Chapter - 3

Activities of J G Burns (1836-39)

J G Burns was appointed as the Superintendent of Cachar on a consolidated salary of Rs. 1000/- per monsum. He assumed charge as Superintendent from P Mainwarring on 13 April, 1836. He made extensive visit to most of the parganahs of Cachar to gather practical knowledge of the situations of Cachar. He was a practical minded personality having military background. In order to provide sound and vibrant administration, he did many things within the powers of his jurisdiction in the socio-economic and political segments of Cachar. He was also vested with the powers of Magistrate, Civil Judge, Collector of Revenue and a Frontier Officer.
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Like the time of Thomas Fisher, the society of plain Cachar was composed of various ethnic communities like Cacharis, Manipuris, Bengalis, Muslims and some tribal groups during the Superintendency of J G Burns. Burns encouraged the immigration of people to Cachar to uplift the social structure. The settlement of some European Officers in Cachar also fostered in raising the social set up to some extent updated.³

Burns also made every attempt to start schools in the 3 Thanahs - Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah of Cachar considered to be most suitable place for it. For the shortage of native teachers, advocated to pay Rs. 20 monthly for the teachers to be brought from Sylhet, but the resources of Cachar would not admit for the introduction of schools. So, his attempt to start one school at Silchar in 1838 as an experiment was made by the voluntary subscription of the Amlahs and Superintendent of Cachar failed for the fall of subscription.⁴ Both Bengali and English languages were used by the officials as the medium of instruction. Burns made translation of official documents from Bengali to English.⁵ But Persian language was never used in Cachar.⁶ This is probably due to the non-Muslim rule in Cachar unlike in Sylhet its neighbouring place.
J G Burns provided relief measures for the benevolence of Cachar people at the time of great hardships. He made attempt to protect the lives from the ravages made by tigers. He raised the price of liquor to stop the consumption of it. The inhabitants of Cachar greatly affected by the floods of 1836 and 1837 occurred during the Superintendency of J G Burns. So, he urged for two good and capacious boats permanently in Cachar to avert future troubles of floods. It would help transporting sepoys and convicts to the safe places of neighbouring high grounds. He also provided relief measures to the flood victims, supplying boats, money and revenue concession for 1837.7

Medical services rendered by native doctors in the existing Medical Centre and Hospitals opened in 1835 were not satisfactory. So, Burns advocated for European doctors to serve in Cachar. In Lakhipur Military Cantonment, two European doctors namely, Surgeon Guise and Dr Benmutt were appointed. Lastly, such European College educated doctors refused to serve in a low salary of Rs. 20. So, Burns had to provide Medical services by the native doctors only.8

J G Burns was liberal in religious outlook and provided religious freedom to all sections of people in practising their religious customs and institutions. He provided freedom of pilgrimage, respect to existing temples in Cachar. Persons involved in insulting and
profaning any deity of temple was punished severely. Burns also provided freedom of women in selecting their husbands and allowed inter-caste marriages.

Communication system was developed through the construction of a large number of roads and bridges in plain Cachar during the Superintendency of J G Burns. He advocated for post offices for the absence of it in Cachar. In 1836, he attached Dawk (Messengers) to the Superintendent’s establishment. Those messengers carried letters and packets from Sylhet to Silchar and other sub-divisional headquarters and Thanahs of Cachar.

J G Burns inspected the road leading from Sylhet to the Eastern extremity of Cachar. He completed the construction of Sylhet-Banskandi road in 1836 within six months with the help of 90 convicts from Dacca, Mymensingh and Tripura. It required 28 wooden bridges at an expense of Rs. 100/-. The work of this road was started by Superintendent Thomas Fisher. Burns also constructed the first Government High Road between Silchar and Banskandi en route Manipur in 1836.
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

J G Burns made every attempt to enrich the economic situation of Cachar. He continued the existing system of revenue administration of Cachar with slight modifications.

