



Contours Of Control: Administrative Structures And Practices In Cachar Forest Division, 1875- 1947

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Abstract: The study looks on the political and administrative structures that oversaw the Cachar Forest Division from 1875 till 1947. The study looks at the boundaries of control put in place over the region's forest resources, with a focus on organizational frameworks, governance structures, and management techniques. The decision-making processes, bureaucratic practices, and hierarchical structures that influenced Cachar's forest resource management are examined in this essay. The phrase "Contours of Control" captures the limits, structures, and methods by which the Cachar Forest Division exercised administrative power. This article explores how governance changed over time, reflecting changing imperial goals and new conservation philosophies, by examining the institutional, legal, and geographical frameworks. The movement from the early stages of imperial exploitation to the latter attempts at sustainable management techniques is highlighted in the article. It explores how administrative policies and procedures affect the use, preservation, and management of forest resources, illuminating the intricate relationship that exists between colonial governance and the environment. The study advances knowledge of the colonial legacy in forest management and its consequences for current conservation efforts through a historical analysis of administrative structures and practices. It emphasizes how crucial historical context is to forming current perspectives on biodiversity preservation and sustainable resource management.

Keywords: Cachar, Forest Division, Imperialism, Governance, Conservation

1. Introduction

Following the assassination of Raja Govind Chunder in 1830, Cachar was annexed to British possessions and placed under the supervision of a Superintendent. Initially commanded by Captain T. Fisher, the district's headquarters shifted from Cherrapunji to Dudpatil and then to Silchar. In 1832, a proclamation formalized the annexation of Cachar's plain portion to British dominion, with Captain T. Fisher appointed as the first Superintendent. Subsequent Superintendents included I.G. Burns, E.R. Lyons, E.S. Person, and P.G. Verner. North Cachar was merged with Cachar after Senapati Tularam's death in 1854. In 1874, Cachar became part of the Chief Commissionership of Assam, and the Superintendent's post was re-designated as Deputy Commissioner, with Mr. R. Stuart serving as the first Deputy Commissioner. The province, surrounded by mountains and dotted with minor hills, featured densely forested plains that resembled lakes during rainy seasons [1].

1.1 Formation of the Cachar Forest Division

The administrative framework for overseeing the region underwent substantial modifications when Cachar was annexed by the British. One such modification was the creation of the Cachar Forest Department in 1862, which placed the Cachar forests within the Dacca Division of the Lower Provinces of Bengal and Assam at the time. Dr. T. Anderson, the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens at Sibpu, was named the first Conservator of Forests for the Lower Provinces in addition to his current duties. Anderson remained in office until Henry Leeds was named Conservator of Forests in 1867. The Conservator of Forests had notional authority over the Dacca Division, which managed the forests of Cachar, until 1871, when a Divisional Forest Officer was absent. To more effectively distribute staff resources to other regions of Bengal, the Division was temporarily dissolved in 1871–1872. Assam was made a Chief Commissioner's province in 1873–1874, and Gustav Mann took over as forest administrator, serving as Assam's first conservator of forests as well as its deputy. Despite the fact that Cachar's woods are essential for providing Eastern Bengal with timber, conservation activities there received attention during Mann's administration. The woods of Sylhet and Cachar joined the Forest Department of Assam in 1874–75 to form the Cachar Division, which had its headquarters in Silchar. In February 1876, William Shakespeare took over as Divisional Forest Officer after an Assistant Superintendent of Police filled in for him. Initially, the Cachar forest division comprised the districts of Cachar and Sylhet [2].

1.1.1 Re-Organization of the Division

Initially, the forests in the Cachar Division were under the control of the Public Works Department due to their significant consumption of forest products. Over time, authority gradually shifted to the Deputy Commissioner, who managed them through the Revenue Wing. As reservation efforts progressed, the administration of declared reserved forests transitioned to the Forest Department. W. Shakespeare established his first reserve in 1876–77, marking a milestone in forest conservation efforts. From 1881–84, the Forest Department assumed administration over all forest areas, regardless of legal status, consolidating its control over forest management. This administrative authority remains unchallenged within the Forest Department. Over its history of one hundred

and fifteen years, the jurisdiction of the Cachar Division underwent six changes. In 1881-82, the forests of the Sylhet District were separated into a distinct charge. Subsequently, in 1935-36, Langting Mupa and Khrungming Reserved Forests of the North Cachar Sub Division were transferred to the Nowgong Division, reflecting ongoing adjustments to administrative boundaries and responsibilities within the region [3].

