CHAPTER – V

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMMIGRATION
With the acquisition of erstwhile Ahom Kingdom in 1826 by the British the process of making Assam Province began. This was accomplished in five phases. first, the development of Assam division within Bengal Presidency (1826-1874), second, the Chief Commissionership of Assam under direct control of the Governor-General (1874-1905), third, Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam under a Lieutenant-Governor (1905-1912), fourth, restored Chief Commissionership of Assam (1912-1921), and finally, the Province of Assam under a Governor (1921-1947). However, this process was followed by large scale immigration from different parts of India, the contribution of Bengal being the highest number. The immigration process thus remained a very important phenomenon for many decades from the very beginning of the British Colonial Rule.

As stated earlier, the British created Assam a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual polyglot province. But this region itself was a multi-ethnic one at the time of the British annexation. There were Tai-Ahoms and the Tibeto-Burman Bodo, Kachari, Mishing, Moran, Barahis, Chutias, Tiwa, Koch, Mech, Rabha and many other plain tribals, besides Assamese speaking people. For exigencies -political, social, economic etc. the Ahom monarchs encouraged immigration from Bengal. They were allowed to settle in Assam if their services contributed to the material and cultural prosperity of the people. The Muslims were allowed, as H.K. Barpujari observed, to settle in Assam
as their services were required in "deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, carving of inscriptions, minting of coins, embroidery works, painting with fast colours, carpentry, sword and gun making and the manufacture of gun powder" The Muslims formed a very useful community as tailors, braziers, silk weavers and other artisans and, thus, were recognized as citizen.³ The Marwari merchants were allowed to setup golas or depots at several places in lower Assam for facilitating the commercial transactions with Bengal.⁴ In order to subvert the Mughal authority the Ahom king Pratap Singh gave political asylum to those of anti-Mughal elements.⁵ Rudra Singh imported artificers from Bengal. The bridge over Namdang river was constructed according to Wade, by the workmen imported from Bengal as local mansions were unskilled. Rudra Singh himself embraced Hindu religion and became an orthodox Hindu. He summoned Krishnaram Bhattacharjee, a famous Mahanta of Sakta sect from Malipota, near Sonitpur in Nadia district.⁶ His son and successor Siv Singh even made Hinduism the state religion and himself initiated by a Sakta priest brought from Nawadwip. The Mughal invaders were accompanied by some Sikhs who settled themselves in certain localities of Assam. Some Burmese soldiers after the treaty of Yandaboo settled at Singimari in Goalpara district. The commercial treaty of 1793, signed between Captain Welsh and Ahom King Gaurinath Singh, opened up the gate to the merchants of Bengal to enter into the interior of the province of Assam.⁷ They rendered contributory service to
the welfare of the state. However, it is evident that the immigration process is an older phenomenon due to diverse factors. When the British annexed the erstwhile Ahom Kingdom there already existed a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual composition of society besides Assamese, Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs, Marwaris, tribals and soon.

With the occupation of Assam by the British in 1826 a new chapter commenced in the annals of immigration. The people from neighbouring districts of Bengal viz. Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensingh and Rangpur began to immigrate. In fact, the British created a new administrative division known as Assam Division within Bengal Presidency with newly acquired territory of Ahom Kingdom which was a small state within Assam Province. Gradually, the hill areas bordering the Brahmaputra Valley were added to this division between the period from 1826 to 1867 by phases as and when those were annexed in parts. It was placed under a Commissioner within Bengal Presidency. So, the creation of Assam Division may be attributed as the first factor responsible for immigration.

The newly established administrative set up in the line of Bengal administration in a new area necessitated the services of the people trained in the art of administration of the Company. At that time English or Persian was the court language of the Presidency. By 1831 Persian language was replaced by Bengali language as the court language of Assam because of
the fact that replacement of a Persian scribe, when he was on leave or left the service, was very difficult and too costly.\textsuperscript{10} As the trained people were not available locally the choice fell ultimately on the people of Bengal to run the whole administration. As H.K. Barpujari said the \textit{amlahs} of Bengal replaced the earlier aristocracy as because the latter were incapable to discharge the duties entrusted with them properly. The new comers ousted the local officials more easily when they could make the revenue and judicial departments more or less their sole preserve. Since Bengali language became the medium of instruction the services of the new comers became indispensable to impart lessons in Bengali in almost all the Government schools, whether Anglo-Vernacular or Vernacular for local teachers were not available in adequate numbers. Moreover, the British occupation also opened up avenues in trade and the traders, particularly the Marwaris, established their control over the trade. However, the new comers, in due course, many of whom settled down in this new area permanently.\textsuperscript{11}

