CHAPTER V

IMMIGRATION TO INTEGRATION
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Immigration may be called an investment by individuals (skilled immigrants) who employ their knowledge and abilities profitably in the host countries.\(^1\) By their investment, the immigrants contributed towards the economic development of the host country. The immigrants solve the problem of labour for the industries and gives stimulus to the marketing activities of the host country.\(^2\) Same was the case with East Bengali immigrants in Assam. Immigration of those peasants during the colonial period was also a kind of investment with some reservations. The immigrants, unlike other foreigners associated themselves with the agricultural sector except a small fraction who engaged in other activities (e.g., labourers, small traders). Their impacts were felt in the contemporary agricultural economy of Assam.

The immigrants were agriculturists

The immigrants at first occupied the char-chapari land of Assam. Once occupied, the barren and uncultivated land was transformed by the immigrants into a permanent regular crop yielding area. As they were mostly agriculturists, they had no other intention rather than to settle down and cultivate the unyielding fields lying waste in the province. These hardy immigrants cleared off the jungle and grew crops. Although technological age was yet to arrive in Assam, nevertheless they opened the jungle area with their physical labour.\(^3\) The Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, Higgins observed that the immigrants did better cultivation than the local people and as such they were certainly beneficial to Assam.\(^4\) With their better techniques of cultivation, these East Bengali peasants taught the Assamese how to grow jute, mung (a variety of pulse) and several other crops and vegetable for commercial purpose. They adopted the practice of double cropping. No doubt, the indigenous people also knew the same

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practice that is growing mustard or *matikalai after ahu* in winter. However, their double cropping area was less than the immigrants. The immigrants used to harvest as many as 5 crops from the same soil.⁵ So, in industry and skill, the immigrants were an object lesson to the local cultivators. About their contribution towards the economic development of Nowgong, P.G. Mukherji, Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong remarked thus:

"They have opened up vast tracts of the dense jungle along the south bank of the Brahmaputra and have occupied nearly all the lands which are open for settlement in this tract. These people have brought in the wake wealth, industry and general prosperity of the whole district. They have improved the health of the countryside by clearing the jungles and converting the wilderness into prosperous villages. Their industry as agriculturists has become almost proverbial and they extract from their fields the utmost that they can yield."⁶

They brought under permanent cultivation thousands of acres of land, which according to the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, Bentinck, the local cultivators had recognized as exigent of efforts beyond their inclination.⁷ The immigrants were expert cultivators. In his *Young India* 1922, Mahatma Gandhi also observed that the *Mymensinghia* Muslim immigrants rapidly occupied the low lying paddy land which had been left vacant by the Assamese race.⁸ In Chapter III we have seen that before the coming of the immigrants, Assam imported a large quantity of rice from Bengal to feed the local people as well as the tea garden workers. In 1876-77, 411,431 maunds of rice were imported to Assam from Bengal, which increased to 963,947 maunds in 1896-97. But the East Bengali opened up the waste lands and grew crops including rice. Since their resettlement, dependency of Assam on Bengal rice was minimized to a great extent. During the year ending 31st March 1900 rice not in husk imported from Bengal by rail and river were 43,713 and 6,62,196 *maunds* and valued at Rs. 1,36,603 and Rs. 20,69,362 respectively. But in 1921-22 that amount was reduced to 5, 69,569 *maunds*.⁹

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⁵ Resettlement of the districts of Nowgong and Darrang, op. cit., 9.
⁶ G.T. Lloyd, op. cit., 42.
⁷ Ibid.
However, the immigrants contributed much towards the agricultural economy of Assam through the jute cultivation. They were expert jute cultivators. So, their resettlement in Assam meant extension of jute cultivation in the province. It has been mentioned in Chapter III that the colonial Government encouraged the immigration of East Bengali farmers to Assam to expand the jute growing areas.\textsuperscript{10} It was found in a survey conducted the Government that areas in Nowgong were suitable for jute.\textsuperscript{11} Resettlement of the immigrants necessarily brought about a change in jute cultivation in Nowgong. The immigrants cultivated three varieties of jute namely \textit{Tusha}, \textit{Deshal} (\textit{Sada}) and \textit{Mesta}. Whereas \textit{Tusha} and \textit{Mesta} have fine fibers and therefore, used for household walls in \textit{char} areas, \textit{Deshal} was used for producing variety of jute products.\textsuperscript{12} The following table shows us the expansion of jute cultivation in Nowgong between 1901 and 1951.

