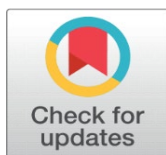


DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE AND COMMERCE IN GOALPARA DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to study the development of Trade and commerce during colonial period in Goalpara. Before the East India Company's ascendancy Goalpara was under the control of the Mughal Empire. Goalpara was the most important trade point of Bengal and Assam. Goalpara has acted as the gateway to Assam for centuries. The various kinds of trades were known in Goalpara since early times. The early nineteenth century was the period of transition to a systematic trade and economy. This transition brought about rapid changes in the field of trade and commerce transformation as well as in the politico-administrative and economic growth of Goalpara. It was in this period the East India Company had established the salt trade from Bengal to the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Goalpara had a well-established trade connection with the Indian subcontinent as well as Southeast Asia and China. Also, rich natural resources and agricultural production are found in this region. Agricultural production has played a significant role both in inland and overseas trade which facilitated the development in trade and economic fields in the Brahmaputra valley during the colonial period.

Keywords: Trade, Salt, Sal Tree, Goalpara, Merchant

1. INTRODUCTION

Goalpara was the most important trade centre of Bengal and Assam before the ascendancy of British East India Company. It became a part of Bengal when Koch ruler was defeated in the hands of Mughal Empire. Afterward, it passed into the hands of British East India Company in 1765. The main motive of territorial expansion of British East India Company was for trade and commerce. With this aim they had established a trading centre at Goalpara. British merchants exported their merchandise through Goalpara to Assam and in return they imported raw materials from Assam. Free-lance European merchants carried out trade with Assam traders at Goalpara town, Jugighopa and Rangamati.¹

¹ D. P. Boroah (Ed.), *Assam Gazetteers Goalpara District*, Government of Assam, Guwahati, 1979, p. 228

2. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study we have discussed both primary and secondary sources collected from different archival records, books and journals.

3. DISCUSSION

Numbers of European traders had concentrated in Goalpara for doing trade with Assam before British East India Company reached in Assam. Richard Edward, a European merchant and some other English merchants from Kasimbazar sent their merchandise in the early period of 1670.² In 1722, Colonel James Mill came to India under the banner of Ostend East India Company but this company was terminated in 1732.³ After that, Colonel James Mill became as free –lance merchant of Bengal who had visited different part of Goalpara and conducted salt trade there.⁴ Dupleix, the governor of French East India Company, made an agreement with Colonel James Mill, who had trade expertise in Assam. James Mill accepted all the proposal of Duplex for making preliminary commercial trip to Assam on the basis of profit sharing. In the last month of 1738, Colonel James Mill made a trip to Assam who was accompanied by Goodingt, a Dutchman.⁵ On May 1739, second trip was prepared under Col. James Mill, Goodingt and Mathie (*A French trade agent*) with merchandise of broad clothes, vermillion and corals including jewellery of Rs. 80,000. They also brought a horse to present to Raja of Assam.⁶ In 1755, French East India Company deputed Jean Baptist Chevalier at Goalpara to conduct salt trade with Assam traders. He established a trade outpost of salt at Goalpara.⁷ In 1757, all trade activities of French East India Company in Bengal were stopped by British East India Company. Jean Baptist Chevalier did not leave Goalpara because of huge profit of salt trade. So, he became a trade agent under English merchants to carry out trade with Assam traders. In 1763, he left Goalpara and all assets had been delivered to John Robinson.⁸ Paul Richard Pearkes, an English merchant had established regular trade with Assam traders and erected a salt factory at Jugighopa.⁹

The British East India Company enjoyed the *de-facto* authority over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa after obtaining the *Dewani* right from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, which brought trade contact with neighboring independent or semi-independent states. In the eastern frontier of Bengal, there were five independent states namely Koch Behar, Assam (the Brahmaputra Valley), Jaintia, Cachar and Arakan.¹⁰ Goalpara which was situated on the east of Koch Behar and west of Assam came under the trade influence of British East India Company. For the purpose of the collection of revenue and expansion of trade towards eastern countries, Goalpara was made a *Thana* under the Rangpur district of Bengal Government in 1813 circa. During that time, present Goalpara town maintained steamer *ghat* where considerable import and export of goods had been carried out. Since the time of Mughal rule, Goalpara and Jugighopa upheld military and trade outpost under the *Subah* of Bengal. The British East India Company always attempted to establish their trade centre in Goalpara for conducting business with the traders of Assam. However, it was not possible to control the trade of Goalpara because of far location from Calcutta. As a result of which, Robert Clive founded a trade committee known as “Society for Trade” in 1765 with the view to carry out trade in remote places of Bengal. On November 1st of 1765, the trade society appointed eleven agents to transact their business in different frontier areas of Bengal. Out of eleven, three agents namely Hugh Baillie, Tom Lewis, Hargreaves were appeared at Goalpara, Rangpur, Hargreaves and Chialmari respectively.¹¹ Hugh Baillie already was an important trade agent who carried out salt trade on behalf of Henry Vansittart

