



# Historical Importance Of Kachugaon Forest During Colonial Period: An Overview.

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## Abstract

There is many historical importance of Kachugaon during the colonial period, its importance was greatly emphasized by the British individuals, and the impact of the foreign rule left a huge trademark which can still be seen. Kachugaon has contributed in a huge margin during that era in creation of political and socio-economic status of Assam. There are still historical sites and places which proves that an event that had happened and it tells us different stories of Kachugaon and its origin of the story. The exploitative nature of Britishers can be seen through the creation of certain infrastructures and government offices in the zone of Kachugaon. Forest of Kachugaon was also put under one of the reserved areas. However, in the present, certain people still exploit its resources even though it is under protection. The conflicts and the violence over the last decades have also thrown the area into disorder. The negligence of government over those area has also led to a failure in preservation of those sites and places. Only one of those is still preserved and still in use that is the building of Forest I.B and rest are left in ruins. Therefore, an effort is made towards writing this article on “A Historical Importance of Kachugaon during colonial period”.

**Keywords:** Kachugaon, British, Forest, Colonial, Assam, Exploit.

## Introduction:

Kachugaon is a town in Kokrajhar region of Assam state, where people of different ethnicity live in harmony and unity. We can trace back the history of Kachugaon right after the arrival of British in Assam. British contacted Assam in the year of 1771 and they made a successful trade relationship with Assam, British came to Goalpara in 1769 and built a factory and, in the year of 1826, the formal rule of the British started right after the first Burmese war.

The history of Kachugaon is quite fascinating, throughout the colonial period the forest of Kachugaon became one of income sources for the British. During that time, this forest established a reputation not just in India but throughout all of Asia. The British needed Timber supply to build Ships, to build Railway sleepers and tracks, as these commodities became very prime for them. Since the forest of Kachugaon was fresh and untouched they turned their ways towards it. Under the British colonial rule, Kachugaon and the greater region of Kokrajhar was incorporated into the British Raj, the colonial administration that ruled India from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to 1947. The British East India Company, driven by its economic interest, sought to exploit the abundant natural capitals of the region, particularly tea, timber, and other resources. As a result, tea gardens, timber businesses, and trading posts were established, opening up new economic development opportunities. Kachugaon, with its strategic location and fertile land, attracted the attention of the British. They established administrative centers, such as District Headquarters and Revenue Collection Offices, to consolidate their control and establish their authority over the local population. The British presence in Kachugaon brought significant changes to the socio-economic fabric of the region, introducing new system of governance, land ownership, and taxation.

Moreover, era of colonization witnessed introduction of Western education and cultural practices in Kachugaon. Missionaries and educational institutions were established, aiming to propagate Western education, Christianity, and English language among the local population. The social and cultural dynamics of Kachugaon were significantly impacted by this, causing the rise of a new educated class, which eventually played a crucial role in political movements and social reforms. The colonial period also witnessed significant resistance and struggles against British occupation of Kachugaon. The local population including indigenous communities, peasants, and tribal groups faced exploitation, land alienation, and cultural erosion under colonial policies. These grievances often culminated in protests, uprisings, and movements for self-determination and autonomy. The resistance offered by the people of Kachugaon played a crucial role in shaping the anti-colonial struggle in the region. Today, the historical importance of Kachugaon throughout the colonial chapter is reflected in its historical landmarks, such as colonial-era buildings, churches, and educational institutions. The remnants of British influence can still be seen, serving as a prompt to the region's past struggles and resilience. Understanding the historical significance of Kachugaon during the colonial powers and local populations, together with the enduring effects of resistance and cultural change.

The colonial period in Kachugaon, Kokrajhar, brought about profound changes and historical significance. The British colonial administration's economic pursuits, administrative reforms, and cultural influences left an indelible mark on the region. The struggles and resistance against colonial rule also played a crucial role in shaping the socio-political landscape of Kachugaon. Exploring the historical importance of Kachugaon during the colonial period furnishes valuable perceptions into the region's past and its ongoing journey towards cultural preservation and self-determination. This article seeks to explore the Historical importance of Kachugaon during the colonial period.

## OBJECTIVE:

1. To highlight the importance of Kachugaon during colonial rule.
2. To study the influence of colonial rule in Kachugaon.

## METHODOLOGY:

In preparation of this article, historical method would be adopted. The work will make use of both primary and secondary sources to get a broader picture of the historical importance of Kachugaon. Personal interviews, questionnaires, inspection and understanding, would be used as primary sources and available relevant literature as a secondary source.