The process of immigration became more intensified from when Assam division was elevated to a Chief Commissioner's Province in 1874. For the first time Assam became a Province in British India under the direct control of Governor General of India. The new province included (i) The Assam division (consisting of Assam proper or the Brahmaputra Valley districts, the Naga hills and the Khasi-Jaintia hills); (ii) Two districts-Sylhet and Cachar, from Dacca division and (iii) Goalpara and Garo hills-the two other districts
of the Cooch Behar division. Till 1874 all these districts and divisions were under Bengal Presidency. By 1898 Lushai hills district was included within the province making the new province a more cosmopolitan one. Shillong was made the capital of this new province. It was away and equidistant from the two valleys. The creation of this new province (separating from Bengal Presidency the three Bengali speaking districts of Goalpara, Sylhet and Cachar), according to J.B. Bhattacharjee, was the first partition of Bengal as because of the fact that it had caused the separation of three large Bengali speaking districts of Goalpara, Sylhet and Cachar which were geographically, historically and culturally integral part of Bengal since early times. However, the newly created province was larger than formerly Assam division. The new provincial districts and sub-divisional headquarters required large number of employees. As a result not only employees and their families but also traders and professionals of various kinds were invited to come. Although language issue was resolved in 1873 when Assamese language recognised as the court language and the Vernacular for education in Assam proper, the Bengali schools developed side by side with the Assamese schools in many places. Secondly, Bengali continued to be the language of court and education in the added districts of Bengal. All these necessities were fulfilled in this new province, mostly by the immigrant people. At that time Sylhet was educationally more advanced than any other in the province. As a result, the educated youths of Sylhet enjoyed
lion's share in various Government departments and other opportunities. Shillong, thus, gradually emerged as a 'Bengali island.' Another significant feature of this new province was the development of internal migration which contributed much to further influx.\textsuperscript{15} It is evident that the population of the new province increased manifold due to immigration and this was due to the necessities created by the development of new province. Thus, the elevation of Assam to Chief Commissioner Province was a significant factor responsible for immigration.

After 1874 another partition of Bengal took place in 1905 by which some more eastern districts of Bengal were transferred to Assam province. The new province so created was known as Eastern Bengal and Assam with Dacca as its capital. Sir, J.B. Fuller, former Chief Commissioner of Assam became the first Lieutenant-Governor of the new province. It consisted of all districts under the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Dacca division, the Chittagong division (including Hill Tract) and the Rajshahi division (including Cooch Behar but excluding Malda district) Its area was 1,06,540 square miles and a population of 3,15,28,433 of which 2,72,72,895 were Bengalees and only 42,55,538 were others (including Assamese).\textsuperscript{16}

The partition of Bengal was followed by anti-partition agitation and British Government ultimately had to annual it by 1911.\textsuperscript{17} So, the period from 1905 to 1911 was earmarked for the greatest number of migrants that
entered in the Brahmaputra Valley. This influx was mainly Muslim agriculturist from Bengal districts of Mymensing, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur as evinced from Census Report of 1911. Between 1901 and 1911 the number of immigrants as per Census Report of 1911 was 80,309. The immigration of farm settlers from Eastern Bengal districts of Dacca, Mymensing, Pabna and Rangpur between the period of 1905 and 1915 was about 70,000 souls registered to have entered the province.

However, partition of Bengal of 1905 was an added factor responsible for immigration in a massive way. The large scale influx after 1905 was a sudden one. Already Assam Valley included, by dint of the creation of Chief Commissioner's province, a sizeable Bengalee population while by the partition of 1905 a number of Bengali-speaking districts were transferred from Bengal Presidency to the new province. The people of the transferred districts were linguistically and culturally homogenous with the existing Bengali speaking people in Assam. The partition of Bengal tagged Assam with Bengal and from the datas, as stated, it is evident that the new province became a Bengalee majority province. The creation of new province developed inter-state migration with the result that there was no hindrance for immigration and also no restriction to settle in any part of the state. During the period from 1905 to 1911 the agriculturist from Eastern Bengal, particularly the Muslims, under direct official management migrated to Assam in a massive scale. The Marwari and Gujrati traders contributed a significant
number to the fold of immigration. The majority immigrants in small-scale trade or shop-keeping were from Bengal and Bihar while the white color job sector was almost a monopoly of the Bengali Hindus. Thus, the population increased without immigration from outside Assam. This trend of immigration and migration in a massive-scale remained unabated in the years that followed.

