CHAPTER IV

RESETTLEMENT

SCHEMES IN NOWGONG
DISTRICT
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RESettlement schemes in Nowgong District

Nowgong district (presently divided into Nagaon and Marigaon districts) is situated on the southern bank of the River Brahmaputra. Under colonial rule, the district was divided into eight revenue circles-Kaliabor, Samaguri, Nowgong Sadar, Dhing, Raha, Marigaon, Kampur and Lanka. The ten thanas of Nowgong till the time of independence were Laharighat, Dhing, Marigaon, Raha, Nowgong Sadar, Rupahihat, Kaliabor, Samaguri, Jamunamukh and Lumding. For assessment purpose, the mauzas of Nowgong (50 mauzas till the time of independence) were constituted into South-Eastern, South-Western, Central, North-Eastern, North-Western, Immigrant, Chapari and Namati Groups. During the colonial period, Nowgong was one of the favourite districts of the East Bengali immigrants. Vast cultivable waste lands attracted the immigrants towards this district. In 1901, the total area of Nowgong was 24,59,206 acres out of which 91,788 acres were forest reserves; 4, 73,742 acres were non-cultivable and 18, 93,848 acres were cultivable land. In spite of it vast cultivable fertile lands, Nowgong was sparsely populated. During the early years of colonial rule, except the Kallang Valley, the density of population in other parts of the district was very low. The northern portion of the district formed the chapari area. Here cultivation of mustard, summer rice, pulse and so forth was carried on by the distant people. It has been discussed in Chapter III that towards the end of 19th century most part of the district was sparsely populated and produced low revenue due to outbreak of Kala-azar, the earthquake of 1897 and the subsequent flood. Hence, the colonial Government decided to bring the areas under cultivation. The colonial Government first undertook the task of opening the district to the people associating with the railways and others near the railway line. The Assam-Bengal Railway started in 1892 was extended up to Lumding of Nowgong. The Government had taken steps to settle down the workers near this

2 See Chapter III, 67-68.
3 Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Revenue & Agricultural Department of the Government of India, October 1899, Rev-No 569/ 3845, Special Enquiry Into the Decrease of Revenue in Nowgong (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Printing Office), (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 1.
railway line. The Government waste lands from the Jamunamukh Railway Station on the west up to the boundary of the district on the east on either side of the line were offered for settlement to the immigrants, besides the railway workers at a nominal assessment rate initially for 20 years, but subsequently for more years. The area offered were 150 bighas for each family or individuals. The land was revenue free for 5 years and in the following 5 years it was assessed at 9 annas per bigha and in the rest years, it was assessed at 1 land ½ annas. After 20 years, the land was assessed under the ordinary revenue regulation of the district. Immigrants from Dacca and other districts of East Bengal got lands under this scheme. On 25th August, 1904, one Kajimudin from Dacca obtained 33 bighas of cultivated land. But this was not a major plan as compared to the availability of waste lands in the district. Next, the immigrants, both the Hindus and the Muslims from Surma Valley were given resettlement at Jamunamukh in South Eastern Group and at Namati in Namati Group. Through the gates of Jamunamukh and Hojai Station of the Assam-Bengal Railway, these new settlers entered and converted the area into an excellent paddy growing area. But major areas of the northern part of the district were yet to be opened up for permanent cultivation. Those areas were often affected by floods. The immigrants from East Bengal took up the task of opening those areas for cultivation. Before discussing the resettlement process of the immigrants from East Bengal in Nowgong, we must be cleared that most of the immigrants from East Bengal into Nowgong and other Brahmaputra Valley districts were from Mymensingh district and they were mostly Muslims by community. No doubt, there were some Hindu immigrants and some from Dacca and other East Bengal districts along with them, but their numbers were so fewer that most Government records like Land Revenue Reports and Census Reports during the colonial period often referred to the immigrants as ‘Mymensinghis’ and ‘Muslim immigrants’. The Dacca immigrants were mostly traders rather than agriculturists and they selected

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Report of the Resettlement of Nowgong during the Years 1926 (Octo.) to 1932 (Janu.) (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 14.

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urban areas*, whereas the *Mymensinghia* immigrants were mostly cultivators. The following table illustrates the fact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mymensingh</th>
<th>Ordinary Cultivators</th>
<th>Field Labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>4,543</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>43,722</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the table it is also seen that out of 49,726 immigrants from Mymensingh in Nowgong in 1921, about 4,666 immigrants were Hindus, whereas the rest were the Muslims. It also means that more than 89 per cent of the immigrants from Mymensingh settled in Nowgong in 1921 were Muslims whereas less than 11 per cent of them were Hindus. That is why most Government documents referred to them as Muslim immigrants. Another fact is that immigration from East Bengal into Assam was of permanent nature. The permanent immigrants always come not by singly, but by families. The East Bengali immigrants came to Assam along with their families. A family ticket of Rs. 5.00 was sufficient to travel by rails run by the Assam-Bengal Railway from East Bengal to Assam.9 Table IV in Part II of Census Report of Assam 1921 shows that out of total 43,722 Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh in Nowgong 19,809 were women. It means that women represented more than 45 per cent of the immigrant cultivators in Nowgong in 1921. In 1931 out of total 3, 38,000 persons born in Mymensingh and censused in Assam over 1, 52,000 were women. That is why J.T. Marten, the Census Superintendent of Bengal 1921 mentioned that migration from East Bengal into Assam was permanent and included 4 females to every 5 males.10

The East Bengali immigrants came into Assam seeking lands, not jobs. So, at the very outset, the local people did not think it prudent to oppose them. Rather, they assisted in resettling them in the *char-chapari* land. Thus the immigrants who arrived earlier had no difficulty in acquiring land in the district. They chose the

* In Nowgong town, Dacca patty was the place where immigrants from Dacca had settled down.
9 As informed by Mansur Ahmed of Kaliadinga, see *Appendix E*, Part II.

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sandier soil of the *chapari*, suitable for jute. Vast areas of the district were covered by jungles. To clear those areas, the immigrants had to bear the expenses. They took the help of *Nuniya* labourers for which they had to pay. Besides incurring the expenses for railway or steamer fare and the amount of building the houses, the immigrants need to pay money first to the *Matabars*, secondly to the *Mandal* and thirdly to the *Mauzadars* and that the *Mandal* claimed payment at Re.1- per *nal*.\(^{11}\) The *Mandal* got the largest share of this illegal gratification. The immigrants sometimes preferred to go the *Matabars* directly and got information regarding the availability of land for settlement. The old immigrant families also sold their lands at high prices to the new comers.\(^ {12}\) So, for a couple of years the immigrants until their resettlement used to get money from their relatives in East Bengal, which in turn helped them in offering staggering prices for lands in Assam. When they began to grow jute and earned money, the supply of money from their relatives was ceased. This money came to Assam in the way of money orders in post offices. This has been proved by the fact that in Nowgong money orders received and paid decreased from Rs.1, 87,261 in 1912-13 to Rs. 1, 12,180 in 1913-14.\(^ {13}\) Some of the immigrants after resettling their families went back to their home in order to get money. The Assistant to the Director of Land Records, Debendra Kumar Mukherjee in a letter to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, A.W. Botham mentioned that during his tour to Nowgong, he found many immigrants waiting at the Chaparmukh Railway Station to go back to their home to get money.\(^ {14}\) However, the Government did not get anything from those earlier immigrants.