2. Objectives

- To examine the historical formation and evolution of the Cachar Forest Division from its inception in 1862 to its reorganization in 1874, focusing on key administrative changes and the establishment of forest management structures.
- To assess the impacts of administrative structures and practices on the utilization, conservation, and governance of forest resources in the region.
- To explore the evolution of governance over time reflecting shifting imperial priorities and emerging conservation ideologies.

3. Methodology

This study employed a historical research approach to investigate the administrative dynamics of the Cachar Forest Division during the colonial period. Historical research involved the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of historical data to understand past events and phenomena. Primary data was gathered through archival research, involving the examination of historical documents, administrative records, policy frameworks, correspondence, and other relevant materials from colonial archives.

4. Colonial Policies and Economic Objectives

Forest conservation in colonial India was driven by the imperative to manage and preserve forest resources sustainably while meeting the growing demands for fuel and timber. Influenced by the German concept of Scientific Forestry, conservation efforts focused on establishing exclusive state control over significant forest tracts and implementing legislation like Act VII of 1865 to define and protect government forests. The objectives of forest legislation included safeguarding public forests, protecting forest growth on government property, and regulating timber trade to balance economic interests with environmental conservation. However, conservation faced challenges from natural occurrences, native practices like bush clearing and burning for agriculture, and pressures from colonial enterprises and tribal cultivation. Despite these challenges, the British Empire's economic and political interests necessitated forest preservation, leading to the implementation of strategies like the 3Rs plan which stands for "Reservation," "Restrictions," and "Regeneration.", to maximize timber trade profits while ensuring financial stability.

5. Boundaries and Jurisdiction of Cachar Division

The forests of Cachar, formerly part of the Dacca Forest division, and those of Sylhet were amalgamated with Bengal's forests following the province's division in September 1874. In contrast to Cachar district's 825 square miles, Sylhet district accounted for 273 square miles within the Cachar division. Following a recommendation to designate these areas as reserves under Act VII of 1865, the supervision of these regions was entrusted to the divisional forest officer under the collaborative directives of the Deputy Commissioners and the Deputy Conservator. The headquarters of the divisional forest officer were located in Silchar. The boundaries of the Cachar division were as follows [4].

- North: The Garo, Khasi and Jaintia, and Naga Hills
- South: The Lushai and Tipperah Hills
- East: Manipur
- West: Tipperah and Mymensingh

The forest area of Cachar division as depicted in the figure 1 were to be reserved comprised of [5].

Cachar:	{ Within the Inner Line	336 Square Miles.
	{ Beyond the Inner Line	489 Square Miles
Sylhet:	-----	273 Square Miles