## DISCUSSION:

Kachugaon is a locality situated in Kokrajhar region of Assam (at present), was covered with thick forest during the colonial period, and its importance can be renowned for its abundant forest cover, emphasizing its significance as a hub of dense vegetation. However, prior to delving into this subject matter, it is essential to familiarize ourselves with a brief overview of the historical importance of Assam.

Assam's significance is highlighted in the epic of Mahabharata, where it is mentioned and referred to as Pragjyotisha, showcasing its historical importance. The forests of Assam were also very famous for the rich fauna that it supported, and more so for her elephants. Assam has been the birthplace of numerous influential kings whose contributions have left a lasting impact on the olden times of India. There has been mentioned in the literary sources about the plenty of elephants found in the forest of Assam, and it was also mentioned by Kautilya that "the elephants bred in the eastern country were probably the best. Kautilya was probably referring to Assam. During the year 1820s-30s, Govinda Chandra the King of Kachari had imposed heavy taxes on timber and this practically prohibited merchants coming from Company's dominion to purchase timber. The forest was so important for the folks of Assam that it is reasonable to assume that the forest in Assam played a vital role in fulfilling the medicinal and various other essential requirements of the people during that time.

Throughout the colonial period, the importance of Assam mainly comes from the forest covered areas and certain regions of India has long been known for its extensive forests' reserves, and Assam stood out as a prime example. Assam's forests provided a source of timber, fuel, and other forest products for the British administration and for the local population. The forests were also home to a variety of wildlife, including elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers. When the British arrived in Assam, they swiftly recognized the immense value of its pleasing landscapes and rich natural resources. Forests dominated the landscape of Assam, encompassing the mainstream of its land area, which did not partake commercial use till then, came to be regarded as a cause of income and resource extraction. British formally started their rule through the Treaty of Yandaboo in the year 1826, February 24. Assam was governed by a British agent who acted as the Governor-General's representative, and in 1838 it was included to Bengal, which was also governed by the

British. By 1842, the British had taken control of the whole Assamese Brahmaputra valley. In 1874, Assam became a distinct province (governed by a Chief Commissioner) with Shillong as its capital. Bengal was divided in 1905, and Assam was combined with Eastern Bengal. However, this caused such animosity that Bengal was reunited in 1912, and Assam was once more made a separate province. As this event was still going on, they kept on continuing to implement their strategies for exploiting Assam's natural resources, gradually making advancements in their endeavors. In the early 19th century, the British colonial administration seized control of Assam's forests. To oversee the forests and make sure they were properly used, a forest department was established. The Assam Forest Department encountered numerous issues with managing the provinces' woods. The lack of an advanced transportation and communication system, the unfavorable weather, and the labor shortage were the main issues. Growing revenue was the only option to overcome the challenges of a tiny business, therefore the Forest Department spent a long time worrying about it. The forests were divided into Reserved, Protected, and Unclassified forests by the Forest Department. Reserved forests were those that were completely off-limits to people and were under rigorous protection. Protected forests were those that allowed some human activity, such as grazing and gathering forest products, but were not as strictly protected. Unclassified forests were ones that were free to be used by people without restriction and were not under the authority of the forest department. The management of Assam's forests by the British colonial authority had a big effect on the local populace. Conflict between the government and the populace resulted from the restriction on locals' access to the forests caused by the designation of reserved forests. The locals were further alienated by the government's limitations on the acquisition of forest goods. Despite the strife, there were some good effects from the British colonial government's management of Assam's woods. The government's attempts to safeguard the forests contributed to the preservation of Assam's biodiversity. In order to increase the productivity of the forests, the government also implemented innovative methods of forest management, such as scientific forestry.

Assam's forests lost significance after India attained Independence in 1947. As opposed to the British colonial authority, the new Indian government did not place as much of a focus on forest management. As a result, Assam's woods have been deteriorating recently. Here are some of the specific ways in which the forests of Assam were important during the colonial period:

- **Timber:** The forests of Assam were a major source of timber for the British administration. Timber was used for a variety of purposes, including construction, shipbuilding, and furniture making.
- **Fuel:** The forests of Assam were also a major source of fuel for the British administration and for the local population. Fuelwood was used for cooking, heating, and lighting.
- **Other forest products:** The forests of Assam also provided a variety of other forest products, such as bamboo, cane, and resin. These products were used for a variety of purposes, including construction, basketry, and waterproofing.
- **Wildlife:** The forests of Assam were home to a variety of wildlife, including elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers. These animals were hunted for their meat, hides, and other products.