Once the immigrants got land and started permanent cultivation, their greed for land increased. They proceeded to satisfy their greed for land by other means. Sometimes they used to lend money to the local people without any bond and the latter having no means to pay back the money, gave their lands to the immigrants. Again, the immigrants were the troublesome neighbours\(^ {15}\) for the Assamese and did not hesitate to commit crime for possession of land. The Deputy Commissioner of

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\(^{11}\) Confidential File, Revenue A, Sep/20, No.2 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives).

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Report on the Land Revenue Administration of Assam for the years 1911-12, 1912-13 and 1913-14 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 3.

\(^{14}\) Confidential File, op. cit.

Nowgong remarked before the Line System Enquiry Committee that the immigrants let loose their cattle on the Assamese paddy field and sometimes they cut the paddy. The peace loving local people could not withstand such oppression and ultimately left their villages after selling the lands to the immigrants.\(^\text{16}\) The indigenous people, according to the prevalent practice had the right to occupy land anywhere. Taking advantage of it, they also sold their land at higher prices to the immigrants and took lands elsewhere. Sometimes, the party friction led some villagers to leave the village selling their *patta* lands to the immigrants. The immigrants had already been accustomed to the monetized economy introduced in Bengal. In comparison, the peasants of Assam following the traditional practice of agriculture based on subsistence did not get the taste of money economy. When the Britishers imposed land tax on the people of Assam payable in cash, they needed money. This pecuniary need of local people seemed to be fulfilled in the wake of immigration of the East Bengali farmers who were prepared to offer high prices for land. The immigrants were willing to pay extravagant prices for *Annual patta* land and even though they fell within the areas reserved for the Assamese.\(^\text{17}\) The immigrants paid 50 to 100 per cent more for the lands.\(^\text{18}\) Hence, the value of land went up. Land prices in almost all the *mauzas* of the district increased enormously. In Hatichong and Kachamari Mauzas of Nowgong, the immigrants offered up to Rs. 100 to Rs.125 per *bigha* to the local people by 1920. When the Senchoa-Moirabari Railway Line was opened in 1930, land in the vicinity of the Moirabari Station was sold at Rs. 700 to Rs. 800 per *bigha*.\(^\text{19}\) Due to such high prices of land offered by the immigrants, the Assamese often sold their lands to the immigrants and retired to new places.

**Line System and resettlement**

Although the immigrants from East Bengal entered Nowgong quite earlier, but only from the second decade of 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, the Government documents mentioned separately the land given to them. The immigrants (immigrants means *Marwaris*, Tea-garden clerks and other non-cultivating classes, Nepalis, Santhals, Railway

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 18.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) *Mauza Note*, Laharighat, 1931/32 (Nagaon: Record Room).
coolies and other cultivating classes like United Province cultivators and East Bengali cultivators) in 1901-02 got 962 acres of land in Nowgong. In 1909-10 the amount increased to 3,762 acres.20 During 1910-11 land settled with the immigrants in Nowgong was 5,425 acres out of which 3,872 acres was settled with the Railway coolies, Mymensinghias and cultivators from United Province. It can be assumed that the cultivators were given more land in Nowgong in comparison to other immigrants. In Nowgong, the numbers of East Bengali cultivators were more numerous than the Railway coolies and cultivators from United Province. The total area occupied in Nowgong in 1911 by Muslims and Hindus from Mymensingh amounted to 2,089 and 157 bighas respectively. On the other hand, area occupied by the Muslim and the Hindu immigrants from other districts of East Bengal were 1,624 bighas and 1,422 bighas respectively.21 In 1919-20 area settled with the immigrants increased to 38,659 acres in Nowgong. The following table shows settlement of land to the immigrants from Mymensingh in Nowgong till the introduction of Line System as provided by C.G.G. Helme, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong.

Table 4.2: Land (in bighas) Settled with Mymensingh immigrants: Nowgong 1915-20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mauza</th>
<th>1915-16</th>
<th>1918-19</th>
<th>1919-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juria</td>
<td>22,702</td>
<td>41,539</td>
<td>51,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatwal</td>
<td>38,982</td>
<td>45,901</td>
<td>52,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerua-Bokoni</td>
<td>26,943</td>
<td>38,161</td>
<td>42,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhing</td>
<td>31,975</td>
<td>42,318</td>
<td>45,345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Govt. of Assam, Deposit R (A), Proposed for the Appointment of a Colonisation Officer for the Assam Valley, File No 100-2 R. Rev. Deptt., Sep., 1920, Nos. 1-12 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 41.

The immigrants from East Bengal were mainly concentrated in mauzas such as Juria, Dhing, Khatwal and Gerua-Bokoni (Gerua-Bokoni was later on split into Laharighat and Bokoni Mauzas in 1924-25). The district administration showed interest on the resettlement of the immigrants. The Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong directed the officers of Revenue department that the immigrant family

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20 See Appendix I, Part I.
should except in special cases be permitted to occupy not exceeding 10 nals in width and 100 nals in length. It means that an immigrant family was allowed to possess 12 bighas of land.\textsuperscript{22} It was also ordered that no land within a mile of any village inhabited by the Hindus or the Kacharis should be settled with the immigrants and in case of collision between the local people and the immigrants, it was decided to bring a line between them and settlement would be refused to the trespasser.\textsuperscript{23} But that rule was not observed.

