

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The period which followed the passing of the 'Govt. of India Act 1935' was a crucial period in the politics of Assam. The election which was held in 1937 under the Govt. of India Act, 1935 awakened political consciousness among the people of Assam. As a matter of fact, the period following the 'Govt. of India Act 1935' introduced electoral politics in India and Assam was not out of spell on this way.

In Assam a House of 107 members was introduced according to the provision of the 'Govt. of India Act 1935'. Election was held in 1937 but no party secured majority though the Indian National Congress captured the largest numbers of seats. The other parties were the Muslim league, The United Peoples Party, The Assam Valley Muslim Party, The Surma Valley Muslim Party, The Muslim Proja Party and the Progressive Party. In the General Election, The Indian National Congress got 33 seats, The Muslim league 09, The Assam Valley Muslim party 05 and the Muslim Proja party only 01, while the largest number of the Muslim candidates were elected as independent, which figured 14. It is cleared that, there was no solidarity among the Muslims in Assam in the election of 1937. The Muslim league was yet to emerge as an organized political force even in Muslim constituencies.

The Muslims have a history of more than seven and a half centuries in Assam. For over four hundred and fifty years they invaded (many times) the Brahmaputra Valley consisting of the districts of Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Nowgong and Sibsagar but failed. In course of the invasions, captive mercenaries and others settled in small numbers and could little influence the existing population. Some Muslim professionals were also invited by the Ahom Kings. Again, the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon and creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam as new province brought the Muslims and the Assamese to a closer contact.

In the thirties, having secured land and numerical strength, the Muslims became more emphatic and vehement in echoing the views of separate interests in all spheres of life. The establishment of the Muslim league in the Brahmaputra Valley in 1938 was a turning point in the history of Assam. The Muslim legislators who were so long divided into numerous groups now sank their differences and consolidated their strength under the sectional leadership of Sir Muhammad Saadulla and owed complete allegiance to the All India Muslim league through its provincial organization.

The situation demanded a leader from the Congress to form the new ministry. Gopinath

Bardoloi was now the right person to take the reign of the new situation. Bardoloi Ministry assumed office on 19th September 1938. A no confidence motion moved by the opposition headed by Saadulla and Abdul Matin Choudhury was defeated. Gopinath Bardoloi maintained a balance between national and regional interests. But the Bardoloi Ministry, however, failed to take a bold and precise stand on the question of line system, for which it had to face severe criticism.

Thus, the Line System, immigration issue and the policy of eviction had split up the province more deeply and widely than any other things. The rise and fall of ministers was linked up with the issue which defied any solution because of divergent approaches of the political leaders, which only hastened communal bitterness and tension. Against such background, the emergence of Muslim League as a formidable force in Assam politics serves only to intensify the communal cleavages. The All India Muslim League officially took up the matter of immigration problem in Assam condemning the Line System as an instrument of injustice and oppression and declared that it could be remedied only by the establishment of Pakistan. Finally, the British colonial policy of Divide and Rule furnished as a pre text for the separation of Sylhet District from the main land of Assam.

The problem of the research project is to investigate the factors helping the development of Muslims in the politics of Assam during the period under review. The subject matter of the study as the titles indicates is to deal with the progress and prospect of the Muslims in the political arena of Assam from 1935 to 1947. The political development of Assam casts its influence on the social changes occurred in the infrastructure. The social changes occurred during the period under review are the results of the political influences. Yet some extra forces might be so alive that it brought to undergo changes from within. So, an investigation in political changes would also form a sine-quantum of the proposed study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Important research had already been done on different themes related to the History of Modern Assam. But few works have focused on the role of Muslims in the Politics of Assam.

Similarly, in the national level research, the role of Muslims in the politics of colonial era, the Muslims of Assam are almost absent. Works like *From Pluralism to Separatism* and *Legacy of Divided: India's Muslims since Independence* of Professor Mushirul Hassan deals with Muslim politics and the Muslim masses participation in the politics. He focused mainly on the political activities in U.P. Bihar, Punjab and Bengal. Muslims of Assam are scantily

referred in his works. The political tussle and polarization occurred in Assam have not received due place and weightage in the works of Professor Hassan or any other works.

Assam Muslims: Politics and Cohesion by Bimal J Dev and Dilip Kumar Lahiri made an attempt to analyse the nature of Muslim politics in Assam. They highlighted the role and importance of the Muslim people in economic development of Assam. It also highlighted the various factors for the rise of Muslim league in the history of Assam. But due to the vastness of the period it covered, the role of Muslims in the politics of Assam from 1935 to 1947 has not been analysed well.

Muslim Politics in Assam by R.M. Lahiri is another initiative which failed to analyse Muslim mindset and their reaction towards provincial politics. It overlooked the facts and figures. Again, Arun Chandra Bhuyan and Sibopada De edited *Political History of Assam* Vol. – III, discusses about the Muslims of Assam. But articulation is a mere presentation of a brief history of the Muslims. It is far away from the research oriented view point.

