CHAPTER V

POLITICAL PROBLEMS

There are many political problems of the Muslims of Char area. As a result of this, the Char area Muslims of Assam are still in backward condition in all respects. These problems will be discussed in two divisions- (1) Common political problems and (2) Specific political problems. The common political problems are those problems which have been facing by all char area Muslims of Assam since their settlement in the land. On the other hand, specific problems are those problems which are confined only to the Char area Muslims of Barpeta district. The main common political problems of the community are -

1. Introduction of Line System
2. Immigrant Identity
3. Pakistani Issue
4. Bideshi or Bangladeshi Issue
5. D Voters Issue
6. ISI Allegation

The main specific political problems of the Char area Muslims of Barpeta district are –

1. Lack of political awareness among masses
2. Lack of able leader
3. Lack of organized political platform
4. Lack of Female leadership
5. Lack of Educated rural leader
6. Political Favourism
7. Money power
The Common Political Problems of the Char Area Muslims of Assam are discussed below:

1. **Introduction of Line System:**

   The introduction of the Line System in early twentieth century by the British to segregate the Bengali Muslims from acquiring high land in Assam,\(^2\) can be regarded as the first political problem. To abolish the Line System and to provide free access in regard to acquiring land by the Bengali Muslims, a mass agitation had been started under the leadership of Moulavi Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, popularly known as Bhasani Moulavi.\(^3\) The agitation ended at last without fruitful results which has already been discussed in the preceding chapter.

   Here to mention that during the agitation the ancestors of the present-day Char area Muslims raised voice demanding the inclusion of Lower Assam including Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) into erstwhile East Pakistan,\(^4\) now Bangladesh. The indigenous Assamese people expressed dissatisfaction at such kind of intriguing nature of the Bengali Muslims of the Char areas for Assam’s inclusion into erstwhile East Pakistan.

   It can be mentioned here that due to the impact of the Line System the habitations of the Bengali Muslims of Assam were confined to low land riverine areas. However, at present, the process of settlement in high land by the well to do people of the community has been started throughout Assam.

2. **Immigrant Identity**

   The Char area Muslims of Assam are regarded as immigrant Muslims. The immigrant identity of these Muslims is not only a social problem but also a political problem.\(^5\) Question may be arisen in regards calling these Muslims as immigrant. Could
inter-state migration be really called immigration? To answer this question, the meaning of the word immigration should be discussed. According to Oxford dictionary, the meaning of immigrant is – a person who comes to live permanently in a country from a foreign country. According to Anglo-Assamese Dictionary, the meaning of immigrant is – a person who migrates into a country for permanent residence. In the light of these two meanings, it would be unfair calling the Char area Muslims as immigrant Muslims. Because, the ancestors of present-day Char dwellers were not foreigners but belonged to the same country at the time of their arrival in Assam. They came from Mymenshing and Pabna of erstwhile East Bengal, later on, Eastern Bengal and Assam a newly formed province of the British India. However, the term immigrant was used to mean the Bengali Muslim farmers coming from East Bengal without a perception of the future implication.

On 5 March, 1929, E.B. Shaw, Deputy Commissioner, Nowgaon, issued the order regarding immigrant as mentioned below.

"The word immigrant will include persons from all districts of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the United Province and the Surama Valley but will not include Tea garden Coolies and ex-coolies". Thus, it was the British people who used the word immigrant to mean the people coming to Assam from Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and the United Province. Later on, the word 'immigrant' was used large extently only to mean the Muslim cultivating people coming from erstwhile East Bengal. It is why the present-day Char area Muslims only are vehemently meant as immigrant although, the British people used to call all people coming from Bihar, Orissa and other parts of the country as immigrant.

Here, worth mentioning is that it would be fair to call the present-day char area Muslims as internally displaced Mulsims instead of immigrant Muslims for the fact that
their ancestors belonged to the same country under British rule at the time of their arrival in Assam.