Immigration once started could not be controlled in the province. These hardy cultivators opened up vast lands and converted them as green crop field. Nevertheless, except a certain sections, the local people of Assam, whether the Hindus or the Muslims did not like the East Bengali immigrants at all. The local people and the immigrants were not able to live side by side on terms of amity and collisions between them were not infrequent. Referring to the impacts of East Bengali immigrants on the local people, W.L. Scott, the Revenue Member in the Assam Legislative Council pointed out that the land hungry farmers of East Bengal had a different culture, which would seem to be uncompromising with the native people. Their economic and racial advantages if unrestricted would surely drive away the indigenous inhabitants from their lands.\textsuperscript{24} Thus it was essential for the authorities to take some measures to protect the indigenous people. So, the district authorities of Nowgong introduced the Line System in 1920s. The Provincial administration of Assam at that time did not think it prudent of taking any steps to control this inter-Provincial migration. Hence, the Line System was a measure adopted by the district administration to protect the local people as well as making settlement of land to the East Bengali immigrants in a plan manner preventing indiscriminate settlement. It was first introduced in Nowgong and later on in Barpeta Sub-Division of Kamrup and Darrang. It was hoped that after the execution of Line System, the immigrants could get land from the Colonization Officer or Sub-Deputy Collector, not from the Land Record Staffs. The Government would be benefited by way of premium which prior to it went into the hands of speculators.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Confidential File, op. cit.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} The Assam Gazette, Part VI, No. 18, 1936 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 1528.
\end{footnotes}
Introduction of the system, the line was not drawn through waste lands; rather it was drawn only after the immigrants had tried to encroach over the Assamese villages.\textsuperscript{26} In 1921 a Colonization Officer was appointed to regulate the settlement of the immigrants. He was a Muslim and could talk with the immigrants in their own language and could investigate their grievances. The Colonization Officer, in consultation with the Circle Sub-Deputy Collectors concerned, prepared lists of all the villages to be opened for settlement of immigrants from East Bengal in Laokhowa, Khatwal, Juria, Dhing, Mikirbhet, Gerua-Bokoni, Mayang and Charai Bahi Mauzas. Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong J.C. Higgins after checking the lists classified the villages under following heads:\textsuperscript{27}

1. Villages which were reserved for the immigrants. The Assamese, it was expected, would not take up land without the sanction of the Deputy Commissioner.

2. Villages in which the Assamese had settled down, but there was available land for immigrants. The Colonization Officer or the Sub-Deputy Collectors would fix lines for settlement for both of them.

3. Villages reserved for the indigenous people where immigrants were not allowed to enter.

4. Villages with both Assamese and immigrants with a line between them. Immigrants would not be allowed to encroach upon the land of indigenous people.

In addition to the villages within the \textit{mauzas} mentioned above, the immigrants had occupied land in other \textit{mauzas} like Nij Sahar, Pakhimoria, Kachamari, Hatichung, Bheleuguri, Barapujia, Kandoli, and Nowgong Town where their settlement was not authorized.\textsuperscript{28} It was decided not to disturb those immigrants, but further colonization by new immigrants was prohibited.

Introduction of the Line System created a perplexed situation in the province. It was often remarked by the MLAs representing the immigrants that the Line System was discriminatory as it prevented the immigrants from acquiring waste lands in


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., Appendix 12-13.

\textsuperscript{28} See Appendix F for list of villages in occupied unauthorized by the \textit{East Bengali} immigrants in Nowgong in 1924.
Nowgong according to their wish. The local people opined in favor of its retention. The issue dominated the discussion in the floor of the Council. This policy of the District administration of Nowgong gave relief to the indigenous people, but encroachment was not stopped. Sometimes, family and religious ties worked as stimulus to the immigrants in getting resettlement in the district. The old immigrant families who had already been established firmly on vast plots of land either with Government initiative or by squatting were tempted by their kith and kin to sell a part of their plot on a higher price. The old settlers also sold land to the new comers in the hope that it would provide a sense of security to them in an alien land. The earlier immigrants who had occupied vast areas of land, sometimes 500 to 1000 bighas and became the Zamindars of the area. They could not carry on the cultivation on their own, hence gave some area on adhi terms to newly arrived landless farmers locally known as kamlas. So, there was the land transfer among the immigrants themselves. The Sub-Deputy Collector of Samaguri Circle mentioned before the Line System Enquiry Committee in 1938 that land transfers among the immigrants were 223 bighas in 1935-36, 2,660 bighas in 1936-37 and 3,442 bighas in 1937-38 in his Circle. This type of transfer meant loss of revenue to the Government. Besides, the immigrants often cultivated the areas nearer to the resident of the local people. When the authorities issued a notice for eviction, the immigrants already reaped the crop and left the field without paying revenue. But after some times, their relatives would come and could carry on cultivation in same manner and same procedure was adopted. This was a very profitable speculation adopted by the immigrants. The Government thought to prevent it immediately. The local people themselves were responsible for transfer of their land into the hands of the East Bengali immigrants as they could be easily tempted by the immigrants by offering higher prices for land. One Bhogeswar Mandal of Dhing hold about 100 bighas of land in Annual pattas in Dhopguripathar in his own lot which were formerly belonged to the Kacharis and subsequently mutated in his own name without the sanction of the Sub-Deputy Collector. He used to sublet his land to the

29 Mansur Ahmed, retired (31.12.1992) teacher of Kaliadinga M.E. Madrasa, aged 80 years of village Kaliadinga (Juria Mauza) informed the researcher that his grandfather came to Nowgong along with his family around 1920. He moved to Kaliadinga by cart from Chaparmukh Rail Station. His relatives who had already settled down in Bagariguri (Juria mauza) informed them about the availability of land. See Appendix E, Part II.


31 Ibid.
immigrants, later on sold it to one Alim Seikh, a *Mymensinghia* immigrant.\textsuperscript{32} So, in other words, in spite of preventing measure like the Line System, entry of immigrants into the Assamese villages continued unabated. The following table shows the number of the *Periodic pattas* transferred to the immigrants in Nowgong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th><em>Periodic pattas</em> transferred</th>
<th>Area (bighas) transferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kampur Circle</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadar Circle</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>- 1,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaguri</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhin Circle</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roha Circle</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong total</td>
<td>1,988</td>
<td>18,927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Revenue Department, *Control of the Settlement and Transfer of Land to Mymensingh Immigrants in the Assam Valley Division*, Rev. A, December 1926, Nos. 94-130 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 19.

The Colonial Government in order to prevent the falling of Assamese villages into the hands of immigrants devised a plan. It was decided that in the localities colonized by the immigrants, the Assamese should be left with *Annual pattas* in a special form which would contain non-transferable right. But the local organizations opposed the rules on the ground that it would affect the permanent heritable and transferable character of the tenures.\textsuperscript{33} Hence resettlement of the immigrants went on increasing in Nowgong. The following table shows the areas settled with the immigrants from East Bengal in Nowgong district.

\textsuperscript{32} File, Rev A, Sep., 1926, No 1-22 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 5.

\textsuperscript{33} M. Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics* (Delhi: Om Sons Publications, 1989), 17.
Table 4.4: Areas (in acre) Settled with the *Mymensinghias*: Nowgong 1920-1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>3,299</td>
<td>30,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>4,878</td>
<td>41,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>5,960</td>
<td>50,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>7,789</td>
<td>55,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>7,619</td>
<td>64,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>9,643</td>
<td>74,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>8,899</td>
<td>75,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>11,363</td>
<td>84,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>11,614</td>
<td>87,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>13,285</td>
<td>89,078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The table shows that the Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh got more land than the Hindus. From 1920 to 1930 land settled with the Muslim immigrants increased from 30,106 acres to 89,078 acres. But, in the same decade the areas settled with the Hindu immigrants increased from 3,299 acres to 13,285 acres.