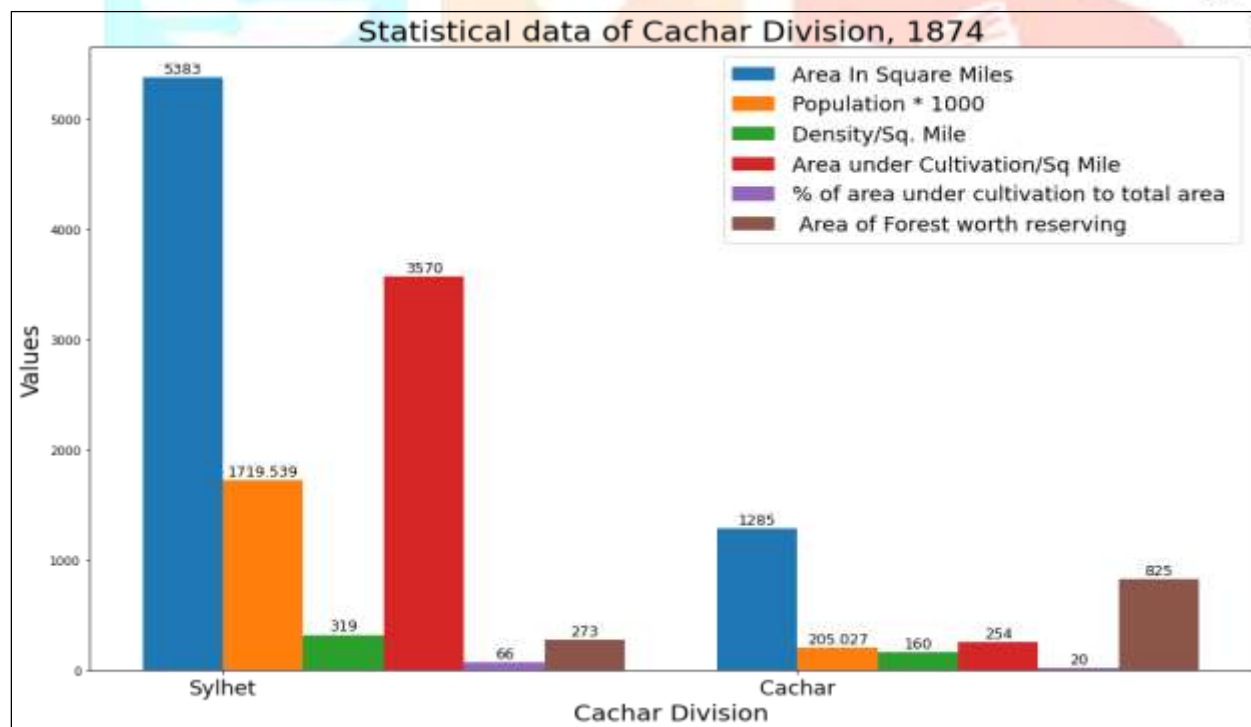


Fig 1: Representation of Cachar Forest Division in 1874

6. Evolution of Forest Administration

6.1 Organization and Administration of Cachar Forest Division

It was evident that preserving the supply of timber required the highest level of vigilance and care by 1874, when the Cachar forests were somewhat depleted, the Sylhet forests were rather small, and there was no forest in any of the Bengal districts outside of Sylhet. Due to the aforementioned reasons, Act VII of 1865 granted permission for the Cachar forests to be gazetted. These forests were then maintained in line with the Act's Forest Rules, and an Assistant-Conservator was assigned to take care of them. Nineteen tea grants are located within the boundaries of the forest area, nearly all of the forests along the southern boundary, or the Lushai country, are more or less uninhabited, and there is extensive jhuming by the various hill tribes. For these reasons, the Deputy-Commissioner was given the authority to direct the Cachar forest officer in all matters relating to the boundaries and the planning. All technical matters pertaining to the management and operation of the woods, as well as general accounting and administrative responsibilities, fell under the direct supervision of the department's director [6]. Regulations establishing the power of forest officers were made under the Indian Forest Act of 1878. These regulations dealt with the Rangers, Foresters, and Forest Guards' capacity to use their relevant Indian Forest Act of 1878 rights while stationed on permanent or temporary posts. They also applied to Rangers, Deputy Commissioners, Assistant and Sub-Assistant Conservators, Assistant and Sub-Divisional Officers, and Assistant Conservators [7].

In 1875–1876, the Assistant Conservator of the Forest of Cachar division was to employ a permanent subordinate installation with one forester, seven observers, and an office staff of one writer, one peon, and one dak-runner at a cost of 153 per month. However, a call for more labour was addressed starting on April 1st, 1876 [8] as illustrated in the table 1.

The distribution of the conservancy establishment was as follows: One forest ranger and six observers were in charge of the eastern sub-division, which covers all the forests around Silchar and is situated along the rivers Jiri, Barak, Sonai, and Rukmini. The western sub-division, which includes all the woods to the west of Silchar, those in the Sylhet district, and those lying along the rivers Jalinga, Katakhal, Dhaleswari, Singla, and Lungai, was under the supervision of one forest ranger and six observers. At Sealtek Ghat, there was meant to be one toll collector and three watchers, while at Sonaimukh Ghat, there was supposed to be one toll collector and three watchers. The structures, along with the one for the Assistant-office, Conservator's were the most cost-effective ways to guarantee productivity and stop the current destructive timber-felling in the Cachar and Sylhet forests. Since there were no roads in the forest and rivers were the only way to access the most of it, the Assistant-Conservator had to utilize the boat establishment [9].

Table 1: Proposed Permanent Sub-ordinate establishment for the management of the forest.