With the conquest of Assam by the British in 1826 Assam became a part of Pan-Indian economic space. The policy of revenue maximisation envisaged by the British acted vigorously to achieve the policy of exploitation. In this regard Assam provided ample scope. As a part of its policy of revenue maximisation the British Government attached special importance to the development of agricultural sector for the economy of Assam was predominantly an agricultural one. However, the British Government inherited a very scanty population geography which was inconducive to achieve its goal. The Government, now, adopted the policy of encouraging the immigrants from outside whom lands on liberal terms were offered to settle permanently in the Brahmaputra Valley where fellow land was abundant.

Gunabhiram said there was 2.4 million of people in Assam before 1769. This figure was decimated by the civil wars (1769-1806) and the Burmese invasions (1817-24) and also due to the ruinous effects of opium
on the people. The population, thus, came down to less than one million by 1830. The recurring diseases, as stated earlier, like cholera, small-pox and particularly the kala-a-zar epidemic, which came to the notice first by 1883 in Goalpara district contributed much to the decimation of population. This kala-a-zar (black fever) entered Assam proper in 1888 and it spread thereafter throughout Assam. It is also stated that the population of Goalpara subdivision decreased by 18 percent and that of Kamrup district by 1.6 percent during the decade 1881-91. Between 1891-1901 the population of Kamrup decreased 7.1 percent, Darrang 8 percent, Mongoldoi 9 percent and that of Nowgong, being the highest, 24.8 percent. The indigenous population, particularly the tribals, were most hard hit. The merciless effect of kala-a-zar that caused high death tolls in Nowgong district, leading to maximum fall in revenue is evident from account given by Deputy Commissioner as follows:

"The state of the district can hardly be realised by any one who has not travelled throughout it, and been into villages. Deserted basti sites are common; a few of them in such cases removed elsewhere, but most stuck to their houses till they died. In Lalung and Hojai villages, I believe hardly any one elsewhere and these two tribes lost very heavily. There used to be numbers of Hojai’s in the neighbourhood of Kharikhana; almost all have died, ten or twelve Hojai villages at the foot of the hills near Doboka have completely disappeared, and Doboka itself has shrunk from an important
trade centre to a miserable hamlet."

"In many instances, an old man or woman, or two or three small children, are all that is left of a large family. In Nowgong, Roha and Puranigudam are empty spaces where formerly houses stood, and the same sort of things can be seen all over the district. So much land has gone out of cultivation that it has hardly any value except in the town, near Silghat, and in the Kondohi mauza. A man will not buy land when it can be had for the asking."

"I find that the results of the census are amply borne out by the falling off of the land revenue demand. I have examined them, mauza by mauza, and they varied in the same proportion everywhere." It is also evident that such a state of affairs turned Assam into a labour short economy.

The existence of vast tract of cultivable land in Assam during British period attached the attention of the British administrators. The soil of Assam was very fertile. It could easily grow the crops like paddy, wheat, cotton, tea, tobacco and banana and jute and mustard in low-lying and inundated areas. Yet revenue did not increase due to labour short economy. As stated earlier, the indigenous Assamese people were averse to produce more. They were indolent in nature and were quite content to cultivate nearly enough for their own use without caring to produce a surplus. The British Government had to import food grains to feed on the growing population.
In 1873 about 3 lacs mounds of rice was imported while during eighties and early nineties it rose to 4 to 5 lacs mounds per year. It was a great inconvenience faced by the Government in maximising revenue. As regard to the scope of settlement of more people in Assam the Census Superintendent of 1901 estimated that "there is room in the Brahmaputra Valley for another four million persons." Gunabhiram Barua estimated that no less than a million people could be easily settled from outside on the waste lands of Assam. At this state of affairs the Government, in order to achieve their own colonial design of exploitation, had no alternative but to encourage immigration.