It has been mentioned earlier that the colonial administrators of Assam did not want to prevent the immigrants because the latter were the sources of revenue. What it wanted was just systematic resettlement of the immigrants without incurring the displeasure of the Assamese. It held a conference at Government House in April, 1928 to discuss the question of land settlement policy of Assam where it was decided to introduce a new scheme in Nowgong for allotting land to the needy persons on application and on payment of premium.34

**Colonization Scheme and resettlement**

On the basis of discussion held at Shillong in 1928, the Government introduced the Colonization Scheme in Nowgong in 1929 with a view to resettle the immigrants. The scheme provided for settlement of land on community-wise and it was hoped that if the immigrants could be resettled down, then there would not necessary arise

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any friction between the Assamese and the immigrants. In this scheme provision was made for allotment of blocks to the immigrants and the local people subject to condition of applications for the same. It was decided to allot an area of 30 bighas of land to each family. The rules of the scheme were as follows:\textsuperscript{35}

1. Settlement was granted only on application made to the Colonization officer who had the right to allot lands to the applicants.
2. A premium of Rs. 25 per bigha was charged of which Rs. 2 was payable on allotment of land, Rs. 3 when the first Annual patta was issued and Rs. 20 when the Periodic patta was issued. The area allotted was normally about 30 bighas to each family.
3. No revenue was charged in the first three years. In the forth year land revenue was charged on the whole area allotted at the faringati rate of the village and Annual pattas was issued on the basis of the survey in the third year. Right to transfer of pattas was not recognized, except that if a Pattadar dies, the patta was granted to the heirs.
4. The Pattadar had to cultivate the land allotted to him and had to reside in the block.
5. In the fifth year, the Periodic pattas was issued in accordance with the Colonization Officer's order.

At the beginning the premium was fixed at Rs. 25 per bigha. But later on, in consideration of economic depression, it was decided to reduce the premium to Rs.10, Rs.7 and Rs.5 per bigha payable in 3 installments depending on the nature of the land viz., waste land, low land and grazing reserves. For the first two years, no rent was imposed on the settlers, from the third year when the land was surveyed and the Annual pattas were issued, the settlers had to pay land revenue at the uniform rate of annas 8 per bigha. In the fifth year, the Periodic pattas were issued to them. The area allotted for the scheme was divided into blocks; in a village there were 5 to 6 blocks and in one block 20 to 30 immigrant families were resettled. Up to January 1938, there were 106 villages under Colonization Scheme in 11 mauzas of Nowgong. The scheme was first introduced in Bokoni and Laharighat, later extended to Mayang in 1929-30. About 28,000 bighas of waste land in 29 villages in

\textsuperscript{35} Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Revenue Department, Nowgong Colonization Scheme, Rev. A, Nos.83-134 March 1931 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 8.
Bokoni and Laharighat Mauzas were included in the scheme. Approximately 38,000 bighas of land, both Cadastral and Non-Cadastral, in the Sahari Mauza was also added in it. Another area about 25,000 bighas in 16 Cadastral and Non-Cadastral villages of Mayang Mauza also included in it. Later on more areas were placed under the scheme. Till the time of appointment of the Line System Enquiry Committee in 1938, total areas of about 1,59,839 bighas of land were brought under the scheme.

Mayang Mauza was a part of the Chapari Group. The East Bengali immigrants were given resettlement in this mauza in large scale only from 1920s. From 1921 to 1931, 3,500 Muslim immigrants (650 families) were resettled in this mauza. They were resettled in 12 villages; 6 in the north and 6 in the south of the Mayang. Up to 1948 the Hindu immigrants possessed 12,060 bighas of land whereas the Muslims possessed 19,031 bighas of land. Besides Mayang, Ghagua Mauza included in the Chapari Group was also colonized by the immigrants. Immigrants from East Bengal held 307 bighas and 4 lessas of land up to 1949.

Like the Chapari Group, the Immigrant Group was also colonized by the East Bengali immigrants. Immigration into this Group started from 1908 onwards. It has been stated above that about 28,000 bighas of waste lands in 29 villages in Bokoni and Laharighat Mauzas of this Group was included in the Colonization Scheme. Although immigration started at quite early in Laharighat included in the Immigrant Group, however, most of the immigrants came to the mauza after the opening of the Chaparmukh-Moirabari Railway Line. In Bokoni Mauza, there were 21 partially and 4 wholly Colonization villages, whereas Dhing Mauza contained 24 Line villages and 29 Immigrants' villages up to 1931-32. Laokhowa Mauza of the

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36 See Appendix G, Part I and Part II for the names of villages.
37 *Mauza Note, Mayang, 1931/32* (Nagaon: Record Room). Also see Appendix G, Part III for the names of villages.
41 The researcher met one Makbul Hussain of Dhumkara village, aged 50 years. He is a B.Sc. teacher in Sialmari High School. He informed that his grandfather Bhatu Khan came to Nowgong from Mymensingh probably in 1920. After arriving at Chaparmukh, his grandfather came to Chennimari village by cart. He occupied about 38 bighas of land in Laharighat by cutting jungle and cultivated the fields himself. See Appendix B, Part I.
Immigrant Group constituted in 1921 was opened up especially for the immigrants from East Bengal, both Hindus and Muslims. Till the time of Resettlement of 1930, Hindu immigrants were settled in 16 villages, whereas the Muslims in 30 villages. Roughly up to 1931-31, there were 1,073 families of Hindu immigrants and 2,071 families of Muslim immigrants. The immigrant families informed the researcher that sometimes they occupied more than 80 bighas of land, most of them by clearing jungle.\textsuperscript{42} Moirabari Mauza (present Marigaon district) split from Laharighat in 1945 was also a predominantly immigrant mauza. The opening of the Chaparmukh–Moirabari Railway Line in 1930 had great effect on the colonization of the entire area by the Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh. Before the opening of the said railway line and commencement of the Colonization Scheme in 1929, the residents of the area included the caste-Hindus as well as ethnic tribes. The opening of the line had great effect on the dislocation of those local people.\textsuperscript{*} Most of the areas of Moirabari Mauza such as Telikatu, Bheuguri, Leluarmukh, Goroomari, Barehaguri, Gaja khaiti and others covered with dense forest were opened by the immigrants. Some of them even occupied up to 400-500 bighas of land and could succeed in acquiring title from the colonial Government.\textsuperscript{43}

In the North-Eastern Group, the immigrants from East Bengal completely occupied Bheleuguri Mauza. In the North-Western Group they were settled in Kachamari, Khatwal, Mikirbheta, Hatichung and Barapujia Mauzas. Khatwal Mauza was resettled both by the Hindu and Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh and Dacca. Most of the available areas were occupied during 1930s.\textsuperscript{44} The researcher has been informed by the old immigrant family members that their ancestors after paying Rs. 5 as railway fare arrived in Nowgong from East Bengal.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} The researcher has been informed by Abdul Hussain Fakir, aged about 115 years of village Puthikhati (Gunabari) in Laokhowa Mauza on 24.07.13. See Appendix C, Part II.