Conservancy	
Two Forest Rangers, on Rs. 50 each	Rs. 100
Twelve Forest Watchers, On Rs. 7 each	Rs 84
Toll-Ghat	
Two Toll-collectors, on Rs. 50 each	Rs. 100
Six watchers, on Rs. 7 each	Rs. 42
Office establishment	
One Writer, on Rs. 40 Per mensem	Rs 40
One Peon, on Rs. 7 per mensem	Rs.7
One Dak-runner, on Rs 7 per mensem	Rs.7
Boat Establishment	
One Manjee, on Rs. 12 per mensem	Rs.12
Three Oarsmen, on Rs. 7 per mensem	Rs 21
Total	Rs. 413 or Rs.4956 annually

The Assistant-Conservator in charge of the division was busy managing the revenue collection at the two toll-stations, checking for excess and waste, prohibiting jhum growing inside of forest reserves, and keeping an eye on the timber harvesting in various forests. The description of the forests should furnish the following information, as ordered by the Government of India.

- Area.
- Boundaries and the properties with which they march.
- Soil (geological description).
- General description of the forest, as to species, age, and condition,
- Timber-depots
- Timber markets and large towns in the vicinity.
- Lines of export
- List of villages or grants of waste land remaining within the forest boundaries, stating the limits of each, and any rights in the forest possessed by the inhabitants.
- Statement of any rights possessed by the inhabitants of the adjoining districts in respect to grazing cattle , fuel, grass , and leaves, bamboos, & c .
- A map of the reserve.
- A working plan.

Meanwhile the districts had been surveyed by the Revenue Survey and maps were available, the area of each block studied can be determined with relatively little labour. It was decided that the number of concentric rings would be used to determine the age of growth of the many tree species that were cut down and removed from these forests, which would inevitably comprise a huge number of species. The above information, which was painstakingly gathered, provided the information on which the working plan was based, or, to put it another way, would allow the Forest Department to systematically improve the forest and figure out how much timber can be taken out each year without endangering it, which was the main objective of all forest conservancy measures

[10]. However, the protective establishment authorized by the government in 1876 is illustrated in the table below with an expenditure of Rs.2352 annually.

Table 2: Sanctioned Protective Establishment of Cachar Division

Conservancy Establishment	Toll-station Establishment.
• One forest-ranger.	• One toll-collector.
• Nine forest-watchers.	• Three toll-watchers and One Manjee

Due to their enormous workload, the workforce was continually shifting, which was manifestly inefficient and seriously harmful to the interests of the government. It was unquestionably necessary to enlarge the subordinate personnel if the Cachar division was to appropriately safeguard these forests. As a result, the Government approved some additional permanent protected establishment posts for Cachar forest listed below in 1877–1878 at a cost of Rs. 5664 per year [11].

Table 3: Additional Protective post for Cachar Division

Conservancy Establishment	Toll-station Establishment.
• Two Forest-Rangers.	• One Forest Rangers.
• Fourteen forest guards	• Four Forest Guards.

The above arrangement made protection far more effective than it had been previously by allowing the development of two sub-divisions, each with a forest ranger in charge. Due to increased funding from the Government of India, the permanent protective establishment in the Cachar division was more effective in 1878–1879 than it had been in previous years. The posting of forest guards and the rangers are summarized in detail in the table 4 [12].

Table 4: Forest Sub-division and Staff Posting (1878-1879)

Western Sub-Division			Eastern Sub-Division	
One Forest Ranger			One Forest Ranger	
Place of Posting	Number of Forest Guards		Place of posting	Number of Forest Guards
Hasiura	3		Silchar	1
Loharbund	2		Nagdigram	3
			Mankushi	3
			Jirighat	2

The fundamental structure for managing Assam's forests under Deputy-Conservator's goal was to:

- Adequately demarcate and gazette all of the better forests in order to protect them as quickly as possible from future spoliation.
- Should maximize the profits from the government forest through all legal means, as this will be the only stable foundation for its long-term establishment and maintenance.

- To keep the areas that will be kept as forests free from anything that could hinder their maximum level of productivity.
- Accurately determine by survey as quickly as possible the nature and contents of each forest.
- Divide the forests into as many separate and manageable divisions, ranges, and beats as was practicable, as this structure was necessary for systematic forest management and ensured cost-effective and efficient power utilization.
- Enhance the forest where investing in such activity was most likely to pay off by sowing and planting as much as possible within the means available [13].