² J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Trade and Colony*, (the British colonization of north east India) ,NEIHA, Shillong, 2000, p. 18

³ S.K.Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assam Relation*, LBS Publication, Guwahati, 2008, p. 63

⁴ Amalendu Guha, “Duplex’s Trade Mission to Assam,” *Studies in the Economic History of North East India (1738- 40)*, Har Anand Publication, New Delhi, 1994, p. 171

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*.p.173

⁷ J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Op. cit*, 2000, pp. 18 -19

⁸ S. K Bhuyan, *Early British Relation with Assam*, EBH Publisher, Guwahati, 2013, p.7

⁹ S. K Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, 2008, p. 64

¹⁰ A. C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India 1784-1826*, Calcutta, 1946, p, 1

¹¹ *Committee of Trade to Clive, Nov 1, 1765, committee’s fourth report App.41, ASA, pp.15 &31*

till 1763 before the appointment as a trade agent under Society for Trade¹²When Henry Vansittart was succeeded by Robert Clive, Hugh Baillie was posted to Goalpara. After some year, Nawab Mir Kasim imposed strict duties on articles of inland trades and suppressed all illegal trade of Europeans in Goalpara. But Hugh Baillie had been carrying regular trade in Goalpara without any hindrances by paying regular duties to the Nawab of Bengal. No doubt, the agency of Hugh Baillie at Goalpara supplied inland articles to Assam and imported large quantity of betelnut and tobacco from Assam.¹³ Later on, Society for Trade started concentration on salt trade which became most important inland trade article in Assam.¹⁴ During that period, salt of Bengal and European broad clothes became major merchandise in Assam.¹⁵ Court of Director opened all trades to private agencies with condition to maintain trade balance of the Company. Court of Director considered it was better to offer the trade of Goalpara to private agencies because it was too far from Company's controlled. So, many free merchants and private trade agencies came to Goalpara for the purpose of trade in Assam.

In 1769, George Lear, an English trade agent came to Goalpara to carry out trade with Assam.¹⁶ He built an independent salt factory and salt emporium at Goalpara town at the cost of rupees 21,742.¹⁷ He founded salt warehouses and godowns at Dacca which became the headquarter of his business.¹⁸ Daniel Raush also an English private merchant who did salt trade in Goalpara without license from the government as an agent of David Killican, a civil servant of Company as well as a merchant of Calcutta. When David Killican was removed by the Court of Director, Hugh Baillie purchased Killican's factory with all appendages. He became a principal merchant in Goalpara who entered into an agreement with Dhuria Baruas of Kandahar *Chowky*. He enjoyed an exclusive privilege by supplying large quantities of salt to Assam which passed through the hand of Duria Barua.¹⁹ On the other hand, Williams, Wheatland, Cator and Jonh Taylor were English merchants appeared at Goalpara to carry out salt trade.²⁰

Regulating Act of 1773 created a new history in Bengal in the field of trade. Regulating Act had abolished all monopoly trade conducted by the servants of British East India Company by misusing the *Dastak* (trade permit). Under the *Dastak*, British East India Company was entitled to trade in Bengal without paying custom duty. As per the Regulating Act, all trades of remote areas were tendered to free merchants and private trade agencies on contract basis under the protection of British East India Company.

William Dow, an English merchant came to India in 1773 with Colonel Dow to carry out trade on clothes and *Jar* in Goalpara with due permission of Warren Hasting, the Governor General of India.²¹ Robert Bigger and Bernard MacCullam were well known English merchants who were engaged salt trade with the merchants of Assam by residing at Goalpara. Robert Bigger could not carry out trade successfully; however, Bernard Mac Cullam was a successful trader in Assam.