From the very beginning of their rule the British Government officials advocated immigration into the province with the view that the paucity of population retarded the increase of land revenue. Captain Butler, the collector Nowgong stated thus: "Unless Assam is colonized from Bengal, there is no prospect or hope of the province being brought fully under cultivation for centuries to come." His main consideration was that land revenue be increased by cultivating land more with the help or immigrants. Likewise, Mills indirectly also favoured immigration when he says thus: "In a country like Assam, where there is a super abundance of land and a deficiency of labour, I strongly deprecate the granting of wasteland to natives of the province." More or less in the like manners, as stated earlier, the other British officials like Captain Jenkins, Henry Hopkins, Porteous, Denzil
Ibbetson and others stressed upon immigration to maximise revenue. Even the enlightened section of the nascent Assamese middle class advocate the scheme of immigration. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (Sept. 1829 June 1859), who was a powerful member of the rising Assamese middle class and a loyalist official of the Colonial Government highly favoured the scheme of immigration. He had two consideration in this regard, first, the improvement of agriculture and the consequent increase of land revenue and secondly, the general civilisation and enlightenment of the country, while Gunabhiram Barua favoured immigration on enumeration of three factors: first, existence of cheap and fertile land; second, attracting earning opportunity for skilled labour and craftsman in view of local manpower shortage and third, possibilities of matrimonial alliance with local families. Some members of the Assamese middle class led by Durgadhar Sarma Barua and Dhelaram Deodhai Phukan in their memorial to Lord Northbrook repeated the appeal of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan to take effective measures for the importation of labour from Oudh and North Bihar as they were superior class of labour than Chotanagpur labourers. In their words; "We would therefore beg most humbly to suggest that your Excellency may be pleased to bring up here the redundant population of the provinces of Oudh, the Belgium of India and North Bihar. To effect this purpose it will be necessary for the Government to incur little expense and to grant tracts of uloo and borota (grass) high lands lying waste on all sides, revenue free for a period of, say,
ten years, but subject afterwards to the usual rates. This description of land is not taken up by the existing population for the cultivation of the ordinary crops of the country, but it will be highly suited to the high land crops (wheat, barley & c-) upon which the natives of those provinces subsists."\textsuperscript{33} It is evident that every effort either by the British Government or nascent Assamese middle class for induction of outsiders to Assam was meant for reclamation of land leading to the maximisation of revenue.

On the other hand, it is relevant to note the density of population of Eastern Bengal, particularly Mymensing district which was nearest to Assam next to Goalpara. From the article titled 'Bengal Peasants-stream of Emigration to Assam' published in the Journal named "Bengalee" on 22nd July 1924 it is ascertained that the density of population in Eastern Bengal had reached a saturating point and emigration was solving the problem of acute congestion.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, Mymensing was the most populous of all the Bengal districts. It witness that by 1874 the total population of the district alone was 23,51,700 which was 4,35,707 more than the total population of all the districts of the Brahmaputra Valley. In Mymensing district about half out of 4½ million acres of land was cultivated and the other half included waste and other categories of land whereas in Assam the total cultivable waste land was 67,79,978 acres of which only 12,58,277 acres were cultivated. Further the partition and separation of holding in Bengal districts naturally affected the cultivators who were no longer able
to support their families with a small plot of land falling to their lot. So, it is plausible to note that under such a situation the cultivators had less paying capacity which retarded the revenue maximisation policy. The colonisation of the Brahmaputra Valley by the immigrants from Bengal had served two purposes: first, it relieved the over burden of population in Bengal districts and second, by settling them in the Brahmaputra Valley land was reclaimed leading to the maximisation of revenue. However, the colonisation of Assam, during the period under review, was done in three stages.