The first attempt was made by Makhanlal Kar to write the Muslims in the politics of Assam in his book *Muslims in Assam Politics*. In his book he highlighted the settlement of Muslims in Assam since the earlier period, their socio-economic position along with their progress in education sector. In this book the role of Muslims in the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly were also discussed. It was also discussed that the Muslims after securing land and numerical strength became more vocal to secure their interest in all spheres of life in Assam. The book also deals with the attitude of the congress and the Muslim League Leaders of Assam along with the colonial officials in connection with immigration problem in Assam. However, this book may only be regarded as the first attempt in reconstructing the history of the Muslims in the politics of Assam. This was followed by the *Muslims in Assam* authored by S.U. Ahmed in 2003 A.D. But M. Kar emphasized on the politicization of the problems of the Muslims like immigration, line system, ethnic conflicts and Muslim geo-politics. On the other hand, S.U. Ahmed mainly deals with the society, ecology and culture of the Muslims of the region. But these works cannot answer all the questions that a modern students of history is expected to raise.

Amalendu Guha in his books (a) *Planter Raj to Swaraj*; (b) *Freedom and Electoral Politics in Assam (1826-1947)* highlighted the attitude of colonial officials towards opening of tea and other industries in Assam. The author also discussed the role of various organization in setting the question of linguistic and regional identity along with the issue of immigration in Assam upon which depended the existence of Assamese race. Again, Atful Hye Shibly's *Abdul*

Matin Chaudhury: *Trusted Lieutenant of Mohammad Ali Jinnah* (published in Feb. 2011) who plunged into active politics by joining the khilafat movement and organising it in a mass scale through the length and breadth of the sylhet district of Assam. But all these works give a scattered information on the Muslim participation in the provincial politics.

Assam Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance by Mohini Kumar Saikia is an honest attempt to highlight the long association of Muslims with Assam. But this work cannot be taken as a research oriented contributions on the role of the Muslims in the politics of Assam. The author failed to analyse critically even the modern period of Assam.

Bhara Ghoror Smriti by Md. Taiyabullah can give us few clue regarding the nature of Muslim politics, but cannot be considered in to the list of completed presentation or work on the role of the Muslims in the politics of Assam.

Gopinath Bardoloi by Nirod Kumar Bardoloi is a biographical contribution to the histography of Assam. It gives us Goponath Bardoloi's approaches towards Muslims and their politics during the period under review. Kamruzzaman Ahmed's work on ***The Muslims of Assam*** is compiled far away from the academic point of view. ***A History of the Muslims and the Barak Valley*** by Ali Haidar Laskar is totally a non-professional work. The author just collected information on the events and personalities related to the Muslims of Assam, specially of Barak Valley. Laskar does not make any attempt to analyse or critical study of the role of Muslims in the politics of colonial Assam.

The partition of Bengal and Assam (1932-1947) by Bidyut Chakraborty highlighted the effect of the introduction of communal electorate in the provincial election of 1937. The author in his book also discussed how the Hindus and the Muslims as communities opposed each other in the political arena during the period. But, it can be said that, it is an attempt to present the one sided story of contemporary politics. Chakraborty failed to address the Muslim psychology and their role in the politics from an objective point of view.

Homeswar Goswami in his book ***Population Trends in the Brahmaputra Valley*** disclosed the factors responsible for the growth of population in Assam. The book also deals with the attitude of the colonial tea planters towards the indigenous cultivators due to slow agricultural growth in the province.

Sanjib Barua in his book ***India Against Itself: Assam and Politics of Nationality*** highlighted the colonial manipulation in their effort for economic transformation of Assam which caused enormous demographic shift. It also highlighted the colonial concept of

wasteland and affect to local gentry and peasantry of the region. The author also tried to relate the immigration of 19th and 20th century with the post-colonial ethnic problem in Assam.

Sarfaraz Hassain Mirza in his book *Muslims Students and Pakistan Movement – Selected Documents (1937-1947)* thrown the role of the Muslim students in the freedom struggle against the British colonial rule and their faith in the ideology of Pakistan. The book also focuses the activity of the Muslim students while participating in the movement since 1937 throughout India.

H.M. Bareh in his book *Encyclopedia of North East India* discussed the factors responsible for retarded agricultural growth in colonial Assam. The author also highlighted the attitude of political leaders towards immigration problem in Assam.

Some important articles like *Freedom Fighter Abdul Matin Chaudhury* by Mukul Choudhury in 1987, *Sir Sayeed Md. Saadullah and Govt. and Politics* by Ali Manaf Sikdar in 1986, *The line system in Assam, A Study of the role of Moulana Vasani* published in the journal of the Asiatic society of Bangladesh, Vol. – XXIII, No. 2, 1978, *Assam in the Days of Vasani, League Politics* published in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.- XXIV, 2-6, 1979-81, *League Politics and its echo in Assam* published in ‘Social Research’, Vol.- III, No. 2, 1982.