| Table 5.1: Area (in acre) under Principal Crops: Nowgong 1901-1951 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Crops           | 1901  | 1911  | 1921  | 1931  | 1941  | 1951  |
| Rice            | 1,47,428 | 1,67,303 | 2,29,270 | 2,59,532 | 3,89,618 | 4,55,142 |
| Jute            | 70    | 1,245 | 20,355 | 49,148 | 78,656 | 90,749 |


From this table we can easily assume that cultivation of jute was expanded rapidly in Nowgong between 1901 and 1951. From a meager 70 acres of land under jute in 1901, it increased to 90,749 acres in 1951 with an increase of 99.92 per cent. Rice covered an area of 1,47,428 acres in 1901; it expanded to 4,55,141 acres in 1951 and the percentile increase was 67.60 per cent. The figures indirectly corroborate the evidence of arrival of the East Bengali immigrants into Nowgong, who were experts in jute cultivation. No doubt, the local people also learnt the practice growing jute for commercial purpose, but the immigrants made Nowgong the highest jute producing and exporting district in Assam. The following table clearly shows that jute was mostly grown in areas where the immigrants were given resettlement.

\textsuperscript{10} See Chapter III, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{12} Gorky Chakravarty and Noor Alam, \textit{Agriculture in Char Areas of Assam: Past, Present and the Task Ahead}, in Ismail Husaain, Habiboor Rahman et.al. (ed.) \textit{Socio-Economic life of the Char-People, Assam} (Barpeta: CAWSSE, 2005), 83.
Table 5.2: Area (bigha) under Jute: Nowgong 1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North-Eastern</td>
<td>5,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern</td>
<td>5,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>3,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-Western</td>
<td>18,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Western</td>
<td>3,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>1,05,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namati</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapari</td>
<td>3,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report of the Resettlement of Nowgong during the Years 1926 (October) to 1933 (January) (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), Appendix IV.

It has been mentioned in Chapter IV that most of the East Bengali immigrants were given resettlement in Chapari, Immigrant and North-Western Groups. Hence, the mauzas that included within these groups were the main jute producing areas of Nowgong. In 1932 jute growing area of the Immigrant Group was 1,05,939 bighas of land. It was followed by the North-Western Group with 18,221 bighas of land under jute. Jute cultivation in the North-Western Group increased from 0.77 per cent in 1911 to 6.06 per cent in 1931.\(^{13}\) It was mostly grown in mauzas like Khatwal, Kachamari, and Mikirbheta where the immigrants settled and a special jute cultivable area called Da-faringati was created.\(^{14}\) Jute cultivation in Mayang Mauza of the Central Group was also increased from 0.11 per cent in 1921 to 5.54 in 1931 due to the arrival of the expert jute cultivators.

Jute produced in Nowgong was directly exported to Calcutta by rail and river. It surpassed the export of other crops from Nowgong. The following table shows the export of jute, paddy and mustard from different Railway Stations in Nowgong.

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\(^{13}\) Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Report on the Resettlement of the North-Western Group of Villages, Rev. A, Sep, 1931, No. 140-155 (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 12.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

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Table 5.3: Export of Crop (in maunds): Nowgong 1926-1928

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stations</th>
<th>Paddy</th>
<th>Mustard</th>
<th>Jute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raha</td>
<td>42,807</td>
<td>27,344</td>
<td>32,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phulaguri</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>1,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebejia</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senchua</td>
<td>3,597</td>
<td>26,680</td>
<td>1,39,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong Town</td>
<td>......</td>
<td>30,668</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puranigudam</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>1,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaguri</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>5,409</td>
<td>11,237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this table we see that during 1926-28 about 1,85,378 maunds of jute were exported from different Railway Stations of Nowgong. During the same period amount of mustard and paddy exported from Nowgong were 93,008 maunds and 48,330 maunds respectively. In 1929 export of jute by rail from Nowgong was 1, 25,856 maunds and it increased to 4, 12,325 maunds in 1931.15 Jute exported from Senchoa Station came from the North-Western as well as Immigrant Group and that exported from Puranigudam Station and Samaguri Station was obtained from Khatwal and Laokhowa Mauzas (Immigrant Group).16 Besides rail, jute was also exported by the Brahmaputra River. Jute collected from the rural markets was carted away to Dhing ghat in Bhuragaon, a newly opened steamer station which in turn was exported by river to Calcutta.17 Some of the Mymensingha immigrants were engaged in the trade of jute. In 1927 Nowgong Central Co-operative Sale and Supply Society was formed with a view to create a favourable market for the cultivators, especially for the growers of jute. Of the eighty five members, about thirty were the Mymensinghias.

