

Silchar in the making : Site for Muhammadan Hostel in the Govt. Boys School

Ratna Dey

The headquarter of the district of Cachar centred around Janiganj-Sadarghat area since early thirties of the 19th century. In the Janiganj-Sadarghat area, the first institution for English education was started by Rev. Pyrse in 1863, initially as the High Grammer School and gradually converted into the present Govt. Boys' Higher Secondary School, which became one of the leading schools in the Cachar District.¹

From the records available so far, it appears that, the boarding house/hostel of the school was started exclusively for Hindus boys. Simultaneously, a Muhammadan hostel was also established for Muslim boys in 1879² under private management³ with the object of providing help to the Muhammadan boys to reside and who came from remote places. However, the boarding house was situated in the present Fatakazar area, a thickly populated part of the town, the western part of which consisted mainly of rickety huts occupied by women of ill fame.⁴ The committee for management of the hostel comprised of some leading Muslims and also Hindus of Silchar who felt the need for shifting the boarding house from such a filthy and unhealthy atmosphere to a better place. Not only that, the building house was in a dilapidated condition, which needed immediate repairing. From the initial stage the monthly expenditure of the hostel was Rs. 17/-; Rs. 10/- Pay of the Supdt., Rs.5/- Pay of the Servant, and Rs. 2/- as contingencies.⁵

In 1893, the leading members of hostel committee communicated the state of affairs to the Chairman Local Board Silchar. Besides, the Committee managed the expenditure of the hostel at an amount of Rs. 30/- annually, which had been an insignificant amount to maintain all affairs of the hostel along with the repairing of walls of two houses. In view of the above, the Committee had no other alternative but to reduce the establishment charges from previous one viz :- Rs. 8/- for supdt., Rs.4/- for servant and Rs. 1/8 for contingencies.⁶

There was provision of accommodation for 12 boys in the hostel. Gradually the number reduced to 6 (six) only; 1 reading in the High School

and 5 in the Middle School. In this situation the members of the Committee proposed for erecting a new hostel in a suitable site. As there was a boarding house maintained by the govt for the accommodation of Hindu boys, the Committee also appealed to the Chief Commission and the Local Board to erect same type of hostel/boarding house for the Muslim boys under Govt. management.⁷

In 1897, accompanied by a deputation of Muhammadan gentlemen H.J.S. Cotton the Chief Commissioner, made a local enquiry on question of Muhammadan hostel at Silchar.⁸ He visited the proposed sites for erecting a new hostel. The site behind the Baptist Church seemed to be convenient, but the Muhammadan gentlemen, who accompanied him strongly objected on the ground that it was too small (ii) too close to the Hindu hostel and (iii) far away from Muslim quarters in the town. The second preference of choice had been the land held by one Sanat Mishra, a Oriya Brahmin, which existed on the opposite side of the bazaar and about half a mile distant from the School, but the land and tank was very expensive to acquire. The third site as proposed was also not suitable as it was by the side of the bazar.⁹

So the Chief Commissioner decided to abandon the plan of erecting a new hostel for only a few boarders. He rather proposed that the interest on money lying to the Committee could be spent for endowment of three scholarships of Rs. 50/- each. Meanwhile, the then Headmaster of the Govt. School Sri Abhaya Charan Das became the Managing Secretary of the Boarding House Committee. In response to a letter from the Deputy Commissioner concerning the site and management of a new hostel for Muhammadans he proposed that having considered the necessity of erecting a hostel for Muslim boys, the plot of land west to the present boarding house compound, which is a Khas land and spacious enough for the purpose, may be allowed. There three houses could be constructed – one to be occupied by Resident Master, the other for the boarders (32'×14' feet to provide accommodation for 8 boys each); and the third house would be cook-shed.¹⁰ The executive engineer estimated the cost of these three houses at Rs. 475.¹¹ On receiving the proposal from the Deputy Commissioner about the site and building of the hostel, the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner wrote to Deputy Commissioner for a map of the site to be submitted.¹²

In 1897 the secy. Of the Muhammadan hostel Sri Abhaya Charan Das in a letter to the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, informed that the

Managing Committee regretted not to comply with the suggestion of the Chief Commissioner for giving up the plan of constructing the hostel. Rather, they decided to use the compound of the hostel. The work will start by December after getting approval from the Deputy Commissioner. As regards the cost, they decided to spend Rs. 500/- out of previous hostel fund in anticipation of receiving formal sanction from the Government. The Vice Chairman of Silchar Municipality also agreed to the proposal by his letter no. 172, 20th March 1897. Thus was selected the site for the first Muhammadan hostel in Silchar.

Notes and references

1. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar Under British Rule in North East-India*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 232-33.
2. A. Bhattacharjee (edited)., *Selected Essays of Debabrata Datta*, Kolkatta August 2005, p. 101.
3. Cachar Records : Letter from office Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the deputy Commissioner Cacher, Shillong, 15th May 1894.
4. R. Dey, *Land Revenue Administration in Cachar*, Kolkata, May 2001, p. 113.
5. Cachar Records : Letter to the Chairman, Silchar Local Board. (In 1874 some new Funds were constituted like Dist Revenue Fund, Dist. Pry Edn Fund & Misc improvement Fund under the jurisdiction of Local Board Ref J.B. Bhattacharjee n.l, p. 175.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cachar Records : Letter from B.B. Newbould, D/C Cachar to the Secy to the Chief Commissioner, Assam 8th Sept. 1896.
8. Note recorded by H.J.S. Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam 9th Feb. 1897.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Cachar Records : Letter from Baboo abhaya Charan Das, H.M. Silchar High School to D/C Cachar Silchar, the 14th August 1896.
11. Cachar Records n, 7.
12. Cachar Records : Letter from Secy to the Chief Commissioner to D/ C Cachar, 27th Nov. 1896 letter of Abhaya Charan Das to the D/C Cachar, 20th Nov 1897.