As a part of Assam, Kachugaon was also targeted for its forest resources as it is proved to be very important for them, Kachugaon forest covered huge area land of 1393 sq. km. Kachugaon Forest is famous for Golden Langur, an endemic species which has been named as the mascot of Bodoland region. It also has Asian elephant, Royal Bengal tiger, Clouded leopard, Indian gaur, Wild water buffalo, Spotted deer, Hornbill, more than 150 species of butterflies, 170 species of birds, 380 varieties of plants and orchids.

Kachugaon was of great significance during the colonial era because of its advantageous position and contribution to the socio-economic structure of the area. Kachugaon, which is in Assam's western region, is ideally situated as a gateway to the hilly areas and neighboring countries. As a result, it became a key junction on the commercial and communication routes that linked Assam's lowlands to the rest of the region. The colonial powers were interested in Kachugaon because of its wealth of natural resources. Rich woods, mineral deposits, agriculturally productive terrain, and bodies of water were all present in the area. The British were very interested in using these resources for financial advantage. There was also a huge area with wasteland which showed a greater interest for cultivation of various plants to produce huge economy for them. 'The production of tea, jute, and other agricultural products became important economic endeavors. Timber from the forests also played a significant role. Kachugaon developed became a center for resource trade and exploitation, boosting the colonial economy, the then Inspector General of Forests, Government of India, Sir F. Beadon Bryant IFS, visited the Division in 1911, and recommended its division in two parts. In 1934, the Division was bifurcated into Haltugaon and Kachugaon Divisions. The HQ of the former was made at Haltugaon, a sleepy hamlet of little consequence (even today), whereas Dhubri continued to be the HQ of the other part i.e. Kachugaon division. This division was affected by Milroy. It appears that the names of Haltugaon and Kachugaon Divisions were changed to Goalpara East and West respectively sometime between 1946 to 1948, The Kachugaon Forest Division is a division of the Western Assam Circle Conservancy. Parts of the current Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts, which are located on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River, are included in the territorial division. The region in question is located in the latitude range of 260 19/33.24 to 260 51/54.36 and the longitude range of 89051/ 18.70 to 900 16/ 20.64. The division covers a total area of 1393 square kilometres. The division is bordered on the west by the West Bengal interstate boundary, on the north by an international boundary with Bhutan, and on the east by the river Saralbhangra, which also serves as the division's western boundary. It is bordered on the south by the Dhubri Division. During the colonial era, Kachugaon developed into a significant administrative and governing centre. In Kachugaon, the British erected government buildings, tax collection sites, and police stations. It developed as a focal point for colonial administration, with officials in charge of administration, revenue collection, and law enforcement. British administration in Kachugaon helped to further entrench colonial rule in the area. The Forest Department implemented the social forestry programme aimed at achieving a specific afforestation target mostly targeted the 'Sal tree' because it is supposed to be most strong and profitable tree in that region. The glorious Sal forests of Kachugaon are now left in few patches to be seen today. Good Sal patches can be seen between Ride IV to Ride VI in the Central and Sanfan Ranges, which are the best surviving stands. During the British rule witnessed official plundering of India's forest wealth. The imposing Forest IB built during that period, and the old visitor's book that has records of almost weekly

visits of the DFO in 1939, are silent testimony to the systematic extraction of timber on a scale that defies imagination.

#### IMPORTANCE OF TIMBER:

Timber was of great importance during the colonial period in India. It was used for a variety of purposes, including:

- **Construction:** Timber was used to build houses, bridges, and other structures.
- **Shipbuilding:** Timber was used to build ships for the British Royal Navy and for the merchant marine.
- **Railways:** Timber was used to build railway sleepers and other railway infrastructure.
- **Furniture making:** Timber was used to make furniture, such as tables, chairs, and beds.
- **Fuel:** Timber was used as fuel for cooking, heating, and lighting.
- **Other products:** Timber was also used to make a variety of other products, such as paper, utensils, and tools.

The British colonial authority in colonial India acted to guarantee that there was a consistent supply of lumber because there was a strong demand for it. There were rates put up by the British Government for the different types of timber, the first-class timber was rated from Rs. 12 to Rs. 20 per acre, second-class timber was rated from Rs. 4 to Rs. 10 per acre and the third-class timber was rated from Rs. 1 to Rs. 3 per acre. The quantity, quality, and accessibility of the wood as well as any other factors influencing the wood's immediate worth all needed to be taken into consideration. A unique provision pertaining to the priceless sal trees was included in the same set of guidelines. So, in no event should the land where a sal tree was growing be assigned without first consulting the province's Chief Forest Officer. Here are some of the specific reasons why timber was so important during the colonial period in India:

- The British Royal Navy required a large supply of timber to build ships.
- The construction of railways required a large supply of timber for railway sleepers and other infrastructure.
- The growth of the tea industry required a large supply of timber for construction and for making tea chests.
- The increasing population of India required a large supply of timber for construction, fuel, and other purposes.

