari Rajahs that helped them in conducting their administration effectively. The Rajar Sarak and Dudhpatil-Jirighat (1824) road was worth mentioning.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

The liberal and progressive attitudes of the princes could not make the economic situation better. The economic situation in plain Cachar during the princely regime was not in a good state. It was mainly for the unstable political situation, civil wars, foreign aggressions prevailed during the last two Cachari Rajahs - Krishnachandra (1780-1813) and Govindachandra (1813-30). Because, power mongers like Taluram Senapati of North Cachar Hills, Manipuri Princes - Chaurjit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh tried to occupy political power in Cachar. The Burmese invasion (1824-26), British policy of intervention abruptly ruined the economy of plain Cachar. However, the princely regime witnessed some political organisations that fostered the Cachari rulers in maintaining economic situation progressive. But they did not succeed enormously. It led to the collapse of princely regime after the murder of Rajah Govindachandra in 1830 at Haritikar.
The economic condition of Krishnachandra was not sound. It is clear from the fact that the annual revenue collection of Krishnachandra was only about one lakh rupees which was realised partly in cash and partly in kind and labour. It was distributed as follows: The Cachar plains Rs. 69,000/-, N C Hills Rs. 5,000/-, Hills subsequently annexed to Manipur Rs. 1,000/-, Dharampur Rs. 25,000/-. But during the reign of Govindachandra (1813-30), revenue collection enormously fell off to Rs. 20000/- for internal turmoil made by Tularam, Manipuri princes and the Burmese invasion (1824-26) in plain Cachar. So, Govindachandra applied for remission of tribute fixed by the Treaty of Badarpur (1824) for 1825-27 to the British Government which was granted by David Scott. Of course, general prosperity of the people was based on sufficient agricultural products (grain) which was enough for them though communication, markets, coinage, labour wages etc. in Cachar were very poor during the princely regime.

In the early part of princely regime, Rajahs collected land revenue in a nominal rate for the economic development of Cachar. But Govindachandra imposed high rates of revenue at Rs. 6 per *hal* on the ground that he had to pay tribute to the British Government stipulated by the Treaty of Badarpur (1824). He was also to construct the road from Sylhet to Manipur through Cachar at his own cost. Govindachandra made land revenue settlement for the maximisation of revenue.
The Rajahs were the owners of land who collected land revenue through settling jungle lands with corporations during the princely regime in Cachar. Khel system was first introduced by Rajmata Chandraprova in plain Cachar and it received its finishing touch at the hands of Govindachandra.

Khel, the smallest self governing and independent agricultural guild or unit headed by a Mukhtar was formed purely on commercial basis for the purpose of taking up the lands, mining, saltwells, fishing and elephant trapping. The khels had members from Hindus, Muslims, Nagas, Kukis and other settlers on democratic and secular ideals without making any discrimination of caste, creed or religion. The khels had a Mukhtar to collect land revenue who was appointed by the Khel. The greater union of Khels constituted Raj. It had also Raj Mukhtars with various titles - Chaudhury, Majumder, Laskar, Barabhuayan, Majarbhuyan, Chotabhuyan etc. enjoyed rent free holdings. With regard to the extent of holdings, everyman received as much land as he could cultivate within the boundary of area granted to the khel, a portion being always appropriated to men of standing in the Khel rent-free. Thus, a Chaudhury got 2 hals free, a Majumder 1 1/2 hals, a Laskar 1 1/4, a Barabhuayan 1 hal, and a Majarbhuyan 6 kears. However, each individual in the khel was liable to the whole revenue payable by the khel and similarly, any khel might be called upon to pay for the whole Raj. Accordingly, khel members paid their portion of revenue to khel Mukhtar who paid total dues
of his khel to the Raj Mukhtar and the later in his turn deposited the entire collection to the Royal Treasury.29

But Govindachandra discontinued rent-free grants allotted to the members of royal family and state officials. These titles were sold as a source of revenue at the following rates (ASP, File No. 636CO of 1872, p. 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choudhury</td>
<td>Rs. 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majumder</td>
<td>Rs. 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laskar</td>
<td>Rs. 60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barabluwan</td>
<td>Rs. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majarbhuyan</td>
<td>Rs. 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and this custom was also retained by Thomas Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar. The headmen of the Khel and Raj (Mukhtar and Raj Mukhtar respectively) were responsible for the rent which was collected in this way. Mukhtars played a vital role as middle class agent of Government in the economic sphere of plain Cachar. In case of failure of Khels to pay rent in time, the land automatically lapsed to the Raj which was bound to take it; no outsiders could be admitted on any terms. The settlers had to make physical services through supplying betel-nuts, firewood etc. to the Rajah. There were some principal Khels the rent of which was appropriated to the Rajah and the
members of his family, his spiritual guide etc. Amongst them, following Khels were mostly significant.