6.2 Administrative Changes and Challenges

The greatest difficulty in administering the Assam Forest was insufficient for its establishment due to limited revenue realized which was also reflected in the establishment of the Cachar forest division [14].

Table 5: Permanent forest establishment of Assam from 1874-79

Year	Superior Staff			Office		Forests		
	Deputy Conservator	Assistant Conservator	Sub-Assistant Conservator	Clerks	Peons	Rangers	Foresters	Guards
1874-75	1	2	1	6	6	2	12	57
1875-76	1	4	1	9	13	5	11	67
1876-77	1	4	1	9	13	5	11	67
1877-78	1	5		9	13	5	11	67
1878-79	1	4	1	10	15	9	11	94

The only way to overcome the difficulty of short setups was for the Deputy Conservator to pay close attention to every detail. In order to increase revenue for the Cachar forest division, two new toll stations were built at 1881, one in Sonaimukh and the other in Jafarabad, which was later relocated to Matijuri. Out of Rs.22760 in revenue obtained in 1882–83 [15], Rs. 6772 were used to safeguard and improve the Cachar forest division in order to preserve the forest [16]. The table 6 provides a full explanation of both permanent and temporary establishments in the Cachar division.

Table 6: Permanent and Temporary Establishment in Cachar Division during the year 1882-83

Designation	Number	Rate of Pay (Rs.)	Amount	
Forest Establishment			Per Month	Per Annum
Forest Ranger	01	60	60	720
Forest Ranger	02	50	100	1200
Forester	03	20	60	720
Forest Guard	01	12	12	144
Forest Guard	02	10	20	240
Forest Guard	07	08	56	672
Forest Guard	10	07	70	840
Total	26	--	378	4536
Office Establishment				
Clerk	01	40	40	480
Peon	01	7	7	84
Dak-Runner	01	07	7	84
Total	03	--	54	648
Temporary Establishment				
Mohurrir	01	20	20	240
Manjis	03	09	27 (for 7 month)	180
Forest Guard	02	07	14	168
	10	07	70 (for 7 month)	400
Feed and keep of Cattle				
Mahut	01	11	11	132
Grass Cutter	01	08	08	96
Demarcation and Surveys				
Khalasis	02	07	14(For 6 month)	84
Other Work				
Forest Guard	03	08	24	288
Total				6772

Source: Compiled from PRFA, 1882-83, Appendix- V, p.95-98

Sonai, Matijuri, and Siyaltek were the three ranges that made up Cachar's forest division, and each was supervised by a forest ranger and other staff members. The table 7 shows the name of the officer in charge, their location, and a list of the duties allocated to the guards.

Table 7: Executive charges and duties of the protective staff of Cachar Division during 1882-83

Name of the Range and Officer In-charge	Headquarters of beats	No. of Forest Guard	Description of work to be done by the Guards
Sonai Range			
- Comprising the Upper and Lower Jiri, the Barak, Sonai and eastern half of the Inner line reserve and the District Forests in the Cachar district, east of Silchar, also Sonaimukh Registering Station and Silchar Forest Revenue Station. - Kailas Chandra Chatterji, Forest Ranger, 6th grade. 1 Forester on Rs. 20 per mensem	1. Sonaimukh	01	With Forest Ranger in charge of Sonai Range.
	2. Sonaimukh	02	Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Barak River and measuring or counting the same.
	3. Silchar	02	Watching at the Silchar Forest Revenue Station to ensure the payment of royalty and the forest Bungalow.
	4. Nagdigram	01	Watching over the Sonai Reserve and the transport of forest produce on the Sonai and Rukmini rivers.
	5. Mankush	02	Watching over the Barak Reserve and the transport of forest produce on the Barak River.
	6. Jirighat	02	Watching over the Upper and Lower Jiri Reserves and the transport of forest produce on the Jiri River.
Matijuri Range			
- Comprising the Katakhal, Dhaleswari and western half of the Inner Line Reserve and the District Forests in the Cachar district, west of Silchar and south of the Barak River. - Matijuri Forest Revenue Station. Tarakisor Gupta, Forest Ranger, 6th grade. 1 Forester on Rs. 20 per mensem	1. Matijuri	02	With Forest Ranger in charge of Matijuri Range
	2. Matijuri	02	Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Katakhal river and measuring or counting the same.
	3. Cuttlicherra	01	Watching over the Dhaleswari Reserve
	4. Baruncherra	01	Watching over the Southern part of the Katakhal Reserve
	5. Loharbund	01	Watching over the Northern Reserve