However, all these articles and papers failed to give a comprehensive idea about the participation of Muslims in the politics of Assam during the concerned period. All these works referred to are either some scattered contributions or some materials offering scope for reconstruction to the history of the period under review. So, ample opportunity remains to study about the Muslims and the Muslim-League, contradictions in Hindu-Muslim relations, activities of the Muslim league and the congress for a researcher to study the history of the region systematically and with a scientific outlook.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The basic aim and objective of the present work is the study of the different political aspects of Assam during the period under review with a view to contribute to the reconstruction of a comprehensive history of the Muslims in the political arena of Assam during the period. A comprehensive history of a place is incomplete without an equal representation of each and every community belonging to its territory. Role of Muslim Community in Assam Politics is one such area of history which has drawn very less attention from historians in terms of writings on the modern period of Assam.

The present study also seeks to highlight the virgin field that focuses the colonial manipulation to divide the two religious communities with the help of various colonial devices like 'Line System', 'Divide and Rule' etc. the study also seeks to explore its attention on the ethnic, racial and religious politics which began with the large scale land hungry Mymensinghia Muslims in Assam. It is also important to explore how the British Government followed the policy of racial segregation in Assam which had a serious impact not only in the history of Assam but of India as well and which still exists as a problematic issue in Assam.

Besides these, other chief aims and objectives are:-

- a) To study the political development of Assam during the period under review and to mark out the distinct feature constituted due to political development.
- b) To examine the nature and characteristic features of the political development with the help of extant primary and secondary sources.
- c) To find out ethno-cultural ramification and racial assimilation occurred in the region during the period under review.
- d) It also seeks to highlight the issue of immigration in to Assam in the early twentieth century.
- e) The study wants to explore the attitude of the congress and the Muslim League politicians on the issue of immigration in to Assam.
- f) The study also seeks to explore the participation of the Muslims of Assam in the struggle for independence and their role in the politics of Assam.

These hypotheses are tested on the light of historical process continued in Northern India including Bengal and North East India including Assam. It is a historical study. The nature of investigation is very intensive. After completion, it will reveal much hidden important aspect of the history of the unturned Muslim masses of Assam.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In Preparing the dissertation, we have adopted empirical method. Therefore, both primary and secondary sources were discussed for the purpose. For the primary sources, we have adopted archival methods as much importance. The Assam State Archives, Guwahati, The Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong and the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati were the major source for primary data. The Assam Secretariat Files, the Meghalaya Secretariat Files, published and unpublished Government official reports under colonial rule, Administrative Reports, Reports on Line System. Enquiry committee, District

Gazetteers, Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly proceedings, various corresponding letters have been consulted for the purpose.

To find out the correct materials, we have visited regional, National and International Libraries, Normal School Library, Silchar, National Library, Asiatic Society and Institute of North East India Studies in Kolkata. We have also used some privately owned libraries of which Romaprashad Gobeshonagar at Agartala deserves special mention.

Various secondary sources like books, journals, news-papers, magazines, letters in English and Bengali have been consulted in the National Library of Kolkata, Omeokumar Institute of Social Change and Development Library, Guwahati, Administrative Staff College, Khanapara, Guwahati University Library and Assam University Library, Silchar for the purpose.

Field works in different Muslim dominated areas of Branmaputra and Surma-Barak Valley had been followed in quest for materials in primary and secondary in nature in the villages of the remote areas of the region. To find out the correct materials, oral or traditional sources have also been consulted in various areas of the region. In the field investigation, the customs or hearsay in various areas have also been taken to testify the real truth with the primary and secondary sources.

CHAPTERIZATION

For the convenient study of the subject, the dissertation is organized into six chapters including the present one which entitled **Introduction**. we have divided this introductory chapter into two sub-chapters, viz. (a) Geographical Extent and Demographic Profile of Assam and (b) Political Scenario before 1935 A.D.

Here we found that Assam is located in the North East corner of India. It is the centre of North East India. Assam is connected with the rest of the world through many routes. The landed western boundary of both Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley are with Bengal. Through these routes and land borders all migrations, immigrations and invasions took place in various phases which influenced the population and demographic profile of Assam.

However, the period which followed the passing of the Govt. of India Act. 1935 was crucial period in the politics of Assam. The election which was held in 1937 under the Govt. of India Act 1935 awakened the political consciousness among the people of Assam. Again, in this chapter, it has also been discussed the different phases of constitutional development, congress policy and its reaction ensuring further Anglo-Muslim alliance and Muslim

predominance in parliamentary politics during the period. The politics of defection which was a special feature in Assam have been thoroughly enquired into and brought to light in their various aspects including the functions of legislature etc.

During the period under review, due to lack of organized political group or groups based on any difference of opinion as to the refusal of the only cohesive group to undertake any responsibility, limited power of the Ministry to frame any constructive programme with a secular approach. In spite of political awakening, the personal flavor of individuals remained the guiding spirit of the period.