The first stage of colonisation was from 1826 to 1874 when Assam was made an administrative division under Bengal Presidency. During this period a group of people, as stated earlier, came to Assam. The creation of Assam Division opened up avenues of employment in offices or trade etc. The people from neighbouring districts of Bengal such as, Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensing, Rangpur and other parts of India began to immigrate, most of whom settled down permanently and became native or domiciled in course of time. This type of immigration was known as inter-divisional immigration. The second phase from 1874 was a crucial one. As started already, Assam division was separated from Bengal Presidency when it was elevated to a province under a Chief Commissioner by 1874 and the system continued till 1905. This creation of Chief Commissioner's Province was considered, according to J.B. Bhattacharjee, as the first partition of Bengal and it was done as a means to relieve the Government of Bengal of the burden of a
large territory and was placed under direct control of the Governor-General-in-Council. The new province included new areas, besides areas under Assam division and for the provincial administration a large number of employees required. Thus was started internal migration which continued with greater intensity within the province. The Government then encouraged the immigration of peasants and labourers. The people of Sylhet district at that time was educationally more advanced and thus enjoyed large share in the Government services. The provincial capital consequently emerged as an island of the people of Sylhet origin. The period from partition of Bengal in 1905 till its annulment in 1911 may be termed as the third phase of colonisation during period of our study. The new province emerged as a consequence of partition, came to be known as Eastern Bengal and Assam under a Lieutenant Governor. This phase of immigration was very crucial from the point of view of farmers' migration, particularly Muslim peasants from different districts of Bengal. As stated already, this partition elevated the process of inter-state migration. The people, now, increased in the Brahmaputra Valley without immigration from outside. This influx was very steady and rapid and also a sudden one. There was no bar to settle down anywhere in the Brahmaputra Valley. In the Census Report of 1901 not a single person from Mymensingh district was recorded in Assam. The char areas of Goalpara including south Salmara, Lakhipur and Bilashipara, attracted most of the industrious agriculturist. On the other hand, the
provincial Government treated immigration as an economic necessity. According P.G. Melitus, Revenue Member, the Valley of the Brahmaputra would provide a home in future for their surplus population. Accordingly immigrants were encouraged to the *chars* of Goalpara which were properties of private *Zamindars* as well as to the Government lands in the Eastern *Duars*. Khan Bahadur Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Dacca while discussing the Financial Statement for 1907-08 in the council of the new province urged the Government to encourage cultivators from Mymensing, Patna and other districts to migrate to the virgin tracts of Assam.³⁷ Men from Mymensing district advanced to Goalpara in large numbers. The Census Report of 1911 was the first document that witnessed the extra-ordinary influx of farmers from Bengal districts of Mymensing, Patna, Bogra and Rangpur and the migrants immediately occupied all the available lands suitable for cultivation. These Muslims were farm labourers and cultivators who came at first as single adventures but later on began to settle by families.³⁸ During the next decade of the twentieth century these Muslim people spread to other districts of Lower Assam and thus formed an important element in all the four lower and central districts. According to Census Report 1911 the total Muslim immigrants numbered 2,58,000 in the Brahmaputra Valley and 6,000 in the Hills and they alone formed nearly twenty percent of the total population in Goalpara.³⁹ However, it is evident from the above that large tract of waste lands, particularly the *char* lands of
Goalpara, came under cultivation which consequently increased the revenue of the state. Thus, the policy of revenue maximisation may be termed as the key factor responsible for immigration.

One of the significant features of the British rule in Assam was colonial innovation which was composed of tea plantation and extraction of coal and oil. The growth of this modern sector may be regarded as a significant factor responsible for immigration. As stated earlier, the discovery of the indigenous tea plant in Upper Assam in 1823 by Mr. C.A. Bruce opened up a new phase of commercial interest to the British Government. Earlier the supply of tea was a Chinese monopoly. But after Bruce's "seeds of indigenous stock" was experimented it was discovered that the indigenous tea was superior than Chinese tea. In fact, this discovery of tea plant was the single most factor that influenced the company in favour of annexation of the province.40 Tea culture was firmly established in Assam by December 1837 when Assam tea was first successfully manufactured.41 On the other hand, the Charter Act of 1833 ceased East India Company to function as a commercial interest and in its place the British Industrial interest established its ascendancy. By this Charter, the Europeans for the first time were allowed to hold land in India on a large scale, either on long term lease or with free hold rights. It paved the path of colonial capitalism in Assam.42 However, all the developments in the subsequent years centred round tea and the Assam Company. Throughout the nineteenth century tea played the most
significant role in Assam economy.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the tea industry began to develop rapidly. Plantation as a labour-incentive industry required more and more labourers. Another feature of it was that like all plantation it was initially setup in sparsely populated regions. So, the greatest impediment faced by the planters in culturing tea was acute shortage of labour.