Siyaltek Range			
Comprising all the District Forest in the Cachar district, west of Silchar and North of the Barak River, and the control over the export of forest produce from the North Cachar hills, also Siyaltek Forest revenue station	1. Siyaltek 2. Siyaltek 3. Kalain Bazar 4. Borkhola 5. Bikransur 6. Goomra 7. Jalalpur	02 02 01 01 01 01 01	With Forest Ranger in charge of Siyaltek Range. Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Barak River and measuring or counting the same. Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Larang river. Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Jatinga river. Watching over the transport of forest produce on the Arang river. Watching over the transport of forest produce
Govinda Chandra De, Forest Ranger, 5th grade 1 Forester on Rs. 20 per mensem			
Note: Out of the total number of 25 Format Guards, 5 are on the list of temporary establishments.			

(Source: Compiled from PRFA, 1882-83, Appendix- VI, p.103)

6.3 Forest Revenue and Expenditure

With effect from 1908, Assam was divided into two circles under the direction of two Deputy-Forest Conservators. Before 1908, Assam had just one Conservator. After the partition in 1905, it became apparent that the charge was too large and intricate for one individual to perform. As a result, permission to nominate a second Conservator was granted in 1908. The rapid growth of the forest and the much larger revenue were more than adequate to support the move. In the years 1930–1931, there were two Conservators of Forest, two Deputy Conservators of Forest and Silviculturists, two Deputy Conservators of Forest and Working Plan Officers, and four Extra Assistant Conservators, two in each of the two circles—the Eastern and Western circles. Cachar Division was a part of Western Circle. Divisional forest officials, forest rangers, deputy rangers, office superintendents, and clerks were also present in each forest division. Additionally, the organization hired peons and forest guards [17]. Each of the two circles had two Conservators of Forest—the British Government's goal was to keep the Forest Department as a revenue surplus department, or to generate more revenue than was needed to maintain the establishment, hence the strength of the department was determined by the amount of revenue it realized as shown in the figure 2. This was made feasible over the course of the years relative to Cachar's revenue as a result of the addition of more protection posts as depicted in the table 8. The revenue was always greater than the expenditure (salary head) of the protective staff since the Cachar forest division's creation. In the following years, as shown in figure 3, the revenue multiplies more than the expenditure on the salary head.

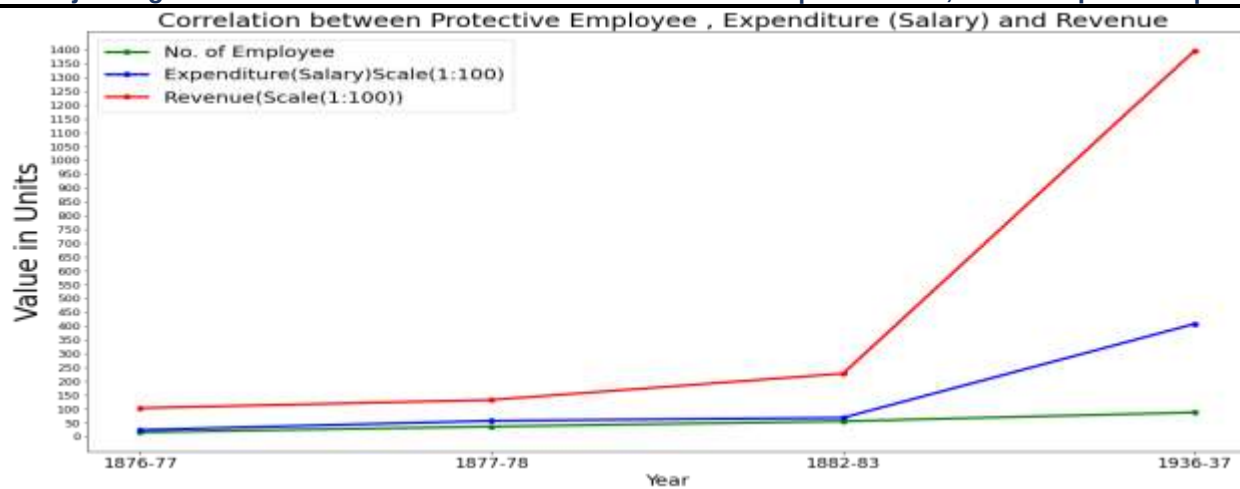


Fig 2: Correlation between number of employees, salary and the revenue realized in the successive years.