CHAPTER – II

In Chapter II, we have discussed about the **Muslim Immigration in Assam** since the beginning of the 20th century. The Muslims have a history of more than seven and a half century in Assam. For over four hundred and fifty years they tried to conquer the Brahmaputra Valley consisting of the years they tried to conquer the Brahmaputra Valley consisting of the districts of Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Nowgang and Sibsagar (and later Goalpara) but failed. In course of the invasions, captive mercenaries and others settled in small numbers and could little influence the existing population. Some Muslim professionals were also invited by the Ahom Kings. Barak-Surma Valley consisting of Sylhet and Cachar districts (as well as Goalpara) had since Akbar's time been in Muslim dominion and came under Assam administration in 1874. The partition of Bengal (1905) and creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam province brought the Muslims and the Assam to a closer contact.

Again, in this chapter, we have discussed that early years of 20th century witnessed the beginning of an altogether different phenomenon of extremely far-reaching consequences. The vast tract of cultivatable waste lands attracted large scale influx of Muslim farmers from the districts of Bengal particularly from Mymensingh. The immigrants soon settled in every nook and corner of the Brahmaputra Valley to several lakhs and this brought face to face two communities and races with distinctly different ways of life.

Basically economic in character, immigration soon became an administrative and social issue causing grave apprehension of being swamped in the minds of the local Hindus who, however, refused to accept any restraint on their right to transfer land. But the British colonial Govt. encouraged immigration as a matter of practical politics.

Thus, in this chapter, we have drawn the steady stream of agricultural immigrants from adjoining districts of Bengal and Bihar namely – Mymensingh, Dacca, Bagura and Rangpur,

started to come to Assam, most of whom were the Muslims. They settled permanently with their families mainly on the vast culturable wastelands lying in the riverine belt of the lower and central districts namely Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgang etc.

CHAPTER – III

This chapter, entitled **Immigration Policy of the Government**, we found that the immigrants from Bengal and its adjoining regions spread in different directions and by 1931 had gone to every nook and corner of the Brahmaputra Valley. At the initial stage it was purely economic in nature, but later on it became political.

However, the provincial government treated immigration as an economic necessity. The government was encouraging immigration particularly to the *Char* areas which were properties of private Zamindars as well as to Government lands. The Deputy Commissioners were empowered to make settlements on an annual *Patta* basis which conferred on the settlers only the right of users and no right to inheritance and transfer. It was therefore, not unnatural that the Government settled large areas of land to the immigrants. The indigenous Assamese people still did not offer to accept any restrictions to their right to transfer land.

As the colonial Government encouraging immigration, there arose frictions between immigrants and the Indigenous Assamese people. The Deputy Commissioners considered steps to meet the situations. The man was noted first in Nowgong that new comers should not be allowed any longer to settle anywhere they liked but would be confined to certain areas in villages demarcated by lines. On 16th May 1923, at Nowgong first officially inaugurated the '**Line System**'. By it, villages were grouped under different categories such as, Assamese villages, Muslim villages, mixed villages, unsettled villages etc. and as the number of new comers increased, and they obtained approval to the Line System. Thus, the Government accorded sanction to the line system in Revenue Department, Letter No. 2132, R, dated August, 1925. Henceforth, it became a Government policy to encourage the immigration in the region.

In course of time, all these created problems specially with the emergence of the Muslim league in Assam. The Government resolution issued in June 1940 put a ban on settlement of Waste Lands with any immigrants. And the formation of the first popular Ministry in Assam in 1937 and the congress attitude to it made the problem insoluble. Henceforth, the immigrants, as the Muslims in general more and more veered round the Muslim league.

The All India Muslim League for the first time officially took up the matter. In its 25th session held on 15-18 October 1937, it adopted a resolution condemning the 'Line System'. Thus the immigrants and their supporters regarded the 'Line System' as an instrument of injustice and oppression.

CHAPTER – IV

Chapter IV entitled **Parliamentary Politics in Assam** probe the different phases of constitutional development, congress policy and its reaction ensuring further Anglo-Muslim alliance and Muslim predominance in parliamentary politics till partition. The politics of defection which was a special feature in Assam have been thoroughly enquired into and brought to light in their various aspects including function of the legislature.

In this chapter, it has been shown that, in Assam, after 1940, the two Nations Theory of the Muslim League got mixed up with the immigrant issue. But Bardoloi Ministry strongly opposed it and it became a battle cry which divided Assam on communal lines. Again with the influx of immigrants and the increase of Bengali speaking people, both the community-Bengali and Assamese divided linguistically and finally it ended up with cessation of Sylhet from Assam to East Pakistan (Modern Bangladesh) by a Referendum offered by Lord Mountbatten in 1947.

In 1946, the first Congress Ministry formed in Assam and Bardoloi came to office on Feb. 1946. The ministry favoured the immigrants but the Muslim league vehemently opposed the congress Govt. policy of immigration. And they found the remedy only to lay in the creation of Pakistan including Assam. Premier Bardoloi stood firm and declared that the congress Govt. were doing nothing new but following the policies of Muslim League Ministry of Saadullah. It was also the opinion of All India Jamiat-E-Ulama.