The significance of wood during India's colonial era serves as a reminder of how crucial woods are to both the country's economy and the livelihoods of its citizens. The Indian economy and people's way of life still rely heavily on forests today. Deforestation, a significant environmental and social issue, poses a threat to India's forests, which is unfortunate.

The British forest policy in Assam was based on the principle of custodial management. This means that the government had control over the forests and was responsible for their management. It is found that

the British Government from the very beginning of the forest administration was progressively increasing its hegemony over the forest resources of Assam. The rights acquired by the government were absolute. Rules for regulating the various other activities of the forest department were framed from time to time in accordance with the relevant clauses of the Indian Forest Acts.

In Kachugaon, Assam, colonial rule had a considerable beneficial and negative impact. On the one hand, the British helped raise living conditions in the area by introducing new technologies and business opportunities. For instance, the development of roads and railways facilitated the movement of people and products, while the adoption of new farming methods enhanced food yields. The British also built schools and hospitals in Kachugaon, which aided in raising literacy rates and enhancing general health. However, colonial control also had a variety of detrimental effects on the Kachugaon people. Several taxes levied by the British on the populace made lifecycle tough for numerous households in the area. In addition, the British frequently stole natives' land and gave it to British settlers, which sparked animosity and social upheaval, many people in Kachugaon lost their sense of identity as an outcome of British suppression of native customs and culture. The formation of new economic prospects was one of colonial rule's most important effects in Kachugaon. The natural resources of Assam, like tea, oil, coal, and forest produce like Timber were of concentration to the British. They mainly focused on the forests to extract timber and wasteland for the cultivation. Assam forest was divided into different categories and those are:

1. Sal Forest

\* Bhabar Sal Forest, \* Bamba Sal, \* Terai Sal Forest, \* Eastern Heavy Alluvial Plain Sal Forest.

2. Mixed Deciduous Forest

3. Evergreen Forest

4. Savannah

\* Dry savannah, \* Wet Savannah

5. Riverain Forest

This sparked development of new industries in Kachugaon, resulting in formation of jobs and business opportunities for the local population. However, these sectors also contributed to worker exploitation and environmental deterioration. The growth of novel knowledge was yet one more important result of colonial control. The British constructed roads, bridges, and railroads to facilitate travel and cargo transportation. They also created fresh farming methods that raised crop output. Many people in Kachugaon saw improvements in their lives as a consequence of these innovations, but other people were also forced to leave their homes and their traditional ways of life were destroyed. The clearing of forests for agricultural purposes was prohibited and frequently resulted in disputes with the forest residents. Alienation of specific chunk of the forests for grazing populations impacted customary usage by incorporating it into the vocabulary of 'wastes. Demographic changes were ushered in with the encouragement of the Santhals and Kols into the

forest villages. They acted as a permanent corpus of agricultural labour and came under the land revenue regime which boosted the state coffers. In Kachugaon, colonial control had a wide-ranging and complex impact. Consequences included both good and bad things, and the total effect changed depending on the person and the culture. But there is no denying that colonial control had a significant impact on Kachugaon's history and growth.

### **BUILDING OF INFRASTRUCTURES AND GOVERNMENT OFFICES:**

British with its exploitative minds started to build certain infrastructures and offices which have benefited them as well as the local population in many aspects. Infrastructures like Hospital, School and Tramway, and offices like Forest Inspection Bungalow and Forest Battalion camp-cum training centre were built by them. Kachugaon was a busy forest citadel, with a wonderful forest IB, Depot and a number of staff quarters. It was also the HQ of the legendary tram of the Department. In the past, Kachugaon was manned by an ACF whose designated official residence was known as “Lal Bungalow”, now in ruins.

- Forest Inspection Bungalow was built in the year 1898, it lies in the coordinates of 26 °34'0” N and 90 °34'4” E. This Bungalow was mainly used for the purpose of providing lodging for Public Works officers while they supervise work and travel for duty.
- The Hospital and School were also built during that era. However, there is no record of built year and it is still known to the people.
- Forest battalion camp-cum training centre was also built in Kachugaon, where officers from different regions would come to train in this centre.
- Tramway was built in the year 1901. The tramway was mostly use for timber supply, to carry workers and supply water to the places.