The three Tahsils – Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah continued its functioning even during the Superintendency of J G Burns. But for the smallness of Tahsildari establishment and to have an efficient establishment, Superintendent Burns proposed to divide the country into 4 Tahsils each to have –

1 Tahsildar at Company Rs. 25
1 Poddar at Company Rs. 8
1 Moharir at Company Rs. 8
6 Peons at Company Rs. 3 ½ each Rs. 21
Stationery expenses Rs. 20

Company Rs. 82

So, the annual expenses of the proposed establishments were Rs. 82x4 = 328x12 = 3936 in August 1836. But Commissioner of Revenue, Dacca Division refuted the proposal and existing establishment expense was cut down except the expense of Rs. 20 for stationery. This would reduce the expenditure of each Rs. 72 per monsum or Rs. 864 a year and Rs. 2592 for three establishments of Cachar. Accordingly Tahsildari establishment was disposed of by the Sadar Board of Revenue
Activities of J G Burns

in October, 1836 during the Superintendency of J G Burns for the decrease of revenue collection. Because, Fisher collected Rs. 40643 in 1835-36 whereas Burns collected only Rs. 35,000 in 1836-37.13

Burns made a satisfactory and benevolent measure for the collection of land revenue through his personal experiments in various parganahs of Cachar on payment of a fixed commission to the collectors. Of course, he had been operating existing system of collection of revenue in a slight modifications. He had been made the collections without the sale of cattle or implements of husbandry as was the case formerly. He renewed the Mukhtar system and the process of renewal started from May 1837 after submitting two subsequent reports to E M Gordon, Commissioner of Dacca Division by J G Burns. Accordingly a few Mukhtars had been appointed in Hailakandi, Suraspur and Chota Jatrapur at the end of October, 1837. These Mukhtars collected Rs. 1222-13-7 but Mukhtarana was not paid till November, 1837.14

So, he restored the Mukhtar system in 1st November, 1837 on payment of a commission of 6% to the Mukhtars on the collections provided the annual amount did not exceed 1/12th of Rs. 2160. So Mukhtars were not allowed to keep more than Rs. 20 in hand. In addition to it, a monthly establishment charge of Rs. 30 was allowed to the Mukhtars for two years for the collection of land, poppy and jalkar revenue of Cachar. The Mukhtar establishment was comprised of 1
writer at company Rs. 15, two Muharirs at company Rs. 8 and Rs. 7 respectively. In spite of existing the Mukhtar establishment, revenue was collected by the Mukhtars in 3 instalments providing prior notification to the Mirasdars. Accordingly, Mirasdars had to pay their revenue to the Mukhtars on a certain day or days at a fixed place appointed by J G Burns. Accordingly, collections of revenue from 1st November, 1837 to 31st October, 1838 was Rs. 25,367-0-7 showing a decrease of Rs. 6620-3-11 of 1837-38 (See Appendix - D) and for the year 1838-39 was Rs. 24974-11-9. Thus, Mukhtar System was in operation till 1st May 1840 on an experimental basis, first for one year and then for 18 months providing 6 monthly statement. It was more successful than the oppressive Peadal system prevalent in Cachar. But the Mukhtars and Mirasdars had to remain in a crucial situation whenever commission was not paid in time. But Burns assured them not to be alarmed in this respect. Actually nobody was given their fees since January, 1838 for technical ground.15

J G Burns, the Superintendent of Cachar, made the first regular scientific land settlement for 5 years with the actual cultivators in 1st May, 1838. It continued upto to 30th April, 1843. It was to attract new settlers to clear unoccupied jungle lands and to reduce the rate of revenue in a moderate one. For this, he made two plans – first being regular settlement for a considerable moderate term and the other was
to make survey of the district for the imperfect survey of Fisher. He made extensive visits in various unoccupied jungle tracts of Cachar to ascertain the quality of land to fix a moderate rate of revenue. Accordingly, he advocated for lowest rate of Rs. 2 per *kulbah* that may cause the annual loss of Rs. 12,000 or 20,000. J G Burns had to perform civil, criminal and fiscal administration of Cachar. He had to depend on Fisher's imperfect survey.\(^{16}\)