Thus, in this chapter, a thorough discussion have been made on immigration policies of the Govt. socio-cultural, and Linguistic aggression over the Assamese society, Language and culture. Finally, all these ended in smoke after the Mountbatten plan on 3rd June, 1947 which prescribed the partition of India by creating Pakistan and Sylhet district of Assam included in East Pakistan by a Referendum. Thus the colonial Govt. was successful with the help of their policy of 'Divide and Rule' to sow the seeds of hostility between the Hindus and the Muslims as well as between the Bengalees and the Assamese which hampered the progress in all directions even after the independence of India.

CHAPTER – V

This chapter contained **The Muslims in the Freedom Struggle**, is a detailed analysis of the different phases of freedom struggle with particular reference to the participation of the Muslims. This chapter also exposed the divergence of attitude of the two major communities and how they drifted away from the main stream of an all India Nationalism and subscribed to the demand for Pakistan (with a few exceptions).

The impact of the provincial Elections of 1937 held under the provisions of the Govt. of India Act. 1935. The politics in Assam in general and the Muslim politics in particular had centred round to issues of the immigrants and the introduction of Line System. After the election, the league consolidated its position among the Muslims and it became the sole spokesman of the community in the Brahmaputra Valley. But we find a different picture in the Barak-Surma Valley. The creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam was more significant for the Muslims as it awakened in them a new sense of political importance derived from a superiority to the Hindus. The Muslims now considered the new province as a boon but the Hindus looked upon it as conspiracy to Bengali Nationalism. As a result, the Surma Valley conference led by Bipin Chandra Pal failed to attract Muslim support. The Muslim league did not rise to prominence in the Surma Valley till late twenties and under the influence of Muslim leaders of Bengal, the Muslims of Sylhet remained essentially pro-partition. None of the later Muslim Leaders of the district has any record of participation in the movement. When the Assam Association adopted the Non Co-operation programme, it was dominated by young Hindu Leaders. No Muslim name is available. Md. Tayyabullah was the first Muslim to court arrest in connection with the movement. As soon as the congress launched the August Movement, of the eight leaders of Assam arrested, there were two Muslims namely Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Md. Tayyabullah.

Abdul Matin Choudhury and Choudhury Khaliluzzaman of Muslim League demanded self-determination for Muslims and supported to create East Pakistan with Bengal and Assam. Sayees Abdur Rouf of Barpeta, Abdul Mazid of Dhubri and Md. Moyeenuddin of South Sylhet also supported to create East Pakistan.

Thus, in this chapter, we find the complete divergence of attitude of the two major communities of Assam. A study of their respective role reveals a total lack of leadership based on the concepts of democracy and secularism. The Muslim masses and intelligentsia with a few exceptions drifted far away from the main current of all India Nationalism and supported

the demand for Pakistan which also aggravated the process of parting of the way between the two communities and the valleys.

CHAPTER - VI

The last chapter, named, **CONCLUSION** deals with ultimate findings of the whole dissertation. In this chapter, we find that in the thirties, having secured land and numerical strength, the Muslims became more emphatic and vehement in echoing the views of separate interests in all spheres of life. The establishments of the Muslim League in the Brahmaputra Valley was a turning point in the history of Assam. The Muslim legislators who were so long divided into numerous groups now sank their differences and consolidated their strength under the sectional leadership of Sir Muhammad Saadullah and owed complete allegiance to the All India Muslim League through its provincial organization.

The situation demanded a leader from the Congress to form the new ministry. Gopinath Bardoloi was now the right person to take the reign of the new situation. Bardoloi Ministry assumed office on 19th September, 1938. a no confidence motion moved by the opposition, headed by Sir Muhammad Saadullah and Abdul Matin Choudhury was defeated. Gopinath Bardoloi maintained a balance between national and regional interests. But Bardoloi Ministry, however, failed to take a bold and precise stand on the question of 'line system', for which it had to face severe criticism.

While discussing the attitude of the colonial authorities towards immigration in Assam it appears that since the annexation of Assam the colonial rulers took such steps which were intended to transform Assam's economy to fulfill their economic need. In the process the Brahmaputra valley witnessed the entry and settlement of three kinds of immigrants, tea garden laborers, Nepali grazers, and East Bengal cultivators the bulk which were Mymensinghia Muslims. It was with Mymensinghia peasant cultivators that the conflicts of interest arose with the Assamese cultivators.

Immediately after the conquest, the colonial rulers explored the possibility of tea cultivation in Assam and accordingly tea industry was established in the middle of nineteenth century. As the indigenous cultivators showed little interest in it, the planters had to run to immigrant tea cultivators. Besides tea, for other industries like coal, oil as well for the construction purposes the colonial rulers had to depend upon immigrant labors.

As the tea industry prospered in Assam in the second half of the nineteenth century more and more tea garden laborers were brought to Assam by the planters under modified emigration rules, which created food scarcity. Therefore, to meet the crisis, food grains began to be imported in Assam from outside the province which was considered by the colonial officials as an extra burden for growing tea industries. Besides, there were other factors like black fever disastrous earthquake and subsequent floods which were considered responsible by colonial officials for slow agricultural growth in Assam. Under the circumstances, the colonial rulers decided to bring more land under plough to meet the food deficit.