The migration of Muslim farmers, from East Bengal especially from Mymensingh district increased Muslim population in Assam. In 1931 the number of Muslim in Assam excluding Sylhet district had risen to 943352. The total number of Muslims in 1941 was 1305962. The migrants acquired land by subsequent purchase amounting to hundreds of hectares. But it must be observed that in 1915 the Assam Government had proposed a set of settlement rules putting some restrictions on transfer of land to new comers. The intention was the safeguard of the interests of the future Assamese people and also to avoid conflicts between the two groups of people who were not quite familiar with each other. But there arose vehement protests from the Assamese themselves who complained that any restriction would adversely affect permanent heritable and transferable character of the tenure.

Saadulla adopted a liberal attitude and opened out some of the surplus land to the Muslim cultivators. The policy coupled with the Grow More Food Campaign sponsored by the Central Government during world war II was supposed to have inflated the number of the Muslims with the ultimate object of making it a Muslim majority province and inclusion in East Pakistan. In fact, the Muslim League demanded Assam for its inclusion in Pakistan. The demand was partially fulfilled as the most populous and Muslim majority district of Sylhet, with the exception of a small part, was cleverly included in East Pakistan after the so-called Referendum of Sylhet in 1947.

The increase of the Muslim cultivators created a fear psychosis in the minds of the indigenous Assamese people which was reflected in the census report, 1931. T.S. Mullan the census commissioner wrote in his census report—"the most important event
during the last twenty five years, an event, moreover, while seems likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and destroy more surely than did Burmese invaders in 1820. The whole structure and civilization has been the invasion of the vast horde of Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims, and particularly from Mymenshin.

This report of T.S Mullan intensified the fear of the Assamese people in one hand and it created a hostile attitude in their minds towards the Muslims on the other. This hostility of the indigenous people towards the char area Muslims has been going on till to-day.

The Assam Foreigners Movement started by the AASU in 1979 aiming at detecting and deporting all foreigners irrespective of caste, community and religion was turned in the long run and the Char area Muslims were targeted as foreigners on alleged lakhs of illegal entrants living in Char area of Assam. This kind of partisan allegation on the Indian citizens without any justification bears a hostile attitude towards the Char area Muslims. Here it may be mentioned that the illegal entrants whoever may be irrespective of caste, community and religion should be identified and deported for the safe guard of the interest of the future Assamese people and greater Assamese nation.

The following figures given by the Government of Assam regarding detection and deportation of illegal migrants under the Foreigners (Tribunals) order, 1964 between December 1985 and January 1987 show how Indian citizens have been barassed in the name of foreigners.

a. Number of cases investigated by the police 245167
b. Number of cases referred to Tribunals 77771
c. Number of persons declared Foreigners 528

The above figures show that only 0.22 percent of the complaint could be substantiated.

The char area Muslims of Brahamputra Valley have been a matter of concern for indigenous Assamese people since the settlement of the latter in Assam. Some
nationalistic Assamese people were of the imaginary perceptions that the numerical strength of the Bengali Muslim farmers would jeopardize the former’s linguistic, social and cultural entity in near future.\textsuperscript{20} This perception which reacted in indigenous people’s minds since the settlement of the industrious Muslim farmers got momentum during the six years Foreigners Movement in Assam, 1979-85. The reaction of which is still apparent in the minds of indigenous Assamese people. The researcher has tried to find out whether that imaginary perception of indigenous people regarding state’s entity is really authentic or not.

The influx and occupation of wastelands by the cultivating Muslims was the first and foremost matter of concern in early twentieth century. To defend large-scale influx of the Muslims from erstwhile East Bengal, the introduction of Line System by the British Government and a great agitation against the Line System under the leadership of Moulana Abdul Humid Khan Bhasani to abolish it actually was meaningless except widening of Hindu-Muslim animosity. Because, the agitation itself ended in vain after the partition of India and Bhasani’s departure from Assam to East Pakistan immediately after his release from jail.\textsuperscript{21}

Moreover, Line System was meaningless in practice. A typical example of the transfer of land to the immigrants was going on. In this respect a letter was sent by the D.C. of Goalpara to the Commissioner of Assam. In his letter the D.C gave an idea of the present situation of immigration in the district. He wrote:

"Immigrants and indigenous people stand on and equal footing everywhere except in a few villages where the Line System was introduced in the temporarily settled estates of this district. The indigenous people for whose benefit the lines were established, started selling their land of their own blocks to the Mymenshinghia immigrants with the result
that a major portion of those Blocks are now in the occupation of the latter. I don’t therefore think that any purpose will be served if their settlement is restricted.22