1. **Khelma** means *bora khel*, the entire rents of which were appropriated by the *Rajah.*

2. **Barjurai (Maharani’s) Khel**, 4 annas share of the rent of which was received by the *Rani* and 12 annas by the *Rajah*.

3. **Dhumkur (Rajah’s mother khel)**

4. **Deka Jurai (Rajputra khel)**

5. **Shang Jurai (Rajah’s brother’s Khel)**

6. **Nogud Khel (Rajah’s own Khel)**

7. **Pang Jurai (Rajah’s younger brother’s Khel)**

8. **Ghurni Jurai (Rajah’s second wife’s Khel)**

9. **Hasti Luma (Rajah’s eldest daughter’s Khel)**

10. **Digu Luma (Rajah’s second daughter’s Khel)**

11. **Ashul Lama (Rajah’s third daughter’s Khel)**

12. **Nokte Lama (Rajah’s fourth daughter’s Khel)**

13. **Dhamadi Jurai (Rajah’s spiritual guide’s Khel)**

14. **Putho Jurai (Rajah’s Mantrie’s Khel)**

15. **Paikan-Ranachandii Khel**

16. **Bishnoghur (Lakshmi Narain’s Khel)**

17. **Bhisingsa Khel (Shyama Thakurani’s Khel)**
These were such 230 Khels (Lakheraj estates) with an area of 1727 acres during the princely regime in Cachar.30

Govindachandra was being financially in a strained condition, effected economy in expenditure by drastically reducing the number of officers. Accordingly in raising additional revenue, the number of Ministers was reduced from four to one and Judges from fifty to four, while services of the revenue officials attached to the Queens and other members of the royal family were dispensed with. To increase the collection of revenue, the amount due from defaulters began to be realised by restraint of property and confinement and in cases of land laid in waste a collective fine was imposed on the whole Khel. To increase his income, he imposed additional taxes to be paid for the cultivation of poppy, fruits and vegetables, manufacture salt and for privileges of holding titles, riding on a dola (Palanquin), wearing of gold ornaments or of having music at marriage and festivals. He also levied custom duties on river ghats (Bikrampur, Barkhola, Gumrah, Udharbond, Madhura ghat, Sonabari ghat, Sealtekh ghat) on all articles of export and these were invariably farmed out to the highest bidder. The Rajah exercised the monopoly of trade in certain commodities particularly grain, which could be sold by the merchants to the Rajah at a price fixed by him. These were eventually resold to the merchants from outside at a higher price, thus, keeping a margin for the state.31
Trade and commerce was maintained by the Cachari Rajahs with Sylhet, Manipur. Trade restrictions were imposed during the reign of Krishnachandra and on request of him, trade restrictions were abolished by the Board of Revenue. So, the Rajahs in spite of having communicational gap, conducted trade with Sylhet in rice, grass, bamboo, cotton through the river Barak.\(^{32}\)

The Rajahs obtained a portion of income from Saltwells.\(^{33}\) The forest was another source of income during the pre-Superintendents rule in Cachar.\(^{34}\) The economic policies initiated by Govindachandra resented the ryots and administrative officers and the Rajah became unpopular in the country.\(^{35}\)

**POLITICAL SITUATION**

The princely regime in Cachar was marked by judicial strictness which was dealt by the Cachari Rajahs from royal court Barodowari at Khaspur.\(^{36}\) The Rajahs maintained judiciary on the basis of some text books and laws. Mentions may be made of the Penal Codes of Govindachandra introduced in 1817, *Kacharir Niyam, Kalmiputhi, Rindana vidhi, Danda vidhi* written in Bengali and Sanskrit were prominent.\(^{37}\)

Rajahs were assisted by a galaxy of judges and ministers both in civil and criminal administration who constituted the court of justice.
The number of judges were reduced from 50 to 4 by Govindachandra. However, the findings of the court were reported to the *Rajah* the Chief administrator of justice, who had absolute power either to punish or to pardon the accused. There was being no distinction between Civil and Criminal administration, *Rajahs* dealt those suits in a summary way. Judicial system was very severe and wrong doers were punished through fines, imprisonment, physical punishments etc.

The fiscal disputes cropped up among the inter *raj* were decided by the *Bar Majumder’s* council, chief court of justice in plain Cachar. But more complicated cases were referred to the *Rajah*. Accordingly *Bar Bhandari, Raj Pandit* and *Bar Majumder* formed a sort of judicial committee to advice the *Rajah* in the complicated cases. But the Hindu and Mohammadan civil code was being unknown to the *Rajah*, the *Bengalis* decided their internal criminal and fiscal feuds by the judicial chiefs through voluntary organisation with a nominal royal interference. Of course civil suits were decided without any interference. The *Rajah* dealt critical cases related to the Hindus and Muslims by the *Raj Pandits* and experts in the Law of *Quran*.