The society sold jute direct to Messrs. E.S. Steward and Company in Calcutta through

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15 Ibid., 17.
16 Ibid.
17 Report of the Resettlement of Nowgong during the Years 1926(October) to 1933 (January) (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 13.
the broker Messrs. Walker and Company.\textsuperscript{18} Thus jute brought cash to the East Bengali immigrants and they in turn contributed in the economic prosperity of the district.

**Expansion of settled area and increased value of land**

The East Bengali immigrants brought about a structural change to the agricultural history of Nowgong. One of the perennial problems which affected the agriculture was relinquishment. As there was no dearth of cultivable land in the province till early years of the British rule, the indigenous people of Assam used to relinquish land when it demanded more labour and occupied another plot of fertile land elsewhere. Thus land-man ratio was helpful to the local people, but it caused a huge loss to the Government revenue as it could not impose land tax on the people permanently on a single plot of land. With the arrival of the land hungry East Bengali immigrants, the ration between man and land began to diminish which worked for total absence of relinquishment throughout the province. In course of time, the immigrants occupied all the available waste land leaving nothing to the indigenous people. So, the local people had to abandon their habit of leaving the land after cultivating for few years. In Nowgong during 1914-15, the percentage of relinquished area against the settled area was 7.86 per cent, but in 1929-30 it dropped down to .63 per cent.\textsuperscript{19} Before the arrival of East Bengali immigrants in the Chapari Group, the percentage of relinquishment was varied between 15 to 20 per cent, but by 1931, it was dropped down to 10 per cent. In the North Western Group, it was 9.11 per cent during 1914-15. By 1929-30 it reduced to .06 per cent. In mauzas like Khatwal, Kachamari and Hatichung, relinquishment was nil by 1930 due to undertaking of extensive cultivation by the immigrants. Thus settled area of the district began to increase rapidly. Increase of settled area means increase revenue. The table in below shows the revenue received by the Government in Nowgong.

\textsuperscript{18} As mentioned by Joysingh Chettri, Secretary of NCCSSS before *the Assam Provincial Banking Enquiry Commission 1929-30*, Vol. II, Evidence (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1930) (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 340-41.

Table 5.4: Settled Area and Revenue: Nowgong 1901-1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Settled Area (acres)</th>
<th>Land Revenue (rupees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-02</td>
<td>2,58,330</td>
<td>4,60,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-03</td>
<td>2,65,889</td>
<td>4,67,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-07</td>
<td>2,10,969</td>
<td>4,46,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-09</td>
<td>2,26,841</td>
<td>4,78,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>3,41,799</td>
<td>5,59,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915-16</td>
<td>3,36,864</td>
<td>5,96,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>3,98,086</td>
<td>7,02,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>4,99,783</td>
<td>8,59,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>4,73,718</td>
<td>8,79,282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assam Secretariat Proceedings, *Report of the Resettlement of Nowgong during the Years 1926(October) to 1932 (January)* (Guwahati: Assam State Archives), 22.

The Government's prime objective of accumulation of more revenue from land was realized due to the coming of the East Bengali immigrants. In Nowgong, the immigrants contributed to the treasury of the Government by way of land revenue. In 1901-02 the revenue demand of Nowgong was Rs.4,60,395, but in 1929-30 it increased to Rs.8,79,282. Expansion of settled area is concomitant of increased value of land. It has already been discussed that the land hungry immigrants had offered extravagant prices for land. So, the prices of land in almost all the mauzas of Nowgong where the immigrants settled increased enormously. In Mikirbheta Mauza, price of a bigha of land in Assamese villages was between Rs.12 to Rs.25, but it was between Rs. 40 to Rs.60 in immigrant villages. In Hatichung and Kachamari Mauza, the immigrants offered up to Rs. 100 to Rs.125 per bigha to the local people.\(^{20}\) 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.\(^{21}\) Because the immigrants had arrived in this mauza by rail and began to occupy land sometimes by clearing jungle and at other by offering tempting prices of land to the local people.

**Rural hats**

Immigration of large numbers of East Bengali farmers into the villages was a kind of invitation to new other elements in rural society. The immigrants from East Bengal.