As stated already, Assam was sparsely populated. The recurring diseases like cholera, small-pox etc. and particularly the epidemic of *kala-a-zar* further aggravated the population geography. This epidemic hit most the indigenous people, particularly the tribals. The apathy of the local people to wage labour further complicated the situation. So, the planters had to depend on immigrant labourers. The tea labourers, now, were brought by the planters as bonded labourers in a planned manner from outside the province. The labourers were recruited in two ways: first by a class of agents or middle men and the second method was to recruit directly. However, the total number of immigrant labourers to work in the tea gardens, according to Census Report 1901, was estimated at 6,45,000. That is to say, 83 percent of the total immigrants came as garden *coolies* though a considerable portion had since been absorbed into the general population. The main recruitment areas were Bengal 64.9% N.W. Province 14.0%, Central Province 10.8%, Madras 2.7%, Nepal 2.7%, Rewa 1.3% and others
2.5%. Half of the total number of recruits came from Burdwan, Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Thus, it is evident that throughout the nineteenth century tea remained the biggest factor responsible for immigration.

Simultaneously, two other labour-incentive industries—coal and petroleum which contributed much to the induction of outsiders to this province. As stated earlier, coal was first discovered by Lieutenant Wilcox, the revenue surveyor posted at Sadiya, in April 1825. He reported the existence of coal beds in the neighbourhood hills between Disang river and Borhat. It was followed by the discovery of coal beds in several other places like Supkong, Suffrai, Sijuk and Ruok in Garo Hills, Nambua, Namrup, Jaipur, Dikhow, Namsang, Makum, Nazira, Jhanzi, Desoi, Ledo, Tikok and so on. We first hear the extraction of coal in the valley of Suffrai, a tributary of Disang in 1828 when a thousand mounds were raised. With the growth of tea industries the demand for local coal became considerable. Later on, Steamer services, Railways and other industries magnified the necessity of using local coal. But one of the serious impediments in the development of coal industry was the supply of labour. Owing to sparse population the coal industry too, like the tea industry, had to recruit workers from other parts of India. In the beginning a futile attempt was made to engage Nagas in the underground work and so Indian mine workers from Bengal coal fields were engaged at first. Then the colliery labourers were recruited from the United Provinces, Bihar and the Central Provinces,
Makran, Peshwar and even from China. Later on, recruitment was restricted to Santhals, Borahs, Bournis, Dhangers etc. as they were the only classes suited to work in the mines. Thus, a large number of immigrants came from outside the province to work in the coal fields in Assam.

The discovery of oil, on the other hand, was an accidental one. Lieutenant Wilcox first noticed the existence of oil at Supkong near the coal bed where petroleum rose to the surface. Oil was discovered in several other places like Namrup, Borhat, Jaipur, Naharpung, Makum, Hukanjuri, Telpung, Babu Barpung etc. All these oil wells were situated near the coal beds. The first attempt to struck oil was made by Goodenough at Naharpung in 1865 where a hand-dug well at the depth of 102 feet led to a dry well. The first successful mechanically drilled oil well in Asia was struck at Makum, near Margerita in March 1867 where oil was found at the depth of 118 feet. About 300 gallons of oil were collected from this well. However, like other labour incentive industries of tea and coal, the oil industry also had to depend on immigrant labour as the local Assamese and Bengali labourers were prone to disappear during the harvesting season with little certainty of return. A considerable number of labourers came to work in the oil wells. Their recruitment was made, as stated earlier, in two ways: first, directly and second through contractors. Thus, the industries of tea, coal and oil engaged the largest number of immigrant labourers during period under review.
Another aspect of British administration in Assam was colonial modernisation which acted as dominant factor responsible for immigration. With the occupation of Assam by the British Assam evidently became an integral part of Indian colony. Assam was made an administrative division within Bengal Presidency and thus traditional isolation of Assam came to an end.

