

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF KANCHRAPARA MUNICIPAL TOWN

FOREWORDS

Kanchrapara is a small Municipal Town, 48 km. from Kolkata by train and located at the Northern most tip of North 24 Parganas District in West Bengal, between Latitude 88.42` E to 88.47` E and longitude 22.92` N to 22.96` N with an area of 3.5 sq. miles or 9.06 Sq. Km and a population of 1, 26, 191 (According to 2001 Census). It is butted and bounded by Gayeshpur Municipality to the East, Kampa-Chakla Gram Panchayet to the East and South East, Bager Khal to the North & Halisahar Municipality to the West. It comprises of Mouzas, Bizpur, parts of Halishar, Mallicker Bag, Bahirbag, Jonepur, Pallada Kampa & Jethia, as per West Bengal Land and Land Revenue records.

EARLY HISTORY

From early historical period, geographically, this area had been full of a swamps, natural riverine lake, low land, water bodies sparse village-settlements surrounded by deep jungle infested with wild animals of all kinds. Barring a few pockets the area was considered unfit for human habitation.

However, around this area there were more than 50 villages more or less prosperous, of which Mallickerbag, Kanchanpalli or Kanchrapara, Bhabanipur, Ghoshpara Chandua & Kampa need special mention.

A great change came about in this area with the laying of 111 miles long Sealdaha Kusthia Broad guage Rly. Line on 15th Nov. or 29th September, 1962 and subsequent establishment of a Locomotive workshop and Rly. Station in 1963 to the northernmost tip of Bizpur Mouza, under Eastern Bengal State Railway. The Railway Locomotive shop was built with an area of 1,32,000 sq. mtr. In 1914 a carriage and wagon shop also came up.

Subsequently a planned Railway Township was laid and built to the East & South West of the Workshops with a wide range of infrastructure - roads, drains, bridges, street lights, internal Railway lines, parks, Institutes, Administrative Buildings, Technical School, Hospital, Co-operative shopping stores , Bazar , play grounds for football, Tennis, golf, theatres attached to each institutes (Hindmarsh, Institute, Bell Institute, Spalding Institute), Officers' Club etc. soon population began growing up and huts and pucca buildings began to sprout up rapidly, necessitating laying out Municipal infrastructure beyond the Railway area.

The town thus grew up was named Kanchrapara, since the Rly. Station at Bijpur was named after the then village Kanchanpalli or Kanchrapara, prosperous economically and culturally, being the seat of many stalwarts of Baishnab literature and early Bengali literature, as well as famous Vaidyas.

The origin of the name of Kanchrapara has been traced to " KANCHRA", an edible plant which then grew in abundance, but now extinct. The original Kanchrapara, still retains its name and is situated 5 km. North West of Kanchrapara Station, near the bank of Bhagirathi.

It would not be out of place to quote here a few lines from Nadia Gazetteer of 1910 by Jarret.

"Kanchrapara" - A fairly large village in the extreme South of the district and about 3 miles of the Station on the main line of the Eastern Bengal State Railway, to which it has been given its name.

At one time Kanchrapara was a big and important village and was very largely attended by the visitors on the occasion of the celebration of the Ratha Jatra festival. It is now, however, on the decline and is being depopulated by Malaria. "

KANCHRAPARA AS MUNICIPAL TOWN

Since 1869 Kanchrapara was within Naihati Municipality, extending from Southern most boundary of Bhattapalli or Bhatpara to Kanchrapara along the East Bank of Bhagirathi, Kanchrapara being ward no. 3,4 & 5 of Bhatpara . On the 1st July of 1903 Halisahar Municipality was established with Halisahar & Kanchrapara. Kanchrapara Municipality became a separate Municipality on 1st October, 1917 with an area of 3.5 sq. miles and a population of about 30,000.

At that time Municipal infrastructure was practically non-existent beyond the Rly. area. There were only three brick roads one Station Road running from Kanchrapara Station to the junction of Ghoshpara Road at Bagmore to the west, Workshop Road joining Kapileswar Road (Now Bongaon Road) to the South, and Station Road to the North a few yards East off Mondal Bazar. But there were no drains, street lights, running water, health facilities and other services.

It was rural in nature with scattered bustees, a few, dilapidated buildings here and there, ponds, swamps, dobas, a few agricultural plots, punctuated by some new brick buildings erected in an unplanned way.

The credit of bringing about the establishment of Kanchrapara Municipality as an independent Municipality goes to Mr. H. H. Spalding, the then Chairman of Halisahar Municipality .

The first meeting of the Board of commissioners of Kanchrapara Municipality comprising of 8 members was held at Hindmarsh Institute at 8 a.m. on 7th October 1917 under the Presidentship of Mr. Spalding & the first B.O.C. elected Mr. W.H. Harnett the Chairman & Rai Sahib Krishna Chandra Ghatak the Vice-chairman. A spacious room beneath the overhead water reservoir in front of Rly. Indoor Hospital began to be used as Municipal Office.

In subsequent years the new Board set on to the task of building Municipal infrastructure - laying, aligning new roads, connective roads, lanes, by lanes, drains, municipal buildings, street light, water supply, maternity center, bazar, transport, primary school, immunization, carriage and disposal of solid waste and selection of site for trenching ground and building roads & drains with parallel alignments etc. The B.O.C. acquired private lands with compensation wherever they felt it necessary.

Till partition of Bengal in 15th Aug. 1947, Loco & Carriage Superintendents of E.B.R. or Chief Mechanical Engineer, by virtue of their post, became the Chairpersons of Kanchrapara Municipality. Vice-chairpersons and other members were mostly railway men.