In 1836-37, the excessively high rates were brought to the notice of the Board and it was determined to make a new settlement on more easy terms for the *Mirasdars* in 1837-38. Accordingly Burns 5 years settlement commenced on May 1838. He classified the lands of Cachar into four categories and the rate of revenue was fixed as follows: The highest rate of this settlement was Rs. 3 per *kulbah* for cleared lands and *chara* (seed) lands rate was fixed at Rs. 2-8-0 per *kulbah*. *Bari* (Homestead) lands remained rent free and the jungle lands were settled rent free for about 3 years or 1000 days and then at the rate of Rs. 2-8-0 per *kulbah*. This settled total 11,132 *kulbahs* of which 7,563 *kulbahs* were paying and the rest 3,569 *kulbahs* rent free. It was also estimated that the total settled area in 1838 was 36,430 acres and total revenue demand was Rs. 24,974-11-9 as per new assessment rate. It also recognised the transfer of holdings to the new settlers. This settlement was very favourable to the *Mirasdars*, for with few
exceptions all had cleared and cultivated the jungle lands bordering on their holdings in excess of what they paid revenue for.\textsuperscript{17}

Burns surveyed 78,000 Kulbah of Jaintia territory by 30 to 45 native Amins in 1836 in expense of Rs. 14,000 as a measure of great expediency and ultimate economy for the unsatisfactory survey of Fisher. Burns secured a specific revenue from this tract of land of Jaintia.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to land revenue, Burns realised revenue from Saltwells, Ghats, Fisheries, House tax, tax on poppy, sugar and coffee cultivation, Jalkar etc. Taxable articles increased in comparison to the time of Thomas Fisher. He levied house tax on the hill tribes like Nagas, Kukis, Zoolungs for a series of 4 years gave an annual sum of Rs. 655.\textsuperscript{19}

Burns earned Rs. 730 from Suraspur Saltwells on a lease of three years (1837-39) though difficulties cropped up in realisation of the same amount. He also encouraged barter system specially barter of salt with the hill tribes for cotton, beeswax and ivory. People engaged in existing saltwells suffered for the introduction of foreign salt in Cachar. Burns leased the Cachar saltwells for two years 1836-37 and 1837-38 at an annual rent of Rs. 917-8-2 payable at the close of each year. But on their failing to pay, Burns ordered their monthly salsries
to be kept back until the arrears were liquidated instead of attaching their property.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1837, Burns recommended the French proposal for the cultivation of sugar and coffee in Cachar. It would have scope for sugar industry for the economic betterment of Cachar.\textsuperscript{21}

During the Superintendency of Burns, land holders grew poppy in their taluks at their pleasure without soliciting the permission of Superintendent and paid a fixed tax of Rs. 48 per kulbahi in addition to the common rate of land revenue. The tax derived from poppy cultivation was Rs. 1300 in 1838.\textsuperscript{22} It was also stated in the Tabular Statements (1839) mentioned in Appendix - D of the tax derivation of Rs. 146-13-9 and Rs. 349-3-6 from poppy cultivation in Cachar at the time of J G Burns.\textsuperscript{23}

Fisherman caste (Patnee) as well as Mahimals were granted Fishery Mahals by Burns and earned revenue from these mahals in a limited scale.\textsuperscript{24}

The Ghats also provided great impetus to the economic prosperity of Cachar. Because, the sale of ghats of Sealtekh, Banskandi in 1836, additional bhatta on ghat led to the earning of Government of J G Burns in Cachar. He earned a revenue of Rs. 5058 from Sealtekh ghat in 1836-37.\textsuperscript{25}
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

His work was not restricted to economic affairs only, it extended to other spheres. J G Burns as the Chief Executive of Cachar affairs, acted as Magistrate, Civil Judge, Collector, Police Officer. He appointed officers of approved ability keeping former officials in their respective positions to run the administration of plain Cachar effectively. He also suspended those who were found guilty in rendering their services properly. So, like Fisher, J G Burns also retained the charge of Civil, Criminal and Revenue duties of Cachar.

He also reorganised the judicial establishments of Cachar. There were two establishments viz., - Superintendent's Court comprised of one Munshee, one Muharir, and one Nazir dealt land appeals and suits. Another was Native Court comprised of one Barhhandari, two Bitrodolois, one Muharir took cognisance of suits for personal property to the amount of Rs. 100. All these staff in judicial establishments were under the direct magisterial control of the Superintendent J G Burns.