The emergence of British administration in Assam was followed by the organisation of modern education. Earlier, that is to say during Ahom rule education was confined to priestly classes, scribes and a few others connected with the Government. Literary education was not necessary to the official aristocracy. After the British occupation some of the former officials were reinstated in the revenue and judicial departments and they bewildered the whole transaction at the mass of writing and thus proved not only incompetent but 'mere source of headache' to the European functionaries.\(^5\) Evidently, the British Government began to think otherwise. As stated earlier, Persian or English was the then court language and by 1831 Bengali in place of Persian was made the language of court as well as medium of instruction to the advantage of the British Government on the ground that it was very difficult and too costly to have a replacement when a Persian scribe was on leave or left the services. On the other hand, Lord William Bentinck by an Act made English the medium of instruction and in Assam Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, strongly urged upon
the Government to impart English education under supervision of local authorities at Sadar Stations: Goalpara, Gauhati, Nowgong, Darrang and Biswanath. Consequently, as stated already, a number of Bengali schools flourished. Simultaneously, English schools also began to establish and by 1872 six English schools were established in different places. Even after the resumption of the language issue in 1873 when Assamese was made vernacular, the establishment of Bengali and English schools and even Colleges did not stop during the period of our study. However, the fact was that the local teachers were not available in adequate numbers and secondly, to impart education in a language which was not their own. As a result, large number of teachers from Bengal immigrated to Assam to impart education in almost all the Government schools, whether Anglo-vernacular or vernacular and in the beginning they were almost all Bengalees. Simultaneously, the Assamese youth went to Calcutta to learn. They became conscious of ideals and other necessities and so the Assamese middle class became ardent supporters of immigration. Once the induction was started it remained continued during the whole period of our study.

The process of exploitation necessitated an improved communication network. In the early years of British rule the lack of improved communication network retarded large scale immigration. Whatever recruitments were made was very inhuman. During the period from 15 December 1859 to 21 November 1861, there were 2,272 recruits made by Assam Company from
outside. Out of them 250 or 11 percent died on the way.\textsuperscript{54} This cost the process of exploitation highly. From M'cosh statement in 1860 we come to know that communication between Calcutta and Gauhati was maintained by large boat which took between six and seven weeks to reach.\textsuperscript{55} In fifties of the nineteenth century tea industries expanded rapidly along with other industries and thus the planters faced grave problem for transportation of labour. The first Government steamer service was started in 1847 and more regularly from 1861 to ply up and down the Brahmaputra. Recommendations were made by Mills for the extension of steamer services to Dibrugarh as the Brahmaputra was navigable throughout the year. Campbell also convinced the Government as to the necessity of a regular steamer service from Goalundo to Dibrugarh. By 1884 a daily mail service was introduced between Dhubri and Dibrugarh.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, there was enormous development between Assam and outside world and that facilitated the influx of outsiders more easier.

On the otherhand, the progress in the development of road communication was slow due to the serious handicaps of nature and the reluctance of the Government. With the growth of industries proper road communication became important from the point of view of fast movement of goods, labourers etc. In 1836 for facilitating the military movement at all seasons from the security point of view was urgently felt. However, the Public Works Department in 1865 had taken step to construct a road through
the whole length of the Brahmaputra. It was along the south bank of the Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dhubri. It was followed by a number of construction of roads in various parts of the province. The first motor car made its appearance in Assam in 1904 when Newton Gill, a planter, brought his Darrac to Assam. However, though poor was the development of road communications but the fact is that Assam was connected by road communication with North Bengal which facilitated the influx process.