\textsuperscript{43} As informed the researcher by Md. Unas Ali Chaudhuri, grand son of Chahar Ali Munshi, a Mymensinghia immigrant. This Chaudhuri family possessed the areas where the Sewali Kavi Ratna Kanta Borkotaki had his Mauzadari office. See Appendix A, Part I.

\textsuperscript{44} Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Report on the Reassessment of the North Western Group of Villages in the District of Nowgong, Rev. Dept., Rev. A., Sep., 1931, Nos 140-155 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 21-23.

\textsuperscript{45} The researcher met Abdul Jalil, aged 65 years and Dr. Abbas Uddin Ahmed, aged 92 years of Rupahi. They are the members of old Mymensinghia Muslim families. The researcher also met Chakrdhar Dutt, aged 78 years and Md. Sirajuddin, aged 89 years of Rupahi. They are the member of old Hindu and Muslim immigrant families from Dacca in Nowgong. See Appendix D, Part I to IV.
resettled at Laogaon, Tamuli Tup, Barghat and many other villages with an area of 23,691 bighas of land in 1930. In Kachamari Mauza, the Muslim immigrants formed about 40 per cent of the population. Here, the immigrants settled in 11 villages like Naramari, Bhakatgaon, Chilangani, Hirapati etc. with an area 14,069 bighas at the time of Resettlement in 1931. In the Mikirbheta Mauza, there were 2 purely Immigrant villages and 8 villages with Assamese-Immigrant lines in 1931-32. Up to 1931, the immigrants resettled in Kalikajari (46 immigrant families), Hatibat Simaluguri (7 immigrant families), Dighali Pathar (13 families) and many other villages and occupied in about 12,298 bighas of land. In Hatiyujua and Gendhua Pathar with an area of 3,322 bighas in the year 1930. In Barapujia Mauza, the immigrants were found in Manipur and Bhakatgaon villages. In Namati Group, the areas extending from the Assam-Bengal Railway Line up to the Kaki-Hawraghat Road was thrown open to the immigrants from Surma Valley and was commonly known as Sylheti block. Most of the Sylheti immigrants settled down in Hojai, Lumding, Rongkhong, and other mauzas of the Namati Group. Up to 31st March, 1949 Muslim immigrants held 52 bighas of land in Namati Mauza.

**Development Scheme and resettlement**

We have seen that vast areas of Nowgong were thrown open to the East Bengali immigrants through the Colonization Scheme. The scheme was introduced by the colonial Government. Meanwhile, according to the provisions of Government of India Act, 1935, elections were in Assam for the Legislative Assembly in 1937. From that time onwards, the representatives of the local people belonging to different political parties began to take part in policy formulation of the Government. The issue of resettlement of the immigrants in the province became a part of political dialogue of the parties like the Congress and the Muslim League.

Saadulla, the leader of the Muslim group of the Brahmaputra Valley formed a coalition ministry with the help of European and other tribal and non-tribal members in April, 1937. The Muslim League was not a party to the ministry. By the time

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49 Ibid.
Saadulla joined the League. He formed his second coalition ministry in February 1938 which lasted to September 1938. The Muslim League was thus a part of this ministry. After Saadulla’s second term, Gopinath Bordoloi formed a Congress-coalition ministry. Immigration continued unabated during this period. It was necessary for those popular ministries to take up the issue resettlement of the immigrants.

Already in July 1927 a non-official proposal placed before the Legislative Council proposed that a committee with non-official majority be formed to assess the availability of cultivable waste land in the province as well to examine what amount of waste land would be reserved for the expansion of cultivation of the local people. But due to opposition of the Europeans, official and Muslim members it could not be passed. After 9 years on 1st October, 1936, a proposal brought about by Khan Bahadur Nuruddin Ahmed for abolition of the Line System was passed in the Council, where it was decided to appoint a committee to enquire into this immigration issue. Accordingly, the Line System Enquiry Committee was formed. It published its report in 1938. Its recommendation was not altogether prohibition of immigration, but priority of protection of the land belonging to the ethnic tribes. By that time, Gopinath Bordoloi formed a coalition ministry (19th September, 1938 to 16th November, 1939). This ministry decided to deal with the immigrant question. This ministry before its resignation adopted a resolution which favored regulating settlement of landless immigrants with 30 bighas of land per family with preference to those who migrated before 1st January, 1938. Besides, the Government decided to evict all those immigrants who occupied reserve areas illegally. Restriction was imposed on settling down by the immigrants in the areas residing by the backward classes. In respect of other areas, it was decided that where 15 immigrant families had been living before 1st April, 1937 or families less than 15 living for 12 years or more before 1st April, 1937 and had been paying revenue, they would not be evicted. At the same time, it was also agreed that both would not allowed be to buy more land. But, the immigrants who married Assamese girls would enjoy right over land.

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on behalf of such girls. This resolution of the ministry was bitterly criticized by the Muslim League under Saadulla who in a League conference at Ghagmari (Golapara) on 19th November, 1939 promised to abrogate the said resolution of Bordoloi ministry. But the Bordoloi ministry could not do anything for the execution of that resolution. Meanwhile, the Second World War broke out; with the resignation of Bordoloi ministry, the Muslim League under Sir Saadulla formed the Government. Saadulla got the chance to repudiate the policy of late ministry. He was convinced that to remain in power, land settlement policy should be formulated keeping in mind interest of the East Bengali immigrants. Taking advantage of the confusion arising out of the Second World War, the Saadulla ministry repudiated the policy of the outgoing Congress-coalition ministry. He continued the policy of resettlement of the immigrants; even Communist Party of India urged upon him to extend the settlement year for the immigrants up to 1944. The scarcity of the essential commodities during the war year gave a pretext to Saadulla ministry to increase the numbers of immigrants in the province in the name of bringing more area under cultivation. He was not in favor of putting full stop to immigration because Assam, according to him, with vast quantity of arable land was waiting for plough. He argued that Assam was settled down by Nepalis, tea garden labourers, Gurkhas and Biharis and a ban on the entry of East Bengali immigrants would necessarily imply the same for others also which was against Section 298 (sub-section 1) of the Government of India Act, 1935 which states that no provincial Government would prevent any subject of British India in acquiring lands in any territory. But, it must also be maintained that Sub-Section 2-3 of the same Act authorized the Provincial Government to protect the local people in preference to the immigrants. The new ministry convened a conference of various parties on 31st May and 1st June, 1940 where it was unanimously agreed upon the need of special protection to ethnic tribes under the Government and settlement of remaining wasteland with different communities-indigenous and immigrants. Subsequently, it was decided to start a 'Development Scheme' to make settlement of land to the needy communities on the

53 The Asamiya, 5 November, 1937.
55 Dev and Lahiri, op. cit., 34.
57 Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Resolution on Land Settlement, Rev. Deptt., No RG 8/42/19 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 2.
lines of the Nowgong Colonization Scheme. It was decided to introduce in Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup, and North Lakhimpur. The main features of the Development Scheme were as follows:\(^{58}\)

1. Except the necessary reserves all other cultivable land would be opened for settlement; 30 per cent of such land would be kept for the future progeny.