The Board of Trade opened inland trade of Bengal to all individual merchants of English, Indian and other Europeans. Hugh Baillie arrived at Goalpara with the help of Richards Barwell, newly appointed member of the Calcutta Council.²² He conducted salt trade with Assam traders and Bhutanese too. He also did salt trade in Khuntaghat and Habraghat *Pargana* of Bijni estate.²³

Goalpara, Jugighopa and Rangamati were three principal commercial centres in the district of Goalpara where the trade agencies of Company and merchants of Bengal conducted their trade with Assam traders. Goalpara town was situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Besides, Jugighopa and Rangamati were situated on the north bank of Brahmaputra River, which formed as eastern boundary of British Bengal. Important transit point was situated at Hadira which situated on the side of Assam, opposite to Goalpara town. It was known as Kandahar *Chowky* or Assam *Chowky*.²⁴

¹² S. K. Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, 2008, p. 94

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 68

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.97

¹⁵ Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *Assam in the Eighteen Century*, Omsons, NewDelhi, 1985, p. 54

¹⁶ S. K. Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, 2008, p. 97

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.97

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.97

¹⁹ A. C. Banerjee, *Op.cit*, p.7

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.7

²¹ S. K. Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, 2008, p. 75

²² Orchid Baruah, "*British Administrative Centres in Nineteenth Century Assam*", Phd Dissertation, Gauhati University, Guwahati, 2014, p. 80

²³ S. K. Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, 2008, p. 141

²⁴ Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *Op. cit*, p. 58

In the early part of 19th century, salt became as major import goods of Assam which was exchanged with Muga, silk, mustard seeds, ivory, gold and slaves of Assam.²⁵ Thus, number of famous Indian merchants namely Sooberam Palit, Ghanashyam Sarkar, Ganga Narayan Roy and Jagat Seth were concentrated in Goalpara for salt trade. Sooberam Palit and Ghanashyam Sarkar received the *perwana* from Muhammad Reza Khan, the *Naib Dewan* of Bengal for three year monopoly of salt trade in Goalpara.²⁶ On the other hand, Ganga Narayan Roy a Bengali merchant also received the *rawanah* for Assam. Robert Bigger became an agent of Ganga Narayan Roy who erected a factory at Goalpara with the permission of Governor General.²⁷ Jagat Seth who was a loyal merchant of British East India Company had established his business at Goalpara, Jugighopa and Guwahati²⁸.

The British East India Company was trying to set up commercial relations with Bhutan from 1771 to 1866. Several trade missions were sent to Bhutan but no good result had been yielded.²⁹ Because of the failure of trade mission Anglo-Bhutan war was broke out in 1864.³⁰ Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864 was concluded by the treaty of Chinculla of 1866.³¹ The treaty of Chinculla compelled the Bhutan to surrender all eighteen *Duars* of Assam and Bengal to British India. Among the eighteen *Duars*, Guma, Ripu, Chirang, Sidli and Bijni *Duars* were adjacent to Goalpara district which was popularly known as Eastern *Duars*. Significantly, these five *Duars* were added to Goalpara district for administrative convenience.³² The treaty of Chinculla opened the frontier markets below the foothills of Bhutan. The colonial government organized trade fair in several places of *Duars* which also became helpful to maintain peace between Bhutan and British India. The Bhutanese used to visit trade fairs to exchange their forest products with salt and other edible goods. The Bhutanese came down to Goalpara district with the hill products like gold dust, rock salt, musk, cow tails, blankets, knives, rubber, elephant tusks, ponies, Chinese silk and woolen clothes. They bartered the products with rice, dry fish, cotton cloth, glass, salt, utensils, brass metals, etc. The Bhutanese purchased *endi* clothes which were woven by Kachari women.³³ The Bhutanese traders used to visit Kachari villages to collect *endi* clothes or *endi* cocoon. The total value of trans-frontier trade was very small in colonial period.³⁴

With a view to keep friendly relation with Bhutan, the Government of British India established many frontier markets at Dotma, Kochugaon, Serfanguri, Sidli, Chirang and Bijni under the district administration and forest department.

Nibari, Luckichar, Jerah, Singimiri, Damrah, Rangjuli, Rajaballa, Bengal khatta, Tikri, Salmara, Mankachar, Bahadur Khatta, Putimari and Parakhaslana were frontier *hats* (Market) below Garo Hills.³⁵ These *hats* were established by *Chaudhuries* of Koraibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara and Habragahat estates.³⁶ The Garos regularly came to those *hats* with hills products like cotton, chillies, wax, lac, rubber, timber, etc. to sell or barter. When return, they took away cows, pigs, goats, fowls, salt, earthenware pots, swords, spearheads and broad clothes.³⁷ The Garos supplied cotton extensively to Goalpara, Salmara, Mankachar, Mahendraganj and Rowmarighat. The cotton of the Garo Hills was exported to Dacca and Calcutta by river route and then to England.³⁸