The judiciary became more vibrant when Cachar was included in the Dacca Division (1836) and headquarters was shifted to Silchar from Dudhpatil.

Burns made effort to reduce the influence of Vakils for their turbulent and disrespectful conduct in the Cutchery. So, he forbade the
practice of Vakils in Faujdari and Collectoree cases. Because, five Vakils made litigations against the appointment of Mukhtars to deal criminal and fiscal cases. But this existing system was restored by Burns without considering the litigation of any sort from those Vakils.29

There was no stamp duty except a commission of one Anna in Rupee levied on all civil suits during the Superintendency of J G Burns. But this commission was being remitted in the last days of his Superintendency, number of monthly suits increased from 50 to about 100. So, Burns felt the necessity of introducing stamp paper in Courts.30 J G Burns exercised the powers of appointment in judicial department. He appointed Byd Nath, a Bengali, in various situations as Munsiff in place of Krishnaram Bitrodoloi suspended by Burns. Later on, Krishnaram was asked to return his duty and appointment of Byd Nath be confirmed. Raj Kishan was appointed on death of Radha Kishan Bitrodoloi to officiate for him.31

Burns was very strict in judicial administration of Cachar. If anybody was found guilty punished severely through execution, imprisonment, suspension etc. For instance, Nihal Singh and Raju Pathan were provided rigorous imprisonment for swindling act and of man slaughter. Krishnaram Bitrodoloi was suspended for bribery charges. Women cases were dealt severely with the help of two assessors.32
J G Burns repaired the Cachar Jail in 1838 as per the custom of repairing public buildings at the expense of Government. Accordingly, he sanctioned an advance of Rs. 100 for the repairing of Cachar Jail.33

The police department was reorganised by J G Burns to make it more efficient. The three existing Thanah establishments - Silchar, Hailakandi and Katigorah had 3 Darogahs, 3 Jamadars, 18 Barkandazes. He enriched the police department incurring extra Rs. 660 annually. The salary of Darogah was increased from Rs. 7 to Rs. 15 per monsum with an allowance of Rs. 2 for oil and stationary34 (See Appendix - E). It was obvious that the Barkandazes served receiving Rs. 4 per monsum during the Superintendency of Fisher along with rent free holdings according to their ranks. But J G Burns changed this system in 1838 and the lands were ordered to be assessed to entertain police establishment without extra-expense of Government for it.35 Burns as an efficient executive of this district, settled the pension and property question of the Rani in favour of Rani Induprava.36

Thus, J G Burns reorganised the socio-economic and political set up as an efficient Superintendent of plain Cachar and effected a well organised administration in this district. J G Burns, on resignation from service, went back to England on 15 June, 1839.37 He extended the activities of the Superintendent so that later high officials could do something excellent for the British rule.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Ibid., Letter Nos. 387 of 1837, 125 of 1838.

4. CR No. 100 of 1837.

"The places most suitable for schools in Cachar are the 3 Thanahs viz., Silchar (the Sudder), Hyliakandee and Katteegora and the large pargunnah of Sonapoor. The spots are the central and accessible to scholars from the neighbouring pargunnahs except during a portion of the rainy season. With regard to teachers there are none in Cachar viz., natives of the Zillah capable of this task, but competent men can be had from Sylhet where there is a pundit whom Captain Fisher proposed employing should schools ever be established here. I imagine Rs. 20 monthly would be sufficient salary. The expense of stationery can be ascertained and settled hereafter or either be charged as expended or a consolidated sum allowed. As school rooms must be built there would be a difficulty for want of grass in doing so till after the rains and as I have some doubts of the people of Cachar availing themselves of this opportunity I would recommend beginning with one at the Sudder station as an experiment." (CR., No. 140 of 1838).

5. 1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter No. 228 of 1839.


7. Ibid., Nos. 75, 77 of 1837, 164 of 1838.


8. Ibid., Nos. 180, 196 of 1838, 219 of 1839.

Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, Cachar under British Rule in North East India, New Delhi, 1977, p. 160.