### **TRAMWAY IN KACHUGAON:**

Building of tramway has led to the biggest impact in the Kachugaon region. This tramway is still known in the present day to many people. A quick look at pre-colonial history reveals that lumber from Goalpara's forests was among the key goods as traded through the markets of the region's north and south. Goalpara Forest Division was established in 1857 and at originally comprised portions of the Garo Hills before becoming a separate district in 1875. As a result, forestry developed into a formidable tool for state-making that permitted for bigger control over resources. Early attempts to use the woods of the Garo Hills in 1893 to supply the Assam Bengal Railway with Sal sleepers failed because of their irrational price demands. Goalpara forests hinted at the successful growth of such trade by alluding to the manufacturing of sleepers on a modest scale under advantageous labour and transportation conditions. Sal sleepers, which were also utilized in the Gangetic Bengal railway networks, came to be recognized as the standard of excellence in sleeper production. In response to these advances, the Goalpara Division's Deputy Conservator suggested purchasing "a light portable tramway for the development of departmental timber operations in that division's forests." The portability of the tramway was visualised with its use in other forests in Assam in the future. In

1900–1901, a budget of about Rs. 15,000 was suggested for building the tramway. The tramway extended for a total of 18 miles. The Eastern Bengal Railway and the development of the forest tramway were being built at a clear intersection of interests. The Eastern-Bengal Railway placed orders with the Conservator of the Western Forest Circle in 1910 for the supply of sleepers totalling Rs. 2 lakhs for both gauges. An idea for a 21-mile, metre-gauge tramway running from Kokrajhar to the Saralbhangra river surfaced in 1906. The growth of felling and the increase in timber buyers made it difficult for the forest authorities to maintain the entire 19-mile length of Kachugaon forest tramway on hand traction. As a result, the Conservator suggested buying two steam locomotives and 20 trucks, which were thought to save money on extraction and transportation. The alignment chosen for the feeder forest tramway connection to the trunk line was between Kachugaon on the forest range to Fakiragram on the Eastern-Bengal Railway. The connection was completed in 1924. The increase of the requirement for a timber in railways across the nation occurred at the same time as the establishment of the forest department in 1868. According to the Forester Dietrich Brandis the annual consumption for sleepers in the 1880's was 5,00,000 sleepers annually. Since sleepers deteriorated, sideways with their request for new lines, equal number of sleepers was required for renewal and replacement. As the forest department ensured a steady supply of timber for the railways. A huge number of labours were transferred to the forest area and they were forced to settle in that area. The same happened in Kachugaon forest too. The construction of the tramway was although challenging for them but they completed and gained a huge profit for themselves.

## CONCLUSION

Kachugaon is a place with a long and rich history. Kachugaon was once home to a thriving forest tramway, which was a key portion of colonial economy. Kachugaon's forest proved to be very important as we came to know. The tramway had a significant influence on its local environment and demography, and its ruins are a valuable historical resource. The historical importance of Kachugaon is twofold. First, the place is a reminder of the compound interaction of imperialism and railways in Assam. History of it shows how railways were used to exploit region's natural resources, and how they had a profound impact on the local environment and people. Second, the ruins of Kachugaon Forest Tramway are a valuable historical resource. They serve as a reminder of the past and offer insights into the history of colonialism and the railways in Assam.

Jhum cultivation by roving farmers, especially among the Garos and Meches, was demonized as a kind of subsistence that threatened the survival of forests. A restriction on residing in the forests and using their traditional methods of farming severely restricted the people movement. The Garos were convinced to give up their way of life while having their traditional livelihood techniques further demonized. They were then hired as woodcutters within the forest reserves. Since 1902, some of them have even made their homes in "forest villages along the duars," particularly Kachugaon. Many new villages were created due to the transportation of labourers from different places, more than 90 villages were created in the Kachugaon area itself and as compared to other regions it was considered a huge number during that era. Many others suffered as a result of being uprooted from their original residence. Policies that were put up by the Britishers were

also considered as exploitative nature, because numerous local people lost their asylum and lands on accounts to new policies. A nice example can be given from the Drain of wealth, as they drained the forest resources of Kachugaon region. As stated above, huge number of forest resources were drained from its region just to meet their benefits (British), mostly Timbers. The British exploitation of Assam was a major historical injustice. It had a profound impact on the region and its people. It led to the impoverishment of the local population, the degradation of the environment, and the suppression of dissent. The legacy of British rule in Assam continues to be felt today.

To emphasize how much Kachugaon has contributed to history and how much of its resources have been exported to other areas of the world, it should be highlighted that all of the aforementioned points are taken into consideration while discussing the historical significance of Kachugaon. It is important to preserve the historical importance of Kachugaon. The village's ruins should be protected, and the village's history should be documented. This will ensure that the village's history is not forgotten, and that it can be passed on to future generations.

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