2. In the proposed scheme, the natives, the immigrants coming before January 1938 and the immigrants occupying the Government reserves due to erosion of the Brahmaputra would be given preference.

3. Premium would be Rs. 5 per bigha of land in three installments; Re.1 on allotment of land, Rs. 2 in the fourth year when the Annual pattas be issued and remaining in the sixth when the land be converted into the Periodic.

4. There would be separate block for each community.

5. Each family would be given 30 bighas of land.

In Nowgong, the Deputy Commissioner allotted about 64,000 bighas of waste land under the scheme in different circles like Samaguri, Kampur, Dhing and Raha. Those areas allotted were divided into blocks.\(^{59}\) The Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong proposed that about 9,000 bighas of land out of 64,000 bighas should be reserved for normal expansion of local population. But the Government of Assam did not go through the recommendation of district authorities. It opened the entire amount of lands for settlement. The numbers of applications filed up for land under the scheme by the immigrants (both Hindus and Muslims), the Assamese including the Surma Valley settlers, ethnic tribes and Scheduled Caste were 25,521, 12,542, 1,127 and 974 respectively.\(^{60}\) It was decided that the immigrants would be provided 24,000 bighas of land under the scheme. The Assamese including the settlers from Surma Valley, the ethnic tribes and the Scheduled Caste would get 24,000 bighas, 9,000 bighas and 7,000 bighas respectively. Again, decision was taken to resettle the East Bengali immigrants in Gobha, Garubat and Lanka Mauzas.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., 12-18.


\(^{61}\) Ibid.
The proposed scheme was opposed by the local people. The Government's decision to preserve 30 per cent of the waste lands for the future generation without ascertaining the actual amount of land in the province was criticized by the Assamese. The decision of the Government to impose the same rate of premium on both the indigenous and outsiders was also criticized. The local newspapers were also skeptical about the role of ethnic tribes' leaders like Bhimbar Deori and other Congress MLAs who supported the move. The areas selected for the scheme were generally very low, which proved the fact that all available suitable waste lands had already been diminished in Nowgong. But, Saadulla Government in a bid to increase their votes never hesitated to continue land settlement policy towards the immigrants. In face, the factual information did not warrant any extreme criticism for the Government because the number of applications from other communities than the immigrants was fewer. But it should be borne in mind that indigenous population of the province including the Assamese Muslims refused to cooperate with them, who practiced different custom and tradition. Even, whenever these immigrants acquired lands in their neighborhood, the Assamese left their villages. So, they did not apply for lands under the Development Scheme. Although the immigrants were provided land in separate blocks, however, there was no guarantee against squatting by the immigrants. Saadulla Government knew this fact. But as his main motive was resettlement of the immigrants, he used the expression 'development' only to create an erroneous impression that the object of the Government was to develop as quickly as possible all the cultivable land at their disposal and share it out among the various communities. The initiative of Saadulla ministry for giving lands to the immigrants seemed to have been dictated by the Muslim League. It has been noted above that Saadulla was bitterly criticized by the League in its first conference at Ghagmari for his failure of immediate resettlement of the East Bengali immigrants in the waste lands of the province. This scheme seemed to be a conciliatory measure of Saadulla, who promised to provide land to at least one lakh landless immigrants within a period of two months in that conference.

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62 The Asamiya, 6 July, 1940.
64 Star of India, 25 February, 1941 cited in Dev and Lahiri, op. cit., 70.
Saadulla’s land settlement policy brought about his downfall in December. His minister Rohini Kumar Choudhuri was hostile to his policy. The latter asked his counterpart in Bengal, Vijay Prasad Singh Roy to take measures to prevent the immigrants entering Assam by propagating that there was no more available land in Assam.\(^{65}\) From 25\(^{th}\) December 1941 to 24\(^{th}\) August 1942 Assam was administered by the Governor Reid. The Governor of Assam examined the immigration question thoroughly. It was found that due to the Development Scheme announced by the late ministry there was considerable increase of land hungry immigrants in the province with false hopes of being early provided with land for settlement.\(^{66}\) Arrival of the immigrants and their demands for lands gave rise to quarrel with other communities. Moreover, those areas selected for the scheme were already more or less honeycombed with immigrants. At last, the Governor of Assam discarded the scheme. But the Governor did not want to put a restriction altogether on the settlement of land with the immigrants. He consulted with the district officers and agreed to add land to the Colonization Scheme in Nowgong and Darrang, but left the local people to take up land according to their wish.\(^{67}\) It was agreed not to resettle new immigrants in the province, because the remaining waste land needed to be reserved for the future of the local people and the old immigrants.

**Grow More Food Campaign and resettlement**

But this temporary restriction on resettlement of the East Bengali immigrants was removed with the coming of Fourth Saadulla ministry on 25\(^{th}\) August, 1942. Muslim League member Munawwar Ali was made the Revenue Minister in this ministry. He was a supporter of the immigrants and favoured the opening of grazing reserves. Besides, the provincial Government of Bengal wanted early abolition of the Line System in Assam. It has already been mentioned in Chapter III that administrators in Bengal always favored emigration of poor, land hungry Bengali peasants to Assam. On 16\(^{th}\) July, 1943 the Bengal Legislative Council asked the Government of India for taking necessary steps to remove all existing restrictions imposed by the Government of Assam on migration from Bengal.\(^{68}\) The motion had the desire

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\(^{65}\) *The Asamiya*, 10 February, 1940.

\(^{66}\) *Memorandum on Assam Waste Land and Immigrant Policy*, op. cit., 5.