J G Burns wrote to E M Gordon, "A case came before me this day, a complain against a ... for easing himself on the altar of a temple of the Goddess of Kalce and otherwise profaning and insulting the deity. The charge is clearly proved in my opinion but the case is of so unusual a nature that I am at a loss what punishment to award and beg to consult you on the occasion. So, wanton an insult to religion calls for severe punishment." (CR, No. 237 of 1839).

10. Ibid., pp. 30-31.


Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, op. cit., pp. 159-60.


CR, Nos. 162 of 1838, 19 of 1853.

Dainik Jugasankha, Silchar, 7 February, 2005, p. 4, Letters Received from Govt., Duplicate Copy, Vol. No. 8(B), 1832, January-August.

13. Ibid., p. 43.

"With respect to the salary of the Thesaldars in reference to their responsibility I at the time thought it too small as well as the number too few, but in the state of the finances of the country was afraid of stating what I considered would be efficient, one of the Tehsaldars I have removed for gross extortion. To have an efficient Establishment I conceive the country should be divided into four Thesaldarees, each to have -

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<th>Rs.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Thesaldar company</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Poddar</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Mohurir</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Peons @ 3½ each</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stationery expenses</td>
<td>20</td>
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Cos. Rs. 82 x 4 = 328 x 12 = 3936

the annual expense of this would be about 10½ per cent on the collection at the present rate of assessment. The establishment at each might be suggested by Captain Burns except that 20 Rs. a month for the stationery appears expensive and may safely be
cut down to ten which would reduce the cost of each to 72 Rs. per monsum or 864 a year and for the three cos. Rs. 2592. The Tehsildaree establishment has been disposed of by the Board as any delay would have been inexpedient." (1836-37, BGP, File No. 352, Letter Nos. 222, 289 of 1836).

14. CR, No. 221 of 1839.

1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter Nos. 221, 261 of 1839.

15. Ibid., No.s 42 of 1837, 163, 174 of 1838, 17 of 1840.

Ibid., File No. 393, Letter Nos. 44, 56, 123, 221, 228, 261 of 1839.


1850-51, DCF, (Cachar Papers), File No. 17, Letter No. 54 of 1850, p. 4.

17. ASP, File No. 636 CO of 1872, p. 5.


"Prior to the year 1245 BS or 1838/39 the rent of land in Cachar was Companys Rs. 5-2 per Koolba, but Charra and Baree lands were rent free. In 1245 there was a new settlement made and many of the principal people of the District begged that the rates might be reduced and that they should be as follows, cleared lands Rs. 3 per Koolba, Charra lands Rs. 2-8 per Koolba, and Barees to remain rent free, jungle lands to be rent free for 1000 days. As the settlement was made according to that for......and lasted 5 years." (1850-51, DCF (Cachar papers), File No. 17, Letter No. 54 of 1850, p. 4).


1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter Nos. 387 of 1837, 125 of 1838.

20. Ibid., Nos. 184 of 1836, 184 of 1838, 4 of 1843.

21. Ibid., No. 99 of 1837.

22. Ibid., No. 46 of 1839.

23. 1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter Nos. 221, 228 of 1839.


D Datta, op. cit., p. 29.

26. CR, No. 144 of 1838.

"E M Gordon, Commissioner of Dacca Division stated that the settling officer ought to be the Superintendent of Cachar. In my opinion it is quite impossible that the officer can properly perform his duty as Magistrate, Collector and Civil Judge and at the same time conduct a settlement." (1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter No. 170 of 1839).

27. Ibid., No. 84 of 1837.


"The District of Cachar, when first we obtained possession, was placed under the Governor General's Agent in Assam and continued so till July 1835 when it was placed under the Commissioner of Dacca and is so still in the Revenue Department and forms part of the Dacca Division." (D Datta, op. cit., p. 213.).

29. CR, No. 146 of 1838.
E M Gordon stated and wrote to the Sadar Board of Revenue, Fort William, "your Board are perhaps aware that Major Burns is now on the way to the Presidency, having resigned from the service and you will probably...before his departure for England to consult him as to what ought to be done Lieutenant Lyons is in the temporary charge of the Superintendent's office."

(1839, BGP, File No. 393, Letter No. 170 of 1839).