ABSTRACT

Assam is a significant province of India. Situated in the North East, it is connected with rest of the country by a narrow eighteen kilometers passage of land. It has common boundaries with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar (Burma). Until a few years ago Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram were part of Assam. Like other religious communities particularly Hindus-Muslims also form an important section of the state population.

In 1826 A.D. Assam was conquered by the army of the British East India Company and subsequently in the post-mutiny (after 1857 Rebellion) era, it became a province of British India and gradually drew the attention of the government to its socio-economic backwardness. Different reforms were, therefore, made by the British Government in different spheres such as in legislative system, education, government services, administrative setup etc. The Montague Chelmsford Reforms empowered Assam with a status of "Governor's Province" with fifty three (53) members in the provincial legislative council. Out of 39 elected seats, 32 seats were so allotted between two major communities (Hindus and Muslims) to bring about an equilibrium as well as numerical balance between the two valleys in the state. Muslims were given four (4) seats in Brahmaputra Valley and eight (8) in Surma Valley. Hindu representatives were given twelve (12) and eight (8) seats respectively. Similarly, the Government of India Act of 1935 ushered the
concept of popular government through provincial autonomy and as a result, the first provincial government was formed in Assam on 15 March, 1937. Muslims availed their due share in that provincial government.

The most disturbing development in the twentieth century Assam has been of population explosion. It has increased from 3.3 million in 1901 to 22.3 million in 1991 which India, the contrary as a whole from 238.4 million in 1901 to 843.9 million in 1991. Decadal variation in the same period will also exhibit Assam had much higher rate than that of Indian average.

The inconvenience of governing the Assam districts as a division of the Bengal Presidency had long been observed. Quite different local conditions and the unique position thereof, its European planters warranted the creation of a new province to ensure administrative efficiency. Accordingly Assam proper, together with Cachar, Goalpara, Garo Hills and other hilly districts, was formed into a Chief Commissioner's province on 6 February, 1874. This new province with its small population had meager revenue potential. To make it financially viable, authority therefore incorporated the populous district of Sylhet into Assam on 12 September 1874.

It was not until British occupation of Assam in 1826 when avenues of employment both in office and trade, cultivation and plantation were opened that inflow of population. The amlahs (officials) of Bengal replaced the official aristocracy in Assam when the letter proved themselves incapable of discharging their duties under the alien government.

The pressure on the soil, diluvium on their home districts, availability
of cheap, plentiful and fertile lands on easy terms in Assam in place of expensive and uncomfortable holdings as sub-tenants in Bengal drove the immigrants, particularly of the district of Mymensingh to move up into the Brahmaputra Valley and they formed during 1911-21 an appreciable elements of populations in all the four lower middle districts of Goalpara, Nagaon, Darrang and Kamrup.

The "Line Systems" which was devised by J.C.Higgins, Deputy Commissioner, Nagoan in 1916 was enforced in 1920 in the districts of Nagaon and sub-division of Barpeta compelling the migrants to settle in 'segregated localities'. This was stoutly opposed by the immigrants. While emphasizing the need to develop extensive wasteland, government desired retention of the line system for the provision of tribal-settlements. On the resignation of the coalition government, Sir Saadullah, who came to power in November 1939, wanted the abolition of the Line System to encourage settlement of Muslim immigrants to make Assam a permanent base of the Muslim immigrants.

The partition of 1947, the creation of the Dominion of India and Pakistan did not prove deterrent to immigration problem. Sylhet district an integral part of Assam since it constitutionally became the province, splited out through referendum and was included in the East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. During the pre-independent era, migrants settled down in districts of Assam bordering East Bengal, but after the partition the newcomers specially the Bengali Hindu ‘refugees’ from East Pakistan found
no difficulty in crossing the porous border and settled down either by themselves or through their relatives unchecked and undetected. However, the communal bitterness had already started between Hindus and Muslims in India and Pakistan, which also reflected into the natural life of Assam. The riot of 1950 was dreadful event in the history of Assam. In order to reduce communal tension and to maintain peace between both the communities, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Liyaquat Ali Khan had signed an agreement on 8 April 1950, which was known as 'Nehru-Liyaquat' agreement.