The contribution of Railway officers & their associates in developing the infrastructure at that time had been great indeed. Of those the name of the chairpersons Mr. W.H. Harnett, Mr. H. H. Spalding, Mr. A. H. Joycelene, Mr. D. Cardew, Mr. G. Thompson, Mr. O. B. Lacy, Mr. D. V. Irwin, Mr. L. A. K. Bradley, Major U. N. Banerjee and vice-chairpersons Raishib M. C. Madhoke and Rai Sahib K. C. Ghatak, Mr. R. K. Chatterjee, Mr. Naliminath Basu, Mr. Jana Ranjan Ganguli, Mr. Sudhir Ranjan Roy & Rai Shahib Shantinath Chakraborty deserve special mention.

War Time Scenario

The second world war declared in 1st September 1939 and Indian struggle for Independence began to change the scenario of the town. It became a strategically important town because of the biggest Rly. Workshop of Eastern India and proximity to capital town Calcutta. Air strip with hangers for Combat Aircrafts was built close to the Rly. Workshop & township. Rly. Workshops began turning out ammunition, armoured vehicles, air craft propellers. Munition Quarters were built to the west of Loco shop. Air Raid Pre-caution Quarters were built & trenches & water reservoirs were dug. At the height of the War, Roosevelt town, a full fledged Military Cantonment was built acquiring 45 village with in 24 hours notice to evacuate, came up to the North of Kanchrapara. Naturally attention of the Railway officers, specially the British officers was diverted to war preparations and defence.

At this juncture, however, Local commissioners with Major U.N. Banerjee and Rai Sahib M.C. Madhoke as the chairman, went ahead with development programmes with patriotic zeal. In 1939 the then chairman Mr. D. Mac Cauly, however, had observed rising tension between Rly. & Non-raily groups of commissioners and so he proposed to separate Rly. Colony from non-railway area to end that tension once for all. The subject was however kept in abeyance. This shows clear sign of rift and the rift widened in the subsequent years. Finally, just before Independence & Partition, Board of Councillors almost ceased to work.

Post-Independence & Post Partition Scenario

Post-independence period was a period of awakening as well as social turmoil. All the Muslim councillors, excepting Sk. Jamiat Mia left for East Pakistan. A new Board of Commissioners, with 12 members was sworn in with Mr. F. C. West as the President. In the first meeting Moulvi Bashir Ahmed, I.S.E. was elected chairman & Sri Rash Bihari Shastri Vice-chairman. But in the subsequent meetings the chairman & the other muslim commissioners, except Sk. Jamiat Mia absented due to the migration of the chairman to East Pakistan and following his continued absence from station without notice, Moulvi Bashir Ahmed was removed from the post of chairman in a special meeting, held on 26th September acting upon DM's Memo No. M 252-2-47 dated 12th Sept. 1947. Thereafter Sri Gour Mohan Sadhukhan was elected chairman by majority vote while Sri R. B. Shastri remained vice-chairman.

Post Partition Scenario

Post partition scenario of Kanchrapara Municipal Town was fraught with socio-political struggle among different political parties & interest groups. The elected commissioners faced a hard task to tackle influx of refugees from East Pakistan, who squatted at every available piece of Govt. land or vacant land or private land left by Muslims, forming colonies, clearing jungles, and occupying abandoned or vacant houses & Rly. Quarters. Rly. Employees who migrated from East Pakistan were absorbed in vacant Munitions Quarters, R & RT type quarters in the Rly. areas.

Population suddenly swelled up & reached to 56,668 (according to 1951 census). As more refugees came in subsequent years, in 1961, it reached up to 68,966 . Public demand for new roads drains, streetlight, health care, garbage disposal facility and other services rose. But Municipality was too economically weak to meet those demands. Demand of the Municipal employee's association for pay hike also rose because of inflation and heavier workload. Also political demand for greater representation in the Local Body, heightened. During pre-independence period B.O.C. representation was limited only to the title holders.

All these left the Municipality in a sorry state. However, development works went on, but in a slow pace within the Municipality too limited means, only source of Revenue being property tax.

To add to the owe, a meeting was held on 5-9-48 at S.D.O. Barrackpore's Office with the representatives of several Municipalities (Kanchrapara Municipality was not invited). A resolution was passed to exclude the Rly. Area from Kanchrapara Municipality and to amalgamate non-railway areas to Halisahar Municipality. The decision was communicated through S.D.O.'s Memo. No. 115H (27) con dated 27.09.48 The decision, was not, however, carried out owing to local movement.

Henceforth, engineering & financial and other assistance of the Rly. to the Municipality stopped altogether. The Railway now pays the Municipality only 56000 rupees per quarter as tax against the property that it won prior to 1932 though Rly. area constitute 2/3 rd of total Municipal area of 9.06 sq. km and 5 Wards are within Rly. area and all the adult people send elected representatives in the Board of councillors and the Municipality has to provide health, education & other facilities even to the unauthorized occupiers purely on humanitarian ground.

On the other hand, in 6 decades non-railway area with 19 wards, have developed to a thickly populated thriving Trade & Business center and cottage industries like wood craft, shoe chappal making etc. Now 3.02 square km. of non-railway area have to bear the burnt of about 86,000 population, population in the Rly. area being about 40,000.

Non-railway areas of the Municipality has no land at all for development while acres of Rly. land remain unutilized & those are gradually being occupied by unauthorized settlers.

The glory, the sheen & shine of the Rly. area, of which people felt pride, gradually faded. Beautiful, environmentally sound Rly. colonies are struggling in vain to regain their old status and glory. Quarters, left almost uncared, are being filled with bushes; a few parks and play ground and many valuable trees have gone, open defecation is rampant in many areas. Rly. colonies, barring officer colony, are in a pitiable state.

The old glory of this Railway Municipal town, through never officially recognized as one, can only be regained and developed through **Joint Participatory Approach** of the Railway administration & Municipal Administration.

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