From the official correspondence between the Government of Indian and the Chief Commissioner, Assam it appeared that the colonial government was seriously considering a plan of colonization of wasteland in Assam by bring more cultivators from outside the province. Through they considered various risk factors like climate, language, health and rate of mortality were involved on the way of reclamation of wasteland in Assam, yet the colonial rulers were convinced that for the prospect of Assam immigrant cultivators should be encouraged to settle in Assam under liberal settlement rule.

Meanwhile, the worldwide demand of jute on the eve of twentieth century provided an opportunity to the colonial officials of Assam to encourage East Bengal cultivators to extend jute cultivation in Assam as they had some experience in such cultivation in Bengal. Meanwhile, under the encouragement of Zamindars of Goalpara some peasant cultivators of Bengal had already entered and settled in the riverine tracts of Goalpara which is evident from the Census Report of 1911. It also revealed the movement of Bengal cultivators from bordering districts of Dacca, Bogura, Rangpur and Mymensingh to Assam in search of vacant land for cultivation. Slowly it took the shape of influx affecting the population composition of the Brahmaputra valley.

In 1874, the percentage of Muslim population in the Brahmaputra valley was 5.9%, by 1941 it rose to 23%. Compared to the all India population growth rates of 0.3%, 5.7% and 11% of the first three decades of the twentieth century, Assam population grew at much higher rates at 16.8%, 20.2% and 20.1% and this was considered due to immigration. Moreover, with the increase of immigrants, along with their settlement the homogenous nature of tribal caste population of the 19th century very soon shifted to heterogeneous population of non-tribal complex with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences mainly in the Brahmaputra valley.

The push and pull factors also played an important role in the process of migration of East Bengal cultivators to Assam. The scarcity of food grains, shortage of manpower for the reclamation of wasteland, extension of jute cultivation and absence of any restrictive law created pull factor for the migration of East Bengal peasant cultivators in Assam. The Colonial officials saw land abundant Assam as a solution of East Bengal's problem of land scarcity. On the other hand, overpopulation, land shortage, abnormal price hikes on food grains, Zamindari oppression were responsible to push a sizable section of East Bengal agricultural population towards Assam.

The motive of the Colonial officials was also partly political balancing Hindu and Muslim population of Assam. It was undoubtedly one of the striking features of colonial political control. From the statement of Lords Curzon, Viceroy and P.G. Melitus, Revenue Member it appears that they considered Assam a suitable place where the surplus population of other provinces could be absorbed.

In Assam, during the period under study, it appears that the in absence of any proper scheme of settlement or official to regulate their settlement the immigrants started settling wherever vacant lands were found available. Under squatting system prevailing in Assam at that time, the immigrants were allowed to settle without any let or hindrance on any government wasteland, except reserve land. After the immigrants opened up the land by clearing jungles and prepared it suitable for cultivation they were provided annual patta by the concerned authority.

Things well sufficiently well so long as these cultivators were engaged in filling up the vacant spaces in the riverine area. But as they drew nearer to the areas held by the indigenous people sings soon became apparent of the clashes of interests between them and the local people. In those areas in particular which were predominantly peopled by tribal and backward classes, apprehension were entertained that the introduction of a foreign, advanced and pushing element if permitted would spell disaster to the local population. District officers therefore in absence of any clear direction from Government adopted such measures which was likely to prevent or at any check, the spread of immigrants to indigenous areas.

In pursuance of this policy, some lines were laid down on maps and on the ground to demarcate the areas between the immigrants and the local people. This is in general outline what is "Line System", a system has served its purpose as a method of controlling the influx

of immigrants and directing it to more or less compact areas instead of allowing indiscriminate squatting all over the province.

The term Line System can broadly be defined as a colonial device of racial segregation. In the context of Assam, the Line system is associated with the immigration of land hungry peasants from the districts of Mymensingh of East Bengal. The immigration in Assam started in the last decade of the 19th Century with the encouragement of colonial officials. It should be mentioned in this context that the immigrated population, mainly belonged to the Muslim community, who settled in waste lands of Assam by clearing forests and started cultivation. In Assam, by the Line System, the villages were divided into few categories. According to which, some villages were exclusively reserved for indigenous people and some for immigrants. There were certain villages in which a line was drawn on the map or on the ground, on the one side of which immigrants could settle and on the other of which, there settlement was forbidden. The Line System at first owed its origin in the districts of Nowgangin 1920. It was, in fact, a device to segregate the Bengali Muslims from the indigenous population including the tribal and backward classes.

But the immigrants opened up the land on their side of the lines more quickly than the indigenous people on their side. Therefore even after the immigrants settlement had become established, the indigenous village adjoin it still contained much waste land, on which the immigrants often proceeded to encroach.