The influx of immigrants created a crisis of identity amongst the indigenous Assamese. If the process is allowed to continue, they feared, as in the case of the Tripuris, their economy, political and cultural life would be endangered and their very existence would be obliterated. The Assamese found that among the largest migrants group Bengali Muslims have assimilated themselves with the Assamese but Bengali Hindus were averse to identify themselves with the Assamese mainstream.

Soon after the partition, Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi made an announcement in the Assembly that it was not in the intention of the government to make Assam a bilingual State for the sake of homogeneity of the province and desired all non-Assamese to learn Assamese language. Though provision was to remove the language barrier, Cachar and hill areas stood opposed on the misapprehension, this will place non-Assamese in adverse position in the State services. However, under the Right Schedule,
Official Language Bill was introduced in Assam Assembly on 10 October 1960, declaring Assamese as the official language in the Assam. But Bengali would be in practice in the district of Cachar.

In the wake of liberation of Bangladesh several lakhs of refuges came to North-East India and most of these of course returned under 'Indira-Mujib' agreement (19 March, 1972) but a few thousand Bengali Hindu war victims stayed.

In Assam the matter came to prominence in April 1979 when a by-election had to be held on the death of Hiralal Patowari, M.P. in the Mangaldoi constituency. In the wake of election, the SP of Mangaldoi district served 47 thousand the Bengali Hindu-Muslim people with 'Quit India Notice.' The issue, which generated a very strong fear psychosis of losing the socio-cultural and political identity among a large section of Asamiya middle class. This fear psychosis gradually engulfed the majority of Asamiya masses to launch a movement on the foreigner issue. The All Assam Student’s Union (AASU) which had been spearheading the anti-foreigners movement declared-‘no revision, no election'. What they wanted was Three D's- “Detection, Deletion and Deportation” of the foreigners prior to election in all 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam. Under the leadership of young energetic and dedicated President P.K. Mahanta with the support of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), the movement started on 6 November, 1979 with mass rally, picketing, strikes, bandhs, satyagraha of the people throughout Brahmaputra Valley to demand immediate settlement of the foreigners
issue. Now it may be asked for the agitation in Assam: is the problem of the 'foreign nationals' the real bone of contention or it is a manifestation of some other cause that lies deeper still? The answer is that the agitation is the political expression of the economic deprivation, which Assamese have experienced due to heavy migration since the early 20th century. The Movement’s political apprehension that immigration has given rise to the ‘foreigner question’. After a prolonged agitation at last, the agitators agreed to solve the foreigner's problem as per terms of the Assam Accord. Hence the Assam Accord which was signed between the government of India and the leadership of the movement in New Delhi in the early hours of 15 August 1985. The Centre conceded to the demand for Saikia's removal, pledged to deport immigrants who had settled in Assam after 1971 and disfranchise 1966-71 migrants for ten years. On the economic and cultural demands, Centre also agreed to set-up another refinery in Assam, established an IIT, a central university and open Ashok Paper and Silghat Jute Mills.

**Methodology and Technique:** Crust of the problem during our period of study has been identified through the survey of the then vernacular print media, press of Assam and its reflection in the Bengali media reports were compared and analyzed to understand the real state of affairs more objectively. The oral histography in whatever number available further enlightened our study. The problems and its solution as analyzed on the basis of above methodology enabled us to compare the policy of Govt. of Assam in finding its own domestic solution and the role of central government therein.
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The official and archival records highlighted in the bibliography had been additional instruments of investigation for analyses. Moreover, political and personal letters, diaries etc of eminent personalities regarding Muslims of Assam and their problems and issues have also been utilized as our source for deriving material for the subject. Likewise, the oral historical information, as far as available, has also enlightened this research work. The view of modern scholars are debated upon on the basis of the findings referred to above.