Linguistic entity the another fear psychosis arisen in the minds of the indigenous people at the influx of large number of Bengali Muslims does not bear fair meaning. Because, the Bengali speaking char area Muslims instead of becoming a threat to linguistic entity became a grace to it.23

It is well known that Assam came under the British rule after the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826. The British administration imposed Bengali Language in all educational institutions of Assam in lieu of Assamese in 1836.24 As a result, almost for a period of four decades Bengali prevailed over Assamese language in educational institutions. Worth mentioning is that Assamese language was re-introduced in Assam’s educational institutions in 1873.25 Till 1932, immigrant Bengali Muslims living in char areas of undivided districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Nowgaon and Darrang preferred to Bengali as medium of education.26 At that time, of course, the impact of education in immigrant Muslim society was insignificant. According to 1931 census report, the number of Assamese speaking people reduced to minority due to non-acceptance of Assamese by the char area Bengali Muslims.27 The liberal middle class Assamese people, at this moment, perused the Bengali Muslims to accept Assamese as medium of education instead of Bengali. This technique of persuading the Bengali Muslims is initiated for the first time in Barpeta Sub-division.28 In 1932, Dhaniram Talukdar was the chairman of Barpeta Local Board. Under his leadership, an attempt was made to introduce Assamese in the schools of char area in Barpeta Sub-division. Md. Kuddus Khan, a local leading person of Jania encouraged Talukdar and made comprehensive publicity in favour of Assamese language for medium of education. Mr. Akshay Kumar Das, a Congress leader opposed to this
proposal in vain. Assamese language was reintroduced in schools of Barpeta Sub-
division.\textsuperscript{29}

The process of assimilation with the Assamese society by the Bengali Muslims in 
Assam began since early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{30} At that time a good number of schools were 
established in immigrant Muslim dominated areas of undivided Kamrup, Goalpara and 
Nowgaon districts.\textsuperscript{31} As for example, Hamidabad of Goalpara, Chakla of Kamrup and Ali 
Tangani of Nowgaon were pioneer places to establish schools where Assamese language 
was adopted as medium of education.\textsuperscript{31} The adoption of Assamese language by the 
Bengali Muslims increased the number of Assamese speaking people instead of 
decreasing it.\textsuperscript{32}

In the Char area of Barpeta district a few L.P. schools were set up for imparting 
education in Assamese medium.\textsuperscript{33} As for example Dharmapur L.P, Bhatnapaiti L.P. and 
Dhulauri L.P. schools were set up in present Alopati-Majarchar Panchayat in the years 
1931-1936.

The people of Assam had to launch several movements for Assamese language. 
They launched a movement in 1960, for the recognition of Assamese language as state 
language of Assam. The “Medium of Instruction Movement” was started by the “All 
Assam Students’ Union” (ASSU), in 1972. The Char area immigrant Muslims of Assam 
took active part in these two movements.\textsuperscript{33} The distinctiveness of these movements is that 
several Muslims died in these movements. For example, ten Muslims of Barak Valley 
were shot dead by the police on 19 June, 1961.\textsuperscript{35} The Muslim martyrs of ‘Language 
Movement’ were (I) Saru Miah Laskar (50) (II) Gafur Ali Laskar (40) (III) Mainul Haque 
(20) (IV) Mafur Ali Barbhuyan (35) (V) Matiur Rohman Laskar (35) (VI) Mamud Ali 
Barbhuyan (42) (VII) Budhu Miah Laskar (45) (VIII) Sikandar Ali Mazumdar (19) (IX) 
Momiruddin (40) and (X) Safikuddin (25). Regretting to mention that these Muslim
that these Muslim martyrs of ‘Language Movement’ were never mentioned in any literary discussions of Assam. The “Medium of Instruction Movement” took a mass turn and almost all people of Assam took part in this movement. The Char area Muslim students of Kamrup, Goalpara, Nowgaon, Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam actively participated in the movement, and strikes, picketing etc. were observed in the Char area Muslim Localities on the demand of introducing Assamese Language in Colleges and universities of Assam as Medium of Instruction. In this movement many persons had to lose their lives. Among the martyrs of this Instruction Movement, martyr Mozammil Haque is worth mentioning who belonged to immigrant Muslim community of Assam.