The railway communication was unknown to Assam until 1881. From the fifties of the nineteenth century the tea industries began to increase with extraordinary rapidity. Initially tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Jorhat were served by the river ports of Kokilamukh and Dibrugarh. But the problem arose when the tea industries expanded far beyond the river ways. The Sadiya road was unable to bear the burden of heavy load and it was almost impassable during the rainy season. On the otherhand, it became difficult to work in the coal beds in the Makum area. The fast movement of labourers to the spot was a difficult one. All these necessitated an alternative improved communication. Hence, the establishment of railway line for resolving the problem was thought. As a result, the Assam Railways and Trading Company established its first metre gauge locomotive extending from Steamer ghat to Jaipur road in Assam in May 1882. Two years later the coal fields of Upper Assam were connected by the railway lines. In 1885 the Jorhat Provincial Railway connected the tea gardens at Mariani and
Titabar with the river port at Kakilamukh while the Tezpur-Balipara Railway connected tea gardens with the Tezpur port. All these railway lines were meant for fast movement for tea and coal and not for the movement of passengers. It also remained totally aloof from the railway system of India. The formation of Assam-Bengal Railway in 1892 was a step forward to connect the province with the rest of India.\footnote{59} However, the construction of railways, being a labour incentive industry, necessitated the supply of labour which the pioneers had to depend on immigrant labourers. From the Census Report of 1901 it is evinced that a few thousands of immigrants came from the North-Western Provinces, the Central Provinces, Madras and Rewa to work on the railways under construction in the province.\footnote{60} Mention may be made here that, as stated earlier, these immigrant labourers, while working in the Hill sections, discovered Maibong, Dayang and Jhatinga valley suitable for settlement. The length of constructed railway lines was only 114 miles in 1891 which rose to 715 miles by 1902-03 and ten years later it extended over 870 miles.\footnote{61} So, all these improved communication made it possible to recruit thousand of labourers in remote tribal tracts. Particularly, the completion of Golakganj-Gauhati extension of the Eastern Bengal Railway by 1911 was followed by a dramatic increase of agriculturist from Eastern Bengal districts into the province.\footnote{62} Thus, railways played a dominant role in the process of immigration to this province.
With the development of industries like tea, coal and oil as well as communication network like steamer, road and railway services new townships began to grow simultaneously during the period under review. Under the colonial rule all the district and sub-divisional headquarters were converted into towns and even became the centre of commerce. Most of the headquarters were located nearly the industries of tea, coal and oil. So, Jaipur became the centre of trade and industry. Gauhati, on the other hand, was the most important station in the Brahmaputra Valley and had become the gateway of Assam. It also became an important centre of trade in north-east India. Barpeta was the next important town in Kamrup district. Several other district headquarters were such as, Goalpara, Dhubri, Barpeta, Nowgong, Tezpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Digboi and so on. The Government established municipalities to run the necessary administrative works. However, the fact is that all these centres were crowded with the immigrant population. These immigrants were service professionals, traders, small-scale traders or shopkeepers etc. and almost all of them were attracted by the district and sub-divisional towns both in the hills and plains including provincial capital in Shillong. As stated already, Shillong emerged as a 'Bengali island'. However, it is implied that the immigrant people were at the root of the development of urbanisation. These developments created conditions for the people in other parts of India to immigrate in large numbers. They came as employees under Government
and in private sector and also for trade and commerce. These categories of immigrants continued during the British period and even after the independence of India.
Notes and References:


2. *ibid* P 12


4. Barpujari, H.K. *Assam: In the Days of the Company*, Gauhati 1980 P 295; also *ibid*


7. Barpujari, H.K., n.4 *opcit* PP 294-97

8. *ibid*


10. Barpujari, H.K. n.4 *opcit* PP 297-98 quoted in Bhattacharjee, J.B. *opcit* P 92

11. *ibid* PP 292, 297-99

12. Bhattacharjee J.B. *opcit* PP 79-80

13. *ibid* P 55

14. *ibid* PP 94-95
15. ibid P 99
16. ibid P 60
17. ibid
22. ibid P 123
29. Kalita, R.C., "Immigration to Assam: British Policy and Assamese Middle class (1826-1900)" *NEIHA Proceeding*, Shillong 1993 P 181
30. *ibid*

31. *ibid* P 182

32. Hilaly, S., *opcit* P 226

33. Kalita, R.C., *opcit* P 182

34. Kar, M., *opcit* P 10

35. *ibid* PP 8-10

36. *ibid* P 9

37. *ibid* P 16

38. *ibid* P 11

39. *ibid*


41. *ibid*


43. Goswami, P., *opcit* P 78

44. Allen, B.C., n.25 chapter III *opcit* P 34

45. *ibid* vol. IV Part I P 33 cited by Goswami, P., *opcit* P 80

46. Goswami, P., *opcit* P 101

47. *ibid* P 103

48. *ibid* PP 110-113

220
49. ibid P 124
51. ibid
53. Bhattacharjee, J.B., *opcit* PP 91-92
55. M’cosh, J., *Topography of Assam* P 82
56. Goswami, P., *opcit* PP 145-48
57. ibid PP 149-55; Guha, A., n.26 *opcit* P 187
58. ibid PP 155-56
59. ibid PP 158-59
60. Allen, B.C., n.44 *opcit*
61. Goswami, P., *opcit* P 160
62. Hilaly, S., *opcit* P 229
64. Bhattacharjee, J.B., *opcit* P 123