The Police Department of plain Cachar during the princely regime was not sufficiently well organised for the financial crisis of the *Rajahs*. It was confirmed from the fact that both Krishnachandra and Govindachandra approached the British Government for military
assistance to protect Cachari kingdom from the frequent neighbouring incursions made by the Burmese, Manipuri princes etc. in plain Cachar.42

But it does not mean that police system was completely absent in Cachar. For the security management in various sectors of Cachar, Rajahs engaged some people through providing rent-free lands according to their ranks. Police personnel were not given cash payment during the princely regime. So, they obliged to serve as police officer or Barkandaz for three months in a year.43 Among these, rural police (Dakuahs) was maintained by the Rajah and remunerated assigning lands like other officials in the state. River police who also made vigilance over the robberies in the riverine routes of Cachar during the princely regime.44

The Cachari Rajahs tried their level best for all round development of Cachar. But they failed in restoring stability in most cases. On the other hand, common people reacted that led to the unpopularity of the Rajahs among the masses in Cachar. So, power mongers like Manipuri princes, Tularam Senapati and Burmese took advantage of the weakness. This resulted the internal and external disturbances in the last days of princely regime in Cachar. This led to the collapse of Cachari rule after the treacherous murder of Govindachandra in 1830 at Haritikar along with his family by Gambhir
Singh, an over ambitious Manipuri prince. Accordingly, ruined the princely regime in Cachar and paved the way for inauguration of the British rule in Cachar. They took the full advantage of the situation and annexed Cachar in 1832. The representatives of the British rule were the Superintendents. The first of them was Thomas Fisher. He was followed by others. The rule of Superintendents continued till 1866. That was the formative period of the British rule in Cachar. The following chapters will examine the multifarious activities of the various Superintendents and the reaction of the people.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. *Letter No. 50 of 1857 (DCRRS)*.


"The Rajahs expended huge amount (Rs. 10,112 annually) of money for religion during 1790-1830. Govindachandra’s expenditure for *Durga Puja* was Rs. 4250, *Lakshmi Puja* Rs. 25, *Jalavisva Puja* Rs. 15. He also spent liberally on Vaishnava faith Rs. 300 for *Manasa Puja*, for *Jhulan Jatra* Rs. 50, *Sravani Jatra* Rs. 50, *Ratha Jatra* Rs. 150, *Maharasa* Rs. 200, *Diwali* Rs. 50 and for *Basanti Puja* Rs. 750. In addition of all, he spent Rs. 120 monthly for the regular worship of Goddess *Kancha Kanti* at Udharbond. But the Rajahs spent minimum for their traditional tribal worship and festivals."

(Suhas Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-72).


   “There was a road known as *Rajar Sarak* probably constructed during the reign of Krishnachandra originated from Khaspur and connected the places like Udharbond, Dalu, Katigorah, Badarpur, Jainagar, Buribail, Ganirgram and Haritikar”. (Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, p. 153.)

23. *Letter No. 50 of 1857, (DCRRS)*.


   Suhas Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-57.


25. Upendrachandra Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

   Suhas Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
26. ASP, File No. 636 CO of 1872, p. 3.

Suhas Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 22.

D D Mali, Revenue Administration in Assam, New Delhi, 1985, p. 9.

Proceedings of NEIHA, Sixth Session, Agartala, 1985, pp. 207-08.

27. "The rates of land assessment was very high as follows: for cleared cultivated lands the revenue demand was company's Rs. 5-2-0 per Kulbakh, for cherra or seed lands the demand was Rs. 3-3 per Kulbakh and homestead, tanks etc. were rent free".

(D Datta, op. cit., p. 208).

28. Suhas Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 147.

29. ASP, File No. 636 CO of 1872, p. 4.


Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

B Datta Roy (ed.), The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North East India, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 223-24.

30. ASP, File No. 636 CO of 1872, p. 4.


"Whilst this district was governed by its own Rajahs, they conferred the titles of Choudhury, Mojoomdar, Burra Luskar, Kelma Luskur, Burrahooyah and Chotabooyah on individuals on their paying certain fixed sums for these titles according to the rank from Rs. 100 down to Rs. 10. To each of these titles there were attached certain privileges and also perquisites". (CR, No. 36 of 1850).


Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, op. cit., p. 45.


32. D Datta, op. cit., p. 5.

R M Lahiri, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

33. CR, No. 184 of 1836.


43. CR, No. 118 of 1848.

44. Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, p. 94.