According to census report, 1931, the number of Assamese speaking people reduced to thirty six percent. The indigenous people got frightened at this thinking that Assamese language would be abolished again from own land and Assam’s entity would be endangered. But the social circumstances in Assam were adverse to this thought. In the meanwhile acceptance of Assamese language as mother tongue by the Char area Bengali Muslims began as a result of which the number of Assamese speaking people increased to sixty two percent in 1951 census. The acceptance of Assamese language by the immigrant Muslims was a help in the recognition of Assamese as the State-language of Assam in 1961. The numerical strength of the immigrant Muslims was not a threat to Assam’s entity as thought by Assamese nationalist elite class but their numerical strength was a great grace to Assam’s entity.

The Immigrant (Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950 notwithstanding, there were no travel restrictions between India and Pakistan till October 1952, and so, obviously, not between Assam and Pakistan. The Foreigners Act under which migration and other things of foreigners are controlled was made applicable so far as Pakistani Nationals are concerned only from the month of January, 1957. Thus, from that time only the
Government of Assam was fully armed with necessary laws to control the movement of people between the two countries. Upto the end of Bishnuram Medhi's term as Chief Minister, which lasted from 6 August 1950 to 28 December, 1957, obviously no action was initiated though he had a year's time since the imposition of the restrictions.42

3. **Pakistani Issue:**

The indigenous Assamese people both Hindus and Muslims were frightened of large scale Pakistani infiltration, after 1950 into Assam.43 The daily news papers especially the Calcutta based news papers highlighted the issue in exaggeration.44 In this connection, R.B. Bhagaivalla, ICS, Superintendent of census operation, Assam, in 1951 made a statement which was revealing.45 He said.

"There have been many grossly exaggerated reports of the recent heavy stream of immigration into Assam, not only in the press and on the platform but also in the authoritative circles. It has been stated by some that in recent times about 5 lakhs of Muslim immigrants came to Assam, 1.5 lakhs to Cachar alone. A study of census figures reveals how exaggerated these reports were. The number of persons born in Bengal and enumerated in Assam in 1951 was itself as high as 573 thousand, 14 thousands were born in Jalpaiguri which is now retained in India. As the number of persons in districts which are now included in West Bengal but which were enumerated in Assam at the earlier censuses were very low, it would be fair to asses that only 500 thousand born in the districts now in Pakistan were censused in Assam. Thus at the present census we have only 59 thousand more. Assuming deaths among them in the last two decades, we cannot have more than 322 thousands as the appropriate number of deaths among the 1931 immigrants. Hence, the total number of immigrants (Presuming it to be equal to the number of all Pakistan born people) could not possibly exceed 430,000 for the entire two decades." 46
Till 1961 the Assam Government did not really know the number of immigrants entered into Assam. The Chief Minister B.P. Chaliha however admitted that there were illegal migrants in Assam. He said.

"Various reports have appeared in the Press about the size of the problem. For me to give a substantially correct figure I have to wait for the census report of 1961 with all its tabulation to make a statement on this on a sound basis. We have not considered it advisable to make an adhoc or summary assessment and come to certain figures." 47

During the decade (1951-61) Assam's population increased as follows: 48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>No. of increase</th>
<th>Percentage of increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>58886063</td>
<td>7884921</td>
<td>19988558</td>
<td>33.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1995936</td>
<td>2765509</td>
<td>769573</td>
<td>38.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>948733</td>
<td>1222342</td>
<td>273609</td>
<td>28.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11872772</td>
<td>8830732</td>
<td>3042040</td>
<td>34.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General S.M. Srinagesh, Government of Assam, in his address to the second session of the legislative Assembly held after the General election of 1961, on 5 June 1962 asserted:

"The unauthorized entrants from Pakistan are apprehended and persecuted and convicted persons are deported to Pakistan." 49