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\(^{21}\) *Resettlement of the districts of Nowgong and Darrang*, op. cit., 16.
were exclusively related to agricultural fields. They contributed to the growth of agricultural marketing which remained unknown until their arrival. They produced crops not for subsistence, but for sale. So, it led to the setting up of a numbers of rural markets locally called hats. Daily or Weekly rural hats began to be held in the areas settled by the immigrants, where locally produced items were marketed. The Marwari Keyas (traders) entered the rural hats to buy the things. In Laharighat Mauza, many hats began in places like Datialbari, Nagabandha and Barbari. In Laokhowa Mauza such hats were found in Garajan, Chaidaria, Nij Laokhowa, Lailuri, Puthikhaiti and Dakshin Bhomoraguri. People from neighbouring areas often visited the hats. The Keyas set up the godowns near the market places. In Laharighat Mauza, their firms or godowns were found in areas like Nij Dhing, Bhajakhaiti Pather, Dalaigaon, Sialmari Domgaon, Mikirgaon, Kashipahi, Barangani Pather and Garapar. They purchased the agricultural products of the immigrants in the rural hats.22 Later on, the Keyas sold those items in urban areas. They sent jute directly to Calcutta from many railway stations of Nowgong. Besides jute, the immigrants also sold vegetables, fowls and eggs to the local people in those hats. Many local items like bamboo found in the bastis had no economic value till the arrival of the immigrants. But, they found a ready market amongst the immigrants. The immigrants made thatch houses and used to buy bamboo from the neighbouring villagers in the hats. In 1910s twenty or thirty bamboos could be brought for one rupee; but in 1930s ordinary jali bamboos (for house wall) cost four or five annas each and each bhaluka bamboo (house posts) cost from eight annas to one rupee.23 The local people had great opportunities of obtaining the ready cash by selling bamboo, thatch and other items in the hats. Thus, arrival of the East Bengali immigrants brought about a great transformation in the rural economy of Assam.

At the initial stage immigration is a welcome development for the land abundant country. But unhindered immigration is not acceptable to any country because it often creates problems of job scarcity as well as gradual reduction of cultivable land in the host country. Thus it affects the economic interests of the local people. In case of

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22 Mauza Note, Laharighat 1930/31 (Nagaon: Record Room), 3.
Assam, arrival of the East Bengali immigrants created many socio-political and environment problems during the colonial period.

**Destruction of grazing reserves and forests**

During the colonial period Assam occupied a unique position in India on account of fertile land lying waste throughout the province. Vast amount of waste lands of the province was classified as professional grazing reserves, reserve forest and village grazing grounds. All these types of reserves have great significance in the rural agricultural economy. During the colonial period, before the arrival of the East Bengali immigrants, many grazing grounds were found reserved for the use of the villagers. On the other hand, the professional graziers, most of whom were the Nepalis depended on the grazing reserves and reserve forest for fodder of their cattle. They established many *khutis* in those reserve areas. The Government also got considerable revenue from the grazing tax levied on the owners of cattle. Besides being source of fodder for the cattle, the reserves and forests were also the main source of fuel for the rural masses, especially the ethnic tribes. People collected their wood for their hearth from the neighbouring forests.

In Nowgong, *mauzas* like Duar Bagari, Pubtharia, Laokhowa, Juria, Dhing, Khatwal and many others contained professional grazing reserves where the graziers had established their *khutis*.\(^{24}\) Besides, the Laokhowa forest reserve had also many *khutis* of the graziers like Langia khuti, Batali bil khuti, Bagmari khuti, Bairam khuti, Karaiga khuti, Rupahimukh khuti and Deswali khuti.\(^{25}\) Milk supply needed for the district was came from the *khutis* of the reserve areas. The graziers near the Laokhowa forest reserve and the neighbourhood sold milk in Tezpur and the people of Gauhati got its milk from the reserves in the Kopili Valley in Nowgong.\(^{26}\)

Considering its importance, it was necessary for the administrators to preserve the reserve areas both for the local people and the immigrants. But it did not happen. Arrival of East Bengali immigrants posed a challenge to the existing reserves. When

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\(^{24}\) See *Appendix J* for the name of the *Mauzas* that contained Professional Grazing Reserves.


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
all the available areas were occupied, the immigrants encroached upon those grazing reserves and forests. Up to 1936 as many as 59 grazing reserves and village forests were thrown open to the immigrants in Nowgong district. In Mayang Mauza 5 grazing reserves and 9 fuel reserves under the village committee were kept for the use of the immigrants and as well as local people, but later on they were thrown open for settlement of the immigrants. The Langia reserve of Juria Mauza and Kacharibori reserve of Dhing Mauza were entirely occupied by the immigrants.27 During the time of the Second World War, the Saadulla ministry opened some of the professional grazing reserves in the name of Grow More Food Campaign. An area of 17,838 acres of Laokhowa reserve forest was opened for colonization of the immigrants in 1943-44. The village grazing grounds found in the areas settled by the immigrants were also been occupied by them. Besides the reserve forest, Laokhowa Mauza had contained 13 village grazing grounds covering a total area of 3,785 bighas. But all the grazing grounds were occupied by the immigrants. It created problems to the neighbouring local people. They could not find place to graze their cattle. Opening of professional grazing reserve also affected the graziers. The graziers lost their source of fodder for their cattle. Many graziers shifted their khuts from Nowgong to other places. Besides, this process of extensification also led to the removal of wild animals and birds from those reserves. Many valuable trees like Simolu, Sisu, Karoi, Bhelu, Bhelkar and Gamari found in those reserves were also cut down. Moreover, the ethnic tribes living near the reserves and forests lost their source of fuel collected from those areas.