It was noticed by the colonial Government that the indigenous people had the tendency to sale or transfer of their land to immigrants when they were offered fabulous prices by the immigrants. In the process the immigrants not only purchased land under annual lease but also proceeded to capture lands under periodic lease. The Government considered that such a tendency on the part the indigenous people might prove detrimental in the long run.

Therefore, considering the interest of the local people colonial Government in Assam modified the land settlement policy by which the right of inherit and transfer of land under annual lease was prohibited and allowed only right of use. It also empowered the Deputy Commissioner to eject any person from land who had not acquired requisite norms to possess the land.

But the Line System had failed to restrict the transfer of lands as such executive orders were effective in case of new settlement of waste lands and under annual lease. Moreover, it

was found that the Assamese *pattadars* having periodic lease continued to transfer lands to immigrants even within the line of restriction tempted by fabulous prices. This is evident from the report of Devendra Kumar Mukherjee, Assistant Director of Land Records, Assam. As under the existing law no *pattdar* under periodic lease could be prohibited from transferring his land to another cultivator. Such steps on the part of the Assamese *pattadars* made the problem of settlement more acute. Therefore, the Colonial Government considered that certain legislation was necessary to forbade transfer of land under periodic *patta* which should be brought by people's representatives in the Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, to accommodate large number of immigrants in Nowgong and Kamrup, the Government in Assam announced Colonisation Scheme. According to which, large blocks of lands, formerly waste and unattractive to the indigenous people were constituted as colonization areas for settlement of immigrants.

Thus it appears that it was a deliberate colonial policy to encourage immigration in Assam on the one hand for enhancing the economic prosperity of the province as they transformed the vast uncultivated wasteland into a field of multiple crops like paddy, mustard, jute; pulses and others. On the other hand, their settlement was restricted within a certain area considering the interest of indigenous people by the device of Line System. The colonial handling of the land settlement problem gave rise to communal consciousness and gradually the matter was taken up by the public representatives.

Immediately on the ushering in of Provincial Autonomy measures which had been taken earlier for administrative reasons began to be measured by communal and political standards. As a result, the Line System was charged as being an unfair and perhaps illegal method of control, and the evictions which were an inevitable part of it were subjected to one sided criticism. An Enquiry Committee was appointed by the first Saadulla Ministry, formed under the Government⁵ of India Act, 1935. It submitted a report with a general conclusion to support the policy of evictions and to recommend a reform of the Line System.

Meanwhile, the inflow of immigrants continued as more immigrants began to come attracted by the prospect of getting land in Assam. However, many immigrants who came earlier had prospered and bought up lands allotted to their neighbours. They formed a small and wealthy class of landowners. With large areas under their control, they began to employ cultivators by importing them from native districts. Such laborers formed the nucleus of that

largest class of landless immigrants whose was recognized by all and for whose relief Muslim leaders and later Muslim League ministries had tried to devise further schemes of settlement.

It had become a great controversy whether to provide land to those entire landless immigrants who were working under some person. Because, after getting land they might import another group of laborers form their native places to work under them, and the newcomers might also demand land for them in future. And thus the problem of providing land for the landless would never be any solution.

Therefore, over the question of accommodation of landless immigrants the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly appeared to be divided into two groups and no one could prescribe a real solution. Meanwhile, the Congress Coalition Government issued a Resolution indicating their general policy in the matter just before their resignation in 1939. It was not accepted by Saadulla Ministry which succeeded it.

Since the Muslim League's declaration of Lahore resolution of 1940, the Two Nation Theory became the central theme of Indian politics and in Assam it got mixed up with the immigrant issue. The Line System was condemned by Muslim League as instrument of injustice and oppression and declared that it could be remedied by the establishment of Pakistan.

Saadulla followed a policy of extension of colonization areas for immigrants and re-examination of the necessity or reserving such large areas for professional graziers. Moreover Development Scheme under Saadulla was considered by the Congress party as an attempt to dispose all the available land among the immigrants. Later, under Grow More Food Campaign it appears that 'Lines' had been withdrawn in a number of villages to enable immigrants to obtain settlement of land on the Assamese side of the land. All these steps were severely criticized by the Congress as well as Assamese Hindus which was considered as an attempt by the Muslim League Ministry to incorporate Assam within the scheme of Pakistan.

Again, Bardaloi Government's decision of large scale eviction of illegal immigrants from Assam precipitated the communal tension followed by civil disobedience movement by the Provisional Muslim League in Assam. It soon becomes a battle cry for Pakistan. The announcement of Mountbatten plan forced the Provisional Muslim League to accept the fait accompli and naturally the issue of Line System receded to the background.

Another dimension of the immigrant problem was the language issue and valley rivalry. Initially under the encouragement of Colonial officials Bengali Muslim immigrants were willing to identify themselves with the Assamese people but later began to assert themselves as Bengalis. As the prominent Muslim League leaders of the province were from Sylhet and the Bengali identity of the immigrants were always asserted during the period of evictions, the Assamese leaders wanted to get rid of linguistic problem. So they favoured the idea of immediate transfer of Sylhet to Bengal which, culturally and linguistically was different from the Brahmaputra valley.