Table 8: Permanent Staff in Cachar Division on 1st April 1937 [18]

Rank	Number	Rate of Pay per month (Rs.)	Total Per year (Rs.)
Deputy Conservator	1	575	6900
Forest Ranger			
• Grade I	1	250	3,000
• Grade IV	1	125	1,500
• Grade VI	1	80	960
• Grade VI	1	75	900
Deputy Ranger			
• Grade I	2	70	1,680
• Grade II	3	65	2,340
• Grade III	2	55	1,320
Foresters			
Grade I	9	40	4,320
Grade II	3	35	1,260
Grade III	6	30	2,160
Forest Guards	15	18	3,240
	16	17	3,264
	04	16	768
Head Clerk	01	115	1,380
Accountant	01	95	1,140
Clerk	01	44	528
Clerk	01	40	480
Peons	02	13	312
Chowkidar I.B	02	12	233
Motorboat Mistry	01	40	480
Motorboat Chowkidar	01	13	156

Boatman	09	15	1,620
Orderly	02	13	312
Range Clerk	01	35	420
Total			40,723

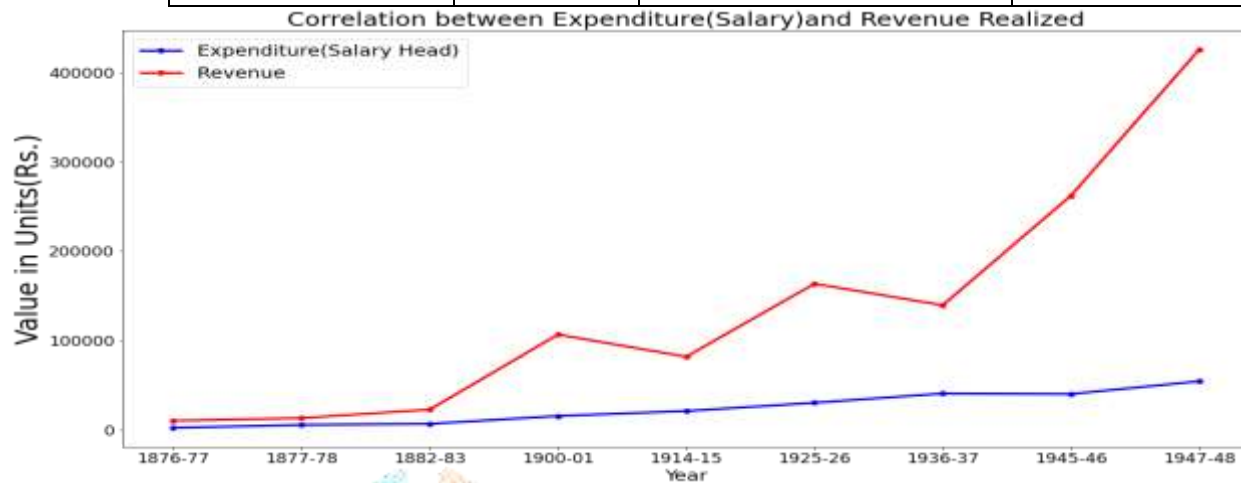


Fig 3: Correlation between Expenditure (Salary Head) and the revenue realized of the successive years.

7. Conclusion

A detailed evolution of colonial forest management shaped by evolving conservation ideals and shifting imperial priorities is revealed by analyzing the administrative structures and practices in the Cachar Forest Division between 1875 and 1947. The Cachar Forest Division was established and reorganized in response to larger trends in colonial government, which placed a strong emphasis on the creation of bureaucratic and hierarchical structures in order to maintain control over forest resources. This study adds to a better understanding of the colonial legacy and its implications for current conservation efforts by looking at the historical background of forest management in Cachar. In order to solve the difficulties of sustainable resource management and environmental conservation in the modern era, it emphasizes the necessity of incorporating historical knowledge into current forest administration.

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