Out-migration of ethnic tribes

De-reservation of large reserve areas for resettlement of the immigrants in the province seemed to have its impact on the ethnic tribes. It transformed the ethnic composition of Assam.28 The principal ethnic groups in Nowgong were the Tiwas and the Kacharis. They inhabited in the northern part of the district. Another tribe of Nowgong, the Mikir, was found in the mauzas bordering the hills. The immigrants posed a big challenge to the survival of those tribes. The immigrants often encroached upon the land of the ethnic tribes. The tribes were not good agriculturists and were sparely scattered. On account of their habit of drinking laopani (local wine), their land

27 Ibid., 20.
often remains uncultivated. So, when the immigrants approached them, the tribal people gave their land for cultivation on *adhi* terms. But gradually the immigrants occupied the entire land, sometimes by paying a meager amount for it. Referring to the loss of lands by the *Tiwa* tribes, Sanjoy Hazarika states that the immigrants had taken over their lands illegally by getting a *chappa* (or thump impression on pieces of paper) as sale of land was prohibited in tribal belts. The immigrants always tried by every means—fair or foul to get possession of land. The immigrants often threw bones of cows into the water source of the local people, opened their hens and cocks on their drying rice and when protested, the immigrants chased them with knives. In such a situation, it was impossible for the local people specially the ethnic tribes to be in peace with the immigrants. Court remained the main option for them, but those people were not litigants unlike the immigrants. The result was that the ethnic people lost their land. Besides, the Muslim immigrants claimed that they possessed magical power and knew witchcraft and could heal snake bites and other disease. The ethnic people believed all these and gave some parts of their land to the immigrants.

The ethnic people depended on forest for their fuel. But the forest covers of the district began to disappear gradually after the coming of the Bengali immigrants. They failed to procure their fuel. They had already lost their land. Even they could not get the government jobs, because they did not get education to be fitted for jobs. Out of the total 53,094 tribals in Nowgong only 369 persons were literate in 1931. The number of literate *Kachari* was even less than the *Mikirs*. The ethnic tribes had no other source of occupation. They also did not like the presence of those ethnically, linguistically, and religiously different people. Sometimes friction took place between the immigrants and the ethnic tribes resulting in casualties on both sides. At last the

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32 As told by Habib Ullah Bahar, forth son of Abdul Karim Fakir. He was nearly 74 yrs. He retired as Deputy Extension & Media Officer, District F.W. Bureau, Nagaon. Abdul Karim Fakir came from Mymensingh district to Juria between 1920 and 1930. He acquired here 84 bighas land and settled down in Kacharigaon. He knew witchery, so the tribal people had great respect to him and they asked to cultivate their field too. He had 7 sons, although he was illiterate, he took great care for the education of his children. So, he shifted his family to the present Juria town. All of them were well-established. See Appendix E, Part I.
ethnic people abandoned their villages and went more inside towards the submontane zone.\textsuperscript{34} The following table shows the distribution of ethnic tribes in Nowgong.

Table 5.5: Ethnic Tribes (male and female) in Nowgong: 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thana</th>
<th>Kachari</th>
<th>Lalung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laharighat</td>
<td>3,258</td>
<td>6,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhing</td>
<td>......</td>
<td>1,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marigaon</td>
<td>2,224</td>
<td>18,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raha</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>1,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaliabor</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaguri</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamunamukh</td>
<td>4,036</td>
<td>3,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumding</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It should be mentioned here that the numbers of ethnic people were decreasing decade after decade in the province. The \textit{Kachari} tribe showed net variation of -22.1 per cent between 1881 and 1921. The same was also the case of the \textit{Lalungs (Tiwas)} who showed -13.0 per cent decrease between 1881 and 1921. In Nowgong, the number of the \textit{Kachari} was 13,781 persons in 1911, but their number decreased to 12,066 persons in 1921.\textsuperscript{35} It is a clear indication of out-migration by these tribes. Prior to the arrival of the immigrants, the \textit{Tiwas (Lalungs)} and the \textit{Kacharis} resided in many villages like Kacharigaon, Lalukgaon, Kaliadinga, Mahguri, Sutirpar, Tangiabasti, Salmara and so forth in the north of present Juria town. In Laharighat Thana they were found in many villages like Khartola, Durabandhi, Salmaripam, Banmuri, Taptola, Khertoli, Dungarpar, Kapurpara, Tengaguri, Kacharigaon, Batelimarigaon, Dhupaguri, Qutolabari and so forth. Villages like Rowmari, Nagabadha, Lalunggaon Bhakatgaon in Rupahiath Thana were mainly inhabited by these ethnic people. In Samaguri Thana, they were mainly concentrated in ethnic villages like Kacharigaon, Jatia Kacharigaon and Gandhali Kacharigaon. But after the encroachment of the