However, he also did not mention the number of illegal entrants though he expressed the Government's earnest desire to check unauthorized entry of Pakistani nationals and also to detect and deport Pakistanis who are unauthorisedly staying here.
As furnished by Chaliha, the number of foreigners detected between 1952 and 1962 were as follows:50

Table: 5.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>5966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>3638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>3384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>2092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1060</td>
<td>2621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-62</td>
<td>5146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26875 persons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Muslim member from Dhubri was critical of the existing procedures of detection and deportation. He said that in his own district, a number of persons were served with 'Quit India notices by the Superintendent of Police. When the persons concerned filed objections claiming to be Indian citizens, no inquiry was held and they were summarily deported. Again referring to the systematic propaganda regarding the dangers of Pakistani infiltration, he drew the House's attention to a news item published in 'Hindustan Standard' of June 2, 1962. It reads:

"Indications are that leaders not necessarily belonging to a single group or the same political ideology may pool up their popularity to launch a vigorous state wise
movement, more against those who shield them than against those who really jump the Indo-Pak border and slink into Assam. As against the repression of minorities in East Pakistan the infiltration of Pakistanis into India has become all the more unbearable and if the Government does not take stern suitable remedial measures against it, we are afraid the people of our country may not remain indifferent and silent over the matter but may themselves take some suitable measures against this influx. In that case the communal harmony may deteriorate and agitation may not be quite peaceful.”

It must have been noticed that public awareness of the allegedly continuous and large-scale illegal immigration was limited to the circles of legislators who because of political exigencies looked at it from their respective angles. Thus the matter was never brought to the notice of the people out side. Further, there was little attempt at determining the actual number of immigrants in a proper manner and statistical jugglery was resorted to the basis of census figures.

The ruling Congress was criticized for its failure to control and prevent the infiltration. It appeared that shouting in Assembly and condemnation of Chaliha and his Government for their failure and even encouragement to influx were all emotional, personal and were avoid of substantial facts. As regards Assam Muslims they were first suspected of planning the conquest of the territory for Pakistan. It has been conveniently forgotten that the schemes of B.R. Ambedkar, Chakraborty Raja Gopalacharia and Benegal Narsing Rao had also envisaged the partition of India.

After partition, communal riots took place in Assam especially in lower Assam in 1950. The immigrant Muslims of Goalpara and Kamrup districts were severely suffered and persecuted in this riot. A large number of Muslims had left Bijni for Pakistan out of fear and came back again after one month following normal situation. Suddenly, a planned attack occurred on by indigenous people wherein many people were killed,
several villages reduced to ashes at Bogulamari, Barpeta sub-division. Such an incident of arson and killing by indigenous people in other areas of lower Assam created a sense of panic among immigrant Muslims.

**Foreigners (Tribunal) Order 1964:**

The Government of India promulgated the foreigners (Tribunal) order, 1964, which provided for statutory appointment of Tribunals. Any person aggrieved by a Quit India notice had the right to represent his case to the Tribunal. Any one not satisfied with the judgment could appeal to the court of law.

**The Prevention of Infiltration (From Pakistan) Programme (PIP):**

This programme was formulated in 1964 by B.N. Malik, the then director of Central Bureau of Intelligence. Under it the following steps were to be taken:

1. Raising of special units of the state police for dealing with infiltration.
2. Special Tribunals were to be established for speedy disposal of cases.
3. The Government of India would meet the expenses of those units.
4. 200 border watch posts were to be raised at a cost of Rs. 6000 each.

This scheme was followed vigorously by Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha. Between 1964 and 1967, 240,000 infiltrators were indentified and 190,000 deported. But between 1967 and 1970 only 20,800 were identified and smaller number was deported.