\(^{67}\) Ibid.

result. The new Saadulla ministry agreed to follow any instruction received from the Central Government regarding land settlement with the immigrants.\textsuperscript{69} During the time of Second World War ‘Grow More Food Campaign’ was adopted to arrest the scarcity of food by replacing the cash crops by food crops. For this purpose, the Government of India desired the extension of cultivation in Assam from 52.8 acres to 57 lakhs during the year 1943.\textsuperscript{70} It indirectly helped Saadulla Government in the resettlement of the immigrants in the province in the garb of the said campaign. The ministry passed a resolution to accelerate land settlement in Darrang, Kamrup and Nowgong, to extend areas of immigrant colonies and to settle more lands with the immigrants even de-reserving the selected grazing reserves.\textsuperscript{71} By a supplementary instruction in 1943, Saadulla clarified the following things:\textsuperscript{72}

1. No premium on initial settlement in Barpeta, but encroachers on Government reserves and Assamese area to pay back revenue.

2. The \textit{Periodic pattas} to be issued immediately to encroachers given settlement on payment of arrears.

3. Regularization of occupation of lands in Assamese villages by immigrants.

4. All occupants earlier than 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1942 and 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1943 in tribal and other areas respectively to be given settlement within the month of February, 1944.

5. More lands to be found for immigrants in Mangaldoi.

This policy of Saadulla was bitterly criticized by the local people of Assam. In the garb of the Grow More Food Campaign, Saadulla encouraged the immigrants to encroach upon the grazing reserves of the province. He extended the cut off year for settlement of land to the immigrants to 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1942. It meant complete deviation from earlier rule. The Hindu Mahasabha raised a strong voice against the settlement policy of Saadulla. It feared that Saadulla wanted to increase the numbers of Muslim population in the province by inviting the Muslim immigrants from East Bengal. This feeling of the Hindu Mahasabha was not altogether baseless. Saadulla’s appraisal to Liaquat Ali Khan, chief aide of Mohammad Ali Jinnah about the growth of Muslim population in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong due to the

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} M Kar, \textit{Muslims in Assam Politics} (Delhi: Om Sons Publications, 1989), 60.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 85.
arrival of Bengali immigrant Muslims attested the fear of the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{73} The Assam Provincial Hindu Sabha condemned the Resolution of 1943 which guided the Government’s land settlement policy. The Viceroy of India also after studying the land settlement policy of Saadulla remarked that Grow More Food was nothing more than growing Muslims in Assam.\textsuperscript{74}

It is to be noted that although the new immigrants were encouraged to encroach upon the grazing reserves, the Government at the same time needed to take responsibility of the following sections of immigrants.\textsuperscript{75}

1. Those whose settlement had already been made, but evicted by erosion of the Brahmaputra and other rivers.\textsuperscript{*}
2. Those who purchased the \textit{Annual pattas} in close villages from the indigenous people. They needed to be evicted and resettle in other places.
3. The immigrants, except those whose occupation of grazing did not interfere with grazing facilities of the local people, who without permission occupied reserve areas in the hope that Government would provide them with land elsewhere after eviction, needed to be resettle in colonization areas.

It seems that Saadulla found solutions to all those problems in the grazing reserves (professional grazing reserves and village grazing grounds). Hence he proceeded to de-reserve the professional grazing reserves of the province to resettle the immigrants. S. P. Desai was appointed to investigate the condition and availability of grazing reserves of the province in September, 1943. He was against de-reservation of the reserves in the interest of the cattle rearers and local people. In Nowgong, he found that total area under the reserves along the Brahmaputra and Kopili Valleys was about 1,81,548 \textit{bighas} whereas the district needed about an area of 80,518 \textit{bighas} for the cattle.\textsuperscript{76} But he cautioned the opening of the grazing

\textsuperscript{73} Sanjoy Hazarika, \textit{Rites of Passage, Border Crossings, Imagined homelands, India’s East and Bangladesh} (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 74.
\textsuperscript{74} M Kar, op. cit., 73.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Memorandum on Assam Waste Land and Immigrant Policy}, op. cit., 3.
\textsuperscript{*} In the floods of 1930, about 59 families with an area of 850 \textit{bighas} in Laharighat and Bokoni Mauzas had been affected and flood deposited sand over the entire area. They had already paid the premium. It was up to the government to make available land elsewhere to those affected immigrants. They had been accommodated in a part of Dhumkura professional grazing reserve with an area of 1297 \textit{bighas} in Laharighat and in the Barkur Pathar No 1 in Bokoni with an area of 1,112 \textit{bighas} falling in Amlakuti Professional Grazing Reserve.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Report of the Special Officer appointed for the examination of the Professional Grazing Reserves in the Assam Valley, 1944} (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 19.
reserves because they were liable to reduce in size due to erosion and inclusion of some areas already within colonization area. He recommended that professional grazing reserves along the Brahmaputra should not be disturbed. But, Saadulla Government did not listen to the advice of Desai. It ordered opening of the reserves for settlement of the immigrants including different communities on payment of premium of Rs.10 in place of previous Rs.5. By the end of 1943 about 23,996 bighas of land belonging to the professional grazing reserves and sarkari lands in Gobha, Mayang and Ali Tangani Mauzas of Nowgong were opened for resettlement of the immigrants. Langia professional grazing reserve in Nowgong with an area of 1,114 bighas was opened for the immigrants keeping 100 bighas of lands for sheltering cattle during flood. In 1943-44 an area of 17,838 acres of Laokhowa Reserve Forest was opened for colonization. This policy of opening the grazing reserves was intended to satisfy the Government of Bengal and this fact can be ascertained from a letter of Revenue Secretary to the Government of Assam to the Government of Bengal in May 1944 which indicated the intention of former to liberalize the Line System to meet the objection of the latter. This policy of opening the grazing reserves of the province had it impacts found on the ethnic tribes and cattle rearers which have been described in Chapter V.

The local people agitated against de-reservation and settlement of land to the East Bengali immigrants. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha successfully organized ‘the Assam Land Policy Protest day’ on 25th August, 1944. The Congress woke up from hibernation of some years and resumed the legislative activities in November 1944. Working on the fears of local people, it decided to oppose the land settlement policy of Saadulla Government and urged upon it to convene a conference to settle the complicated resettlement policy. Accordingly, the All Party Conference held in December 1944 arrived at certain agreed decisions. The Government passed a resolution on the basis of those decisions on 15th January 1945. It agreed to preserve the professional grazing reserves. It was decided that an amount of 30 bighas of land

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77 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
would be settled with the pre-1938 landless immigrants after reserving 30 per cent of
available waste land for future generation. The Government promised to protect the
ethnic tribes in special belts.\textsuperscript{82} It seemed that Saadulla unwillingly conceded to the
demands of the Congress. But the Muslim League which represented the immigrants
opposed the recommendations. It wanted full accommodation of the immigrants
even at the cost of local people's interests. Settlement of land with the immigrants
was continuing uninterrupted. Between 1943 and 1945 about 1, 74,548 \textit{bighas} of
land were directly settled with the new immigrants and another 26,753 \textit{bighas} were
settled after regularization of old encroachments. An area of about 1, 64,995 \textit{bighas}
of land were opened from the grazing reserves for settlement of the immigrants.\textsuperscript{83} The Congress wasted eviction of all unlawful encroachers from professional grazing
reserves. Hence, it also refused to follow the resolution. Under such condition
Saadulla ministry tumbled down. A reconstituted ministry headed by Saadulla and
supported by the Congress came to power in March 1945 under the terms of
Saadulla-Bordoloi-Choudhuri Tripartite Agreement. This ministry passed a
resolution on 13\textsuperscript{th} July, 1945 which laid emphasis on the protection of the ethnic
tribes, eviction from professional grazing reserves and planned settlement of land to
both the landless immigrants, who came to Assam before 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1938 and
landless indigenous persons.\textsuperscript{84} Hence, at the instance of Revenue Minister Rohini
Kumar Choudhury eviction operation started in many reserves of Kamrup
croached by the immigrants illegally. After the general elections of 1946, a
Congress ministry was formed under Gopinath Bordoloi on 11\textsuperscript{th} February 1946. The
new Government started eviction operation in Darrang, Kamrupa and Nowgong
districts.

The issue of resettlement of the East Bengali immigrants in Assam had made hot the
political wind of the province. Saadulla's initiative further complicated the issue.
Besides him, another leader of the Muslim League, Maulana Bhasani who became
its President in April, 1944 carried on propaganda for the resettlement of the
immigrants. Under his leadership the immigration issue and demand for inclusion of
Assam into Pakistan was mixed up. Bhasani opposed the eviction drive of Bordoloi

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{The Assam Tribune}, 24 October, 1944.
\textsuperscript{82} Bhuyan and De, op. cit., 269.
\textsuperscript{83} M. Kar, \textit{Muslims in Assam Politics} (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997), 94.
\textsuperscript{84} Dev and Lahiri, op. cit., 77.
and launched a programme of Civil Disobedience against the Government. He encouraged the evicted Muslim immigrants to reoccupy the lands. In a meeting on 26th June, 1946 at Mangaldoi attended by 15 thousands immigrants, Bhasani declared that they would not surrender even an inch of land they acquired and advised the immigrants to occupy waste land wherever found available. A Joint Committee of Action was formed by Bengal and Assam Provincial Muslim League to make the struggle of the Bengali immigrants in Assam effective and successful. This encouragement of Bhasani to the East Bengali immigrants necessarily met with extreme criticism from the local people. The Hindu Assamese supported the move of the Government and highlighted the theory of "son of soil" to checkmate the politics of immigration. At last Bordoloi Government was compelled to arrest Bhasani on 10th March, 1947 and was kept in jail till June, 1947. On his release, he left for East Bengal. With his retirement opposition to the eviction drive lost its momentum. Moreover, eviction operations started after independence became a 'tame and easy affair'. The post partition communal tension in East Pakistan created fear psychosis amongst the immigrant Muslims in Assam and around one lakh of them from Goalpara, Cachar, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong left for Pakistan and became displaced. Their numbers were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Displaced Families</th>
<th>Actual number who left for Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>...........</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Many displaced Muslims took shelter in safer place within and outside the district boundaries. But as soon as communal passion abated, they again returned to their homes. Those displaced persons who went to Pakistan returned to Assam after the

85 Ibid., 85.
86 Ibid., 91.
87 Ibid., 81.
88 Ibid., 106.
signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement in April, 1950.\textsuperscript{89} After independence Assam faced the problem of resettlement of refuges that entered the province due to communal riots broke out in erstwhile East Bengal. Immigration of Muslim farmers was also continued, but it lost its former tempo.

From the above discussion it is found that immigration into Nowgong was an urgent need for colonial rulers. Their estimation of waste lands in the province including Nowgong was intended to maximize the revenue. They wanted to bring the waste land mostly found in the northern part of Nowgong under cultivation. The immigrants from East Bengal were allowed to open up those areas. The East Bengali immigrants were mainly hailed from Mymensingh district and 89 per cent of them in Nowgong were Muslims. They came to Assam along with their families.

The immigrants bribed the local revenue officers for getting possession of land. For this, they used to receive money from their relatives in East Bengal until they had firmly established. The \textit{Matabars}, headmen of old immigrant's families also gave them information about availability of land after taking money from them. They also tempted the local people to sell their land by offering high prices. Sometimes, immigrants occupied land of local people by foul means like letting loose the cattle on the fields and compelling them to leave their place.

The East Bengali immigrants were mainly concentrated in 11 \textit{mauzas} of Nowgong like Bheleuguri, Bokoni, Dhing, Juria, Kachamari, Khatwal, Laharighat, Laokhowa, Mayang, Mikirbheta and Moirabari. The district authorities of Nowgong wanted that an immigrant family would be allowed settlement of 12 \textit{bighas} of land. But greed for more land brought them into conflict with local people. So, in order to prevent indiscriminate settlement of the immigrants, the district authorities of Nowgong introduced the Line System in 1920. By it some areas were reserved for the immigrants and restricted their entry to villages inhabited by the local people including the ethnic tribes. The government even issued the \textit{Annual pattas} without transferable rights to local people in order to prevent them selling their lands to the immigrants. Nothing could stop the immigrants in occupying lands of the local

people and grazing areas. The colonial Government did not want to stop immigration of East Bengali farmers, who were the sources of revenue. They, therefore, introduced a systematic policy of resettlement of the immigrants without incurring the displeasure of the Assamese. This policy was the Colonization Scheme of 1929. About 1,59,839 bighas of land of Nowgong was allotted under the scheme to be distributed to the immigrants including the local needy people on payment of premium of Rs. 25 per bigha of land. Under the scheme, the immigrants were given resettlement in mauzas like Bokoni, Laharighat, Mayang and Sahari.

After formation of popular ministries in Assam in 1937, resettlement issue of the immigrants became a part of political dialogue of the parties like Congress and Muslim League. The Congress-coalition ministry led by Gopinath Bordoloi responded to the spirit of “nativism” against the immigrants by adopting a cut off year for settlement of land to the immigrants. But Saadulla’s ministry did not prevent the immigrants rather extended the cut off year for settlement of lands to the immigrants from 1938 to 1942. At last, the fear of local people of losing their land compelled Gopinath Bordoloi to start eviction operation in Darrang, Kamrupa and Nowgong districts in spite of the opposition of the Muslim League. After independence the eviction drive continued, but it lost its former tempo. Thus we see that the East Bengali immigrants could get resettlement in Assam including Nowgong sometimes through their own initiatives and at others through Governments’ schemes. Their resettlement brought about many changes in socio-economic and political environment of Assam. In the next Chapter an attempt is made to find out the impact of their resettlement in Nowgong.