\textsuperscript{34} The Report of the Survey of Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam, AIRTSc., 1999 cited in Ismail Hossain, \textit{Asamar Char-Chaparir Jiban aru Samaj} (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 2008), 100.

immigrants, many of their villages were abandoned by the the Kacharis and the Lalungs. When the Village Statement of Nowgong district was published in 1941, the villages inhabited by the Kacharis within Dhing Thana had been abandoned for which there was no mention of the Kachari people in that thana. The same was the case for other thanas also. In Juria Mauza under Rupahihat Thana, the residents of Kakhari village left in 1927-28 and that of Lalimggaon was abandoned in 1945.\textsuperscript{36} Since 1936-37 the ethnic people entirely moved away from the Salmara village of Juria.\textsuperscript{37} Most of the ethnic tribal people took shelter in North Lakhimpur district. The Kacharis of Dhing and Juria found their way to Rampur, Dhemagarh, Bishnupur, Govindapur and many others villages in greater Narayanpur area of Lakhimpur.\textsuperscript{38} They cleared the jungles and established settled villages. During the colonial period, Lakhimpur was less affected by immigration of East Bengalis in comparison to other districts of the Brahmaputra Valley.

We have seen how the immigrants had dislocated the local people, more particularly the ethnic groups from their land. Dislocation of local people by the immigrants created unprecedented political activism in Assam since 1930s. It continued even after independence. The local people since 1920s voiced against the immigrants. The immigrants belonged to different culture, religion and language. The East Bengali immigrants spoke Bengali. Already the Assamese expressed their unhappiness at merging Syhlet, a Bengal district with Assam in 1874. The Bengalis had dominated the administrative offices of Assam, because they knew English language. For the Assamese, the Bengalis were the indigestive element in the Assamese society. Large scale immigration of Bengali speaking immigrants naturally entailed opposition from the Assamese side. Moreover, most of the East Bengali immigrants were Muslims by community. Due to these immigrants, the Muslim population began to rise in the province. The Assamese Hindus began to think that Muslims would surpass them if immigration continued for long time. Thus linguistic rivalry coupled with increasing Muslim population had changed the immigration issue from its socio-economic character to political one. The initiative taken by some Muslim members of the Assembly, who represented the East Bengali immigrants entailed more hostility from

\textsuperscript{36} Dharanidhar Kakati, op. cit., 9.  
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 7-8.  
\textsuperscript{38} As informed by Bhisma Swargiary of North Lakhimpur district. He is a lecturer in Kokrajhar Government College.
the Assamese. Emergence of the Muslim League in the province as a champion of the Muslim cause had been seen as a corollary to immigration. Communal propaganda flared up the environment of the province. It has been mentioned in Chapter IV that League’s activities further speeded up when Saadulla and Maulana Bhasani took up the leadership of the League. Communal lectures were delivered in the League’s conferences which brought about a division in the Assamese society where the Hindus and the Asamiya Muslims has been living peacefully for centuries. Besides, the demand of the leaders of the East Bengali immigrants like Matiur Rahman Mia for acceptance of Bengali as their mother tongue in Assam created suspicion in the mind of the local people.\textsuperscript{39} In December 1940, the \textit{Goalpara Praja Sanmilan} also made same demand on Bengali language.\textsuperscript{40} Even the Muslim League’s initiative for inclusion of Assam in the proposed Pakistan created fear psychosis amongst the Asamiyas. Some nationalist organizations of Assam like the \textit{Assam Sanrakshini Sabha} and the \textit{Asamiya Deka Dal} as well as the \textit{Hindu Mahasabha} criticized the motive of the immigrants and demanded prevention of further immigration. The Congress party under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi took some initiatives for prevention of further immigration into the province. Again in 1937 Jnananath Bora through his article published in the \textit{Dainik Batori} pleaded for separation of Sylhet, a Bengali dominated district from Assam and a ban on further immigration for the survival of the Assamese as a nationality.\textsuperscript{41} But immigration could not be prevented and it continued till independence.