The introduction of Line System in Assam also intensified the rivalry of the two valleys as people of Surma Valley were shown as immigrants by the colonial official though Sylhet was a part and parcel of Assam. In fact, one of the factors which created jealousy between the two valleys was the superior position acquired by people of Sylhet in government services. With the influx of immigrants from Bengal, the Bengali speaking population went on increasing from census to census, which alarmed a major section of Assamese community. It further widened over the question of medium of instruction in education, establishment of University and High court in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Under the circumstances the separation of Sylhet became a life and death problem for the Assamese who wanted to curb out a linguistically more homogenous province. So they welcomed the plan of referendum declared by Mountbatten which ended up with the separation of Sylhet from Assam. Thus the colonial policy of immigration and Line System proved to be very in the context of Assam and it furnished as one of the pretext for the partition of Assam.

The impact of the provincial of 1937 held under the provisions of the government of India Act 1935 had been enormous all over India but in Assam it was different. The politics in Assam in general and the Muslim politics in particular had centered round to issues of the immigrants and the introduction of line system. Except some sporadic anti-British outbursts of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, almost all the politicians of Assam, irrespective of parties, became involved with the local issues. But the Muslim league became a dominant force in Assam by bringing the immigrant Muslims under its banner. The hard truth was that long before 1940, the year in which the Pakistan Resolution was adopted, immigration and line system had transformed into a communal issue. Assam politics until the partition of India in 1947 had revolved round it.

The Muslim opinion was against any restriction on the settlement of immigrants. Khan Bahadur Nuruddin Ahmed of Nowgong was the first Muslim member of the Assam legislative council, who had officially moved a resolution in 1936 for the abolition of the line system. The motion was lost by seven votes to twenty, with all seven Muslim members supporting, all Hindu members opposing. The second attempt had been made again in 1937 by Munawwar Ali, a young member of the council from Sylhet, for the total abolition of the line system. His move had been strongly supported by Abdul Matin Choudhury.

However, in December 1938, the Muslims of Assam living in Calcutta formed the Assam Muslim Association of Calcutta and unanimously made Moulana Mohammad Ali as the president and Abdul Matin Choudhury as the Secretary. The main objective of the Association was to serve Islam, the country and the people. But Mohammad Sadulla was an advocate of Assam's interest but joined the Muslim league for leadership and power which he ensured to himself by alliance to other groups. But neither he nor Bhasani had direct hand in the formulation of the league demand on Assam. It was of course inspired by the success of the Assam league in the election of 1946.

But we find a different picture in the Surma Valley. The creation of Eastern Bengali and Assam was more significant for the Muslims as it awakened in them a new sense of political importance derived from superiority to the Hindus. The Muslims now considered the new province as a boon but the Hindus looked upon it as conspiracy to Bengali Nationalism. As a result, the surma valley conference led by Bipin Chandra Pal failed to attract Muslim support and stirred the Hindu minds. The Muslim league did not rise to prominence in the Surma Valley till late twenties and under the influence of Muslim leaders of Bengal, the Muslims of Sylhet remained essentially pro-partition. None of the later Muslim leaders of the district has any record of participation in the movement. When the Assam Association adopted the Non Co-Operation programme, it was dominated by young Hindu leaders. No Muslim name is available. Tayyabulla was the first Muslim to court arrest in connection with the movement.

The Muslims in Assam gathered round the Assam provincial Muslim league and it became the sole spokesman of the community. Abdul Matin Choudhury and Mohammad Saadulla became its leaders. As the most respected leader of the Muslims and occupying the most important position of the party and its parliamentary forum, Saadulla was considered as the main architect of the Muslim league in Assam. On the other hand, Abdul Matin Choudhury

of Sylhet had started his political career as a non co-operator and later he joined the Muslim league and represented Assam. More than that, he was a close associate and confident of Jinnah as well as a influential member of the Saadulla cabinet. He participated in the league Legislators conference in 1946 which demanded the creation of Eastern Pakistan with Bengal and Assam. Sayeed Abdur Rouf of Barpeta and Abdul Mazid of Dhubri and Mayeenuddin Ahmed Choudhury of South Sylhet also supported the demand of Pakistan and criticized the congress government for its policy towards the Muslims. Thus, the demand for Pakistan alienated the Hindus and the Muslims. This exposes the complete divergence of attitude of the two major communities of the province. It also reveals a total lack of a universal leadership based on the concepts of democracy and secularism.

Therefore, it is not so easy to associate migration with the development especially in the state like Assam. Various nature and form of migration ultimately decided the fate of Assam. On one hand, due to the immigration especially the Bangalees, the age old, socio – economic and linguistic structure of Assam was disturbed while on the other hand, due to large scale immigration, the aborigines of the state were outnumbered, their socio – economic and political status were dropped, they lost their lands and many of them became landless in their own lands, which ultimately led the Assamese youths toward terrorism.

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