In early 19th century, timber became an important item for trading. Sal (*Soria Robusta*) trees were found extensively in the forest of Goalpara division of Assam. Before the establishment of forest department in Assam, Sal trees were exploited by *Zamindars* and private traders in the form of *dhum* for making of boats and construction of house.³⁹ In rainy season, timber traders of Dacca and Mymensingh were arrived at Goalpara by boats to buy Sal timber.⁴⁰ In 1864, Imperial

²⁵ Binod.S.Das, "Changing Profile of the Frontier Bengal(1751-1833)", Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1984, p. 185

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.101

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.101

²⁸ Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *Op. cit*, p. 55

²⁹ C.J.Hamilton, *The Trade Relations Between England and India (1600-1896)*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink And Co., 1919, p.237

³⁰ A.J.Laine, "An Account of the Land Tenure system of Goalpara", ASOF, 1917, p. 3

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Srimiti Das, "Assam -Bhutan Trade Relation 1865-1947", Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, 2005, p. 29

³³ *Ibid*, p.24

³⁴ B. C. Allen, E.A. Gait, C.G.H. Allen & H.F. Howard, *Gazetteer of Bengal and North- East India*, Mittall Publication, New Delhi, 2012, p. 519

³⁵ Manjula Borthakur, *Periodic Markets in Tribal Areas: A Case Study of Meghalaya* Unpublished M. Phil dissertation, NEHU, Shillong, 1989, p. 37

³⁶ Angira Dev(Kar), *The Garo Frontier Market in the Nineteenth Century*, Unpublished M.Phil dissertation submitted to NEHU, Shillong, 1992, p.36

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *Report on Cotton Marketing in Assam*, Assam Secretariat Printing Press, Shillong, 1942, p. 14

³⁹ W.F.Perree, *The Second Working Plan for the Goalpara Forest Division, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907*, Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1908, p. 9

⁴⁰ Sanghamitra Misra, *Becoming a Borderland (The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India)*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2011, p. 68

forest department was established in Assam and did extensive survey on the forest of Goalpara including *Duars* forest. An extensive Sal trees (*Soria Robusta*) were found in Goalpara forest which occupied a good market in the district. In 1875, the forest department had started to sell timber to timber contractors at the rate of Rs. 10 per tree.⁴¹In 1897, the forest department commenced sleeper operation in order to supply wood sleeper to the Eastern Bengal Railway. Railway sleeper required hard timber such as Sal timber to fix the track with earth.⁴²Assam - Bengal Railway Trading Company took an advantage for making railway track sleeper with Sal wood.⁴³

During the second half of twentieth century, British India earned handsome profit from agricultural products. Jute became an important commodity next to cotton in markets of Europe. Jute sacks were used for packaging of cotton, sugar, coffee, guano, cements and other commodities. Jute was grown in India in abundance especially in Bengal, Assam, Koch Behar and Nepal.⁴⁴The Goalpara district became the largest producer of jute among the districts of Assam.⁴⁵

The trade and commerce in Goalpara during Colonial period mainly confined to Salt, Forest and agricultural products especially Sal timber and jutes.

Results: The growth and development of Trade and commerce in Goalpara during colonial period compelled the British Government to built-up good transport facilities. Assam Steamer Company started steamer services between Calcutta and Guwahati in the year 1839. The district authority constructs many roads on the expenses of Local Fund. In 1902, forest department established Tram in Goalpara forest to extract Sal timber from forest. In 1902 the East Bengal Railway extended up to Golokganj, from where two railway lines had been constructed between Golokganj and Dhubri and Golokganj to Guwahati.

The most important impact of growth of trade and commerce in Goalpara during colonial period was credit system. Originally, there was not credit system in Goalpara but mortgage system was existed. With the coming of Marwari businessmen, the old system was replaced by a new financial system in the district which was known as credit facility. The Marwari merchants provided credit facilities to the people of Goalpara district and they also started giving loan to the farmer in term of agriculture production. In 1904, British Government enacted Co-operative for providing credit facilities to the public. Thereafter, a good co-operative movement was started in Assam which led to create some agricultural credit societies in Goalpara district.

With the development of trade and commerce modern education system also came out in Goalpara district. The traders and colonial employees pressurized Colonial government to introduce modern education facilities in Goalpara. Therefore many schools were established in many places of Goalpara.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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⁴² A.C. Singha, *Colonial Legacy and Environmental Crisis in the North East India*, EBH Publisher, Guwahati, 2012, p. 20

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *Indian Trade Enquiry, Reports on Jute and Silk*, London, 1921, p. 2

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