In Char area of Barpeta district partisan harassment was committed by the police in the name of identification of Pakistani infiltrators. This created a fear psychosis in the minds of the Char people. In Alopati-Majarchar area Quite India notice was issued to more than 500 people. After verification it was found that all of them were bonafied Indian citizens. Abed Ali Sarkar of village Alopati and his 30 relatives were forcefully deported to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) ignoring all proofs being Indian citizens.
Kader Bepari of village Majarchar and his 40 relatives were also forcefully expelled by the police inspite of their genuine proofs as Indian citizens.60

In a note addressed to the Government of India on 5 July 1966, Pakistan had complained that Indian Muslims were being expelled from Assam (and Kutch) under the pretext that they were illegal Pakistani entrants.61 India replied on 18 July that those persons who had been sent out had either overstayed their term in India or had come from Pakistan and stayed here illegally.62

4. Bideshi (foreigners) or Bangladeshi Issue

Bideshi (foreigners) or Bangladeshi is the another political problem faced by the Char area Muslims of Assam. ‘Bahiragato Andolan’ (Later on Assam Foreigners Movement, 1979-85) of AASU (All Assam Students’ Union) had its initial starting following the death of Hiralal Patowari, a Loka Sobha member of the Bharatiya Lok-Dal-Janata Party combine from Mangaldoi constituency in the district of Darrang. He died on 28th March, 1979, necessitating the holding of a by-election there. The summary revision and publication of draft electoral rolls were scheduled for 20 April, last date of filing of claims and objections was 21 May, disposal of the same was to be done by 15 June and the final voter lists were to be published on 20 June, 1979. The alleged discovery of large number of foreigners’ name in the Draft Electoral Rolls was the first spark for anti foreigners agitation. A voice was raised by the Assamese Hindus and Assam Students’ Union demanding that the poll should be held only after making the electoral rolls free from foreigners’ name. Now, with the public pressure raising on the question of the inclusion of alleged foreigners in the electoral rolls, the Chief Minister Golap Chandra Borbora announced the setting up of 15 Tribunals in different places for trials the cases of people suspected as foreign nationals.63 Executive Magistrate conducted the proceeding even though the powers were separated from those of the judiciary. Alleged pressure from
the regional parties like Asom Jatiotabadi Dal and the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad, the Borbora Government ordered the deletion of names of suspected foreigners from electoral rolls as because the minority votes which had traditionally gone to the Congress now started to have shared by the left parties. Consequently as many as 20,000 suspected foreigners were so identified and ordered to be deported.64

At this point, the Chief Election Commissioner ordered that the 1977 voter lists should remain as it is and no persons' name should be deleted from the list on the ground of being a foreign national.65 At the same time it cannot be denied that the whole operation was conducted in an arbitrary manner and many genuine Indian citizens happened to be Muslims or Bengali Hindus had been harassed by the police.66

**Assam agitation and Muslim situation**:

The Assam agitation had pushed to forgetfulness other vital issues concerning the people and exposed the non-Assamese Hindus, Muslims and other minorities to an insecure position. The top-proclamation of non-partisan and political aims, objects and nature of the agitation did nothing but camouflage the reign of terror, oppression and harassment unblessed against the minorities, most especially the Muslims of lower Assam. In course of the so-called anti-foreigners movement, the rumour was spread that the Assam agitation would ultimately expel only the Muslims and therefore, the Hindus did not need to fear. At the initial stage of the agitation the post 1951 Bengali immigrants into Assam, i.e. the refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan and present Bangladesh were designated as foreigners whom the agitationists wanted to expel from Assam. Suddenly, under the sectarian propaganda of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha (RSS), the Bangali Hindus and the Assamese Muslims were somewhat polarized on the issue. Thus, the agitation greatly contributed dividing Hindus and Muslims.
The Char area of Barpeta district had to suffer from various angles during agitation. As for example, the supply of every day essential commodities to Char area of Barpeta district from Nagarbera, a Hindu dominated Bazar, was stopped by the agitationists. More than one thousand people of Alopati-Majarchar Panchayat and more than nine hundred people of Baghmarachar Panchayat were arbitrarily harassed in the name of hearing. Moreover, the names of all members of Nousher Akand, Head master, Majarchar M.E. School were deleted from voter list on alleged foreigners. Khalilur Rahman, Vice Principal of Dr. Jakir Hussain H.S. School was also harassed by deleting all his family members’ name from voter list. Following such kind of harassment committed to Char area people, Dildar Reza, a AASU worker of Boko Anchalik, resigned from his membership. Dildar Reza later on, was elected an M.L.A on Congress (I) ticket from Baghbar Constituency of Barpeta district, in 1991, 2001 and 2006. He was also inducted as state minister in Hiteswar Saikia’s Council of Ministers in 1991.