In this connection, I also examined certain published documents such as Administration Reports, various gazetteers, district records, Reports such as the Line System Enquiry Committee Report, Report on the Province of Assam, Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, Papers relating to the formation of the Province of Assam, selection of records on various Assamese issues. Various Memoires, Accounts and Journals have also been studied not only in English but in Assamese and Bengali languages also. Other than the primary sources, secondary source materials in the form of books have also been dealt with. The details of all the above source materials utilised for the purpose of research has been provided in the Bibliography of the thesis.

Aims and Objectives: Aim is to redefine the immigration problem and to probe the solutions which provide respite and otherwise (if any). It has generated a long debate among scholars and politicians. Our research focused on Muslim Bengali and Hindu Bengali immigration from Bengal.

We have examined the making and remaking of the boundaries of Assam. How was a line drawn on a map become a tangible geographical
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reality? How was it institutionalized and administered? How did it affect the people who lived in its vicinity? Therefore, our study goes into the historical antecedents of migration into Assam. Significant migration with subsequent serious socio-political ramifications in Assam took place when, the migration of the East Bengal peasants to Assam's vast waste land.

Having given this background, we then turn to the theme of partition and identity. Here we have taken up the issue of partition of 1947 when East Bengal was transformed into East Pakistan and its consequences to the life in its vicinity. Such as, the riot of 1950 and 'Nehru-Liyaquat' agreement (1950), issuing of National Register of Citizens (N.R.C) by the government of India etc.

A substantial section of thesis deals with of identity and identification in the light of the constitution of citizenship. To deal with these problems, there are many legislations, namely the Immigration (expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 and the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 etc. We have examined how issue of language and culture entered into question of identity. How do power relations define the notion of a cultural mainstream? What constitutes the issue of assimilation?

In our thesis we have also examined the impact of the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971 in North-East India on the light of 'Indira-Mujib' agreement (1972). Thereafter, we discussed, in 1980's ‘Anti-foreigners’ movement spearheaded by All Assam Students Union (AASU). How did a student's movement become a popular social movement? How did the
movement end up? All these queries are to be scrutinized in course of research.

**This thesis has been divided into six chapters:**

**CHAPTER – I**

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter traces the historical and political geography through the making and remaking of the boundaries of Assam. Ever since the formation of the Chief Commissioner’s Province of Assam in 1874, how the political and the geographical boundary of Assam have been transformed in various phases till modern time is being discussed in elaborate manner.

**CHAPTER-2**

**HISTORY AND POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION OF MUSLIMS IN ASSAM**

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse, how the farmer migrants from East Bengal was determinant in the consideration of the problem of settlement of waste-land and extension of general cultivation in Assam which was at first purely economic in nature, but later on became political.

**CHAPTER – III**

**PARTITION AND CREATION OF NATION STATES – 1947 TO 1950**

This chapter reviews how the partition of 1947, the creation of the Dominion of India and Pakistan and bifurcation of Sylhet led to the large scale refugee influx did not prove deterrent to immigration problem rather the communal bitterness had already been started between Hindus and Muslims
in India and Pakistan, which also reflected into the natural life of Assam.

CHAPTER – IV
LANGUAGE MOVEMENT – A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

In the chapter an attempt has been made to explore, how the East Bengal migrants created a crisis of identity amongst the indigenous Assamese community which led to widespread riots between the Assamese and the Bengali over the official language and medium of instruction issue.

CHAPTER- V
BANGLADESH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCE AS REFUGEE INFLUX IN THE EAST

This chapter deals with the Liberation War of Bangladesh which led to large scale of refugees asylum and their settlement in the light of ‘Indira-Mujib' Agreement in March 1972.

CHAPTER – VI
ANTI-FOREIGNERS MOVEMENT AND ASSAM ACCORD - 1985

This chapter will discuss the six-year campaign of Anti-foreigners movement on the pretext of political expression of the economic deprivation and settlement of the problem as per term of the ‘Assam Accord’ and its implications.