Gradually a section of local intelligentsias in Assam realized the gravity of the situation and decided to assimilate the immigrants with the Asamiyas. It is true that no country even thinks of becoming heterogeneous in composition. The European countries subscribed to the notion that their countries should contain a single nationality, sharing a common language and culture, and in some instances a common religion.\textsuperscript{42} Although the Assamese also wanted some kind of homogeneity in their society, however, with the passing of time, the intelligentsias realized that only assimilation of the immigrants and local people could prevent the harmful elements of

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{The Asamiya}, 31\textsuperscript{st} May, 1941.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Myron Weiner, “Immigration: Perspectives from Receiving Countries,” \textit{Third World Quarterly}, Vol. 12, No. 1(Jan., 1990), 143.

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heterogeneous society. So, they demanded incorporation and assimilation of the immigrants into the Assamese society. Even, P.R. Gordon, the Commissioner of Assam Valley in 1917 remarked that immigrants should be encouraged to merge their customs and language in the customs and language of the people of the Assam Valley.\(^43\) It was realized that the immigrants who settled permanently in Assam were mainly concerned with land. They would not want to fight for language, culture at that time as their utmost need was getting a permanent habitation in the new province. They would have no objection in adopting the Assamese as their mother tongue. Hence, the intellectuals wanted to see the *Pamuas* (settlers) to be a part and parcel of the Assamese society. Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury, the leading nationalist of Assam asked the immigrants to merge themselves with the Assamese society. Through the *Chetana, the Deka Asam*, the mouthpieces of the *Assam Sangrakshini Sabha*, Roy Choudhury expressed his desire to see the immigrants adopting the Assamese language as their mother tongue. The premier literary organization of the province, the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* from its inception expressed opinion on the problem of immigration. Aiming at the immigrants, in the eighth session of *Sabha* at Dhubri in 1926, President Benudhar Rajkhowa spoke thus,

> 'Many Muslims from Mymensingh district have come to Assam. The wealthier provinces are supposed to receive settlers from other places. So, we express happiness at this. The Aryans came to settle here from far away places. The Koches, the *Kacharis*, the Ahoms came to Assam and became natives of the province. Many Muslims who came with Mir Jumla settled here permanently-they merged with the Assamese. There's no doubt that the *Mymensinghias* would be happy to be Assamese after settling permanently in Assam.'\(^44\)

In the 14\(^{th}\) session of the *Sabha* in 1933, Jyanadabhiram Barua expressed his desire of introducing the Assamese language in schools established for the *Mymensinghias*.\(^45\) The local newspapers also stressed the need to make the immigrants as *Asamiyas*.\(^46\)

They campaigned during the time of Census of 1941 for declaring Assamese as the

\(^{43}\) *Confidential File, Revenue A, Sep/20, No.4* (Guwahati: Assam State Archives).


\(^{45}\) Hiren Gohain and Dilip Bora (ed.), *Asom Andolan: Pratisruti Aru Phalasruti* (Guwahati: Banalata, 2001), 123.

\(^{46}\) *The Asamiya*, 24\(^{th}\) August, 1940.
mother tongue by the *Mymensinghia* farmers. Jawaharlal Nehru also understood the gravity of the immigrant issue and remarked that the very basis of solution of this critical question laid in assimilation of the immigrants. If the immigrants remained aliens and outsiders, they would be disruptive force in the body politic.47 The *Sabha* leaders hoped that assimilation of Bengali farmers would increase the strength of the *Asamiyas*. Ananda Chandra Agarwala at the 15th session of the *Sabha* held in Mangaldoi in 1934 stressed the need to include the immigrants, removing the narrow communalism to form a greater Assamese race.48 The Sabha was hopeful that the Bengali immigrants would become pure Assamese. Citing example of some notable *Mymensinghia* immigrants like Khonkar Samser Ali and Abdul Hamid of Barpeta who had completely sympathized with the Assamese cause in matter of language and culture, Maidul Islam Bora in his Presidential address from Jorhat in 1940 tried to allay the fear of the local people with regard to the immigrants. He hoped that in course of time, the immigrants would adopt the Assamese way of life.49 Jyotiprasad Agarwala appealed the people of Assam to welcome the *navagata* (new comers) of Bengal by pouring their own language among them.50 The illiterate immigrants wanted to accept Assamese as their mother tongue. But the educated section of the immigrants, who somehow got the taste of political power in the Council and the Assembly wanted that the Bengali immigrants should declare Bengali as mother tongue in lieu of the Assamese. Nilmoni Phukan who was the President of 19th session in Sibsagar in 1944 criticized the educated *Mymensinghia* for trying to alienate the illiterate *Mymensinghia* from the Assamese.51 The immigrants gradually realized the urge of the *Asamiya* people. They decided to accept the Assamese as their language. In 1931 the immigrants in Barpeta and in 1947 the immigrants in Nowgong and Goalpara accepted the Assamese as the medium of education replacing Bengali language.52 As a result, the percentage of Assamese speaking population began to increase in the province. In 1951 percentage of Assamese speakers increased to 60 per cent from a mere 14 per cent of previous decade, whereas the Bengali speakers

47 *The Tinidiniya Asamitya*, 18th December, 1937.
49 Ibid., 110-111.
51 Atul Chandra Hazarika, op. cit., 124.
52 Ismail Hossain, *Asamar Char-Chaparir Jiban aru Samaj* (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 2008), 16.
dropped from more than 50 per cent of earlier decades to 17.5 per cent. In Nowgong, the Assamese speaking population increased from 21 per cent in 1931-41 to 158 per cent in 1941-51.\textsuperscript{53} Thus the fear of the Asamiyas of losing their language and identity in their homeland due to the Bengali speaking immigrants diminished to a great extent.

From the above observations it can be concluded that the East Bengali immigrants were good agriculturists. In spite of absence of modern agricultural tools, they cleared off the jungle with the manual labour and turned those areas into green crop fields. It was due to their arrival that dependency of Assam on Bengal rice was cut down to a great extent. They were also expert jute cultivators. They grew jute throughout their settlement. They transformed \textit{mauzas} like Dhing, Gerua-Bokoni, Juria, Khatwal, Laokhowa and Mikirbheta as jute growing areas. Between 1901 and 1951 jute growing areas in Nowgong was increased by 99.92 per cent and it was result of their efforts. Jute from Nowgong was exported to Calcutta both by rail and river.

With the arrival of the immigrants, land-man ration began to diminish in Nowgong. Percentage of relinquishment dropped in Nowgong. The Government's primary objective of obtaining more revenue from land was also realized. Simultaneously, settlement of the immigrants led to the increased value of land in Nowgong. Moreover, money economy entered into the rural areas through the \textit{hats} where both the immigrants and local people exchange goods through cash. Such rural \textit{hats} were held near the places settled down by the immigrants. The Marwari traders, locally called \textit{Keyas} set up the godowns near the market places and bought jute from the immigrants and sold them in Calcutta.

But the province including Nowgong sacrificed many things to derive the benefits from immigration. One such lost was the grazing reserves and forests. Opening of those areas for the resettlement of the East Bengali immigrants affected the graziers, especially Nepalis and other villagers including the ethnic tribes. The graziers lost their source of fodder for their cattle. The ethnic tribes who had lived near the reserves and forests lost their source of fuel collected from those areas.

\textsuperscript{53} Sagar Barua, op. cit., 66.
De-reservation of large areas affected the Tiwas and the Kacharis, two principal ethnic tribes of Nowgong. Already the illiterate tribes had been compelled by the East Bengali immigrants, using foul and fair means, to give up their land. So, many Kachari and Tiwa families of Nowgong out-migrated from their mauzas like Dhing, Laharighat, Juria, Laokhowa and Khatwal to Lakhimpur and other districts of the Brahmaputra Valley. Dislocation of the local people caused by the arrival of East Bengali immigrants led to an unprecedented political activism in Assam since 1930s. The growth of linguistically and religiously different people in Assam created fear in the minds of the Assamese that they would lose their identity in their homeland. So, they opposed the immigrants and campaigned for its prevention. Communal propaganda flared up the environment of Assam during colonial period.

By that time a section of the Assamese intelligentsias tried to assimilate the immigrants with the Assamese society. They asked the Bengali immigrants to adopt the Assamese as their language. The leaders and the Presidents of the Asam Sahitya Sabha like Benudhar Rajkhowa, Jyanadabhiram Barua, Ananda Chandra Agarwala, Jyotiprasad Agarwala and many others took initiative to incorporate the immigrants into the Assamese society. At last in 1951 most of the East Bengali immigrants declared their language as Assamese. Thus incorporation of the immigrants into the Assamese society was achieved to a great extent and it brought about social change and development.