Need of a common minority platform:

The agitation concerned all the communities permanently living in Assam and yet the AASU-AAGSP combine hardly ever cared to take the minorities into confidence. In 1979, the urgency to build a common platform of different minority communities particularly the Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslims as a defensive measure against the threat of denial of Franchise to both the communities was first felt by Abul Fazal Golam Osmani, Bar-at-law, advocate Gauhati High Court (of Cachar) in the wake of revision of the voter lists in the Mangaldoi Parliamentary Constituency in 1979. The agitation further confirmed the need for some kind of consolidation of the minorities against the aggressive design of the Assamese Hindus.

The Assam Foreigners Movement had a worst affect on the entire Char area of Assam. There arose a sense of terror in the minds of all Char dwellers during Assam
Foreigners Movement. Because, partisan harassment, indiscriminate killings, arson, arbitral disenfranchise of lakhs of Muslims by the agititionists were common deeds during agitation throughout Assam.

All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU)

By the end of 1979, the young generation of the Muslims and the Tribal population of Assam seemed to have been disillusioned with the pious proclamations of All Assam Students' Union as well as the Government of Assam regarding a secular, non-partisan approach and the objectives of the agitation against foreigners. Some of the Muslim students who had earlier belonged to AASU had left the organization in 1979, when they found that Muslims were being humiliated. Simultaneously, A.K. Mushahari, the President of the Assam Tribal Youth League (AATYL) declared that the AASU and the AAGSP were anti tribal. It was thus natural that there would be a realignment of youth forces belonging to the minority communities. On March 20-23, 1980, at Jaleswar, in the district of Goalpara, a Minority Convention was held. It was patronized, attended and addressed by the Assamese leader of the Assam Pradesh Congress(I) Committee Lolit Kumar Doley, one CPI (M) MLA and minority leaders like Abul Fazal Golam Osmani, Afzalur Rahman and Santi Ranjan Das Gupta. The convention was claimed to have been attended by 2500 delegates and 50,000 strong gathering. There it was decided to form the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) and also All Assam Minorities Yuva Parishad (AAMYS). Abdul Haye Nagari became the AAMSU President and Azgar Ali Ahmed became the General Secretary of the Union. Among other in the executive committee were Mrinal kanti Roy, Muktar Hussain Khan and Dildar Reza were prominent: The headquarter of the organization was located at Howly in the district of undivided Kamrup.
Aims and objectives

Though born in special circumstances to safeguard primarily the interests of the minority communities of Assam during Assam Movement against the onslaughts of the AASU it will work for overall development of the state of Assam in particular and the different groups of people in general. It will work for socio-economic and educational development of minorities and will struggle for the protection of citizenship and constitutional and political rights of the people belonging to religious and linguistic minorities of Assam. It will also work for due share of the minorities in Government services and technical institutions. Last but not least, it will fight for justice, dignity and equal and fair treatment of the minority communities.77

Grievances

The religious and linguistic minorities do not get fair and equal treatment. They have been deprived of the due share in every field by the Government.78

The names of more than nine lakhs Indian citizens have been deliberately deleted from the voter lists.79 The Government failed to protect the lives and properties of the Muslims, Bengali Hindus and Adivasis in BAC areas. The Government failed to rehabilitate those families which have taken refuge in camps after violence in BAC (Now Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District). No concrete measures have been taken by the Government to improve the socio-economic condition of the people living in Char areas and permanent Pattas are being given to them.80 The population pattern is not being reflected in Government services and in other fields.

Activities of AAMSU

Since the birth in special circumstances during Assam Foreigners Movement in 1980, AAMSU has been carrying out several activities for socio-economic, educational and social development of the minority communities in particular and Assam in general.
In keeping with the generally accepted minority stance, the AAMSU on its inception, demanded the granting of citizenship certificates to all persons in the State on 25 March, 1971. It also demanded that the Nehru-Liakat Pact of 1950 and the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol of 1972 and other relevant international agreements and laws and Acts in regards the issue of Foreigners should be implemented. The Union chalked out the following 13-point charter of demands:

1. 25 March, 1971, should be the base of date for detection of foreigners.
2. Full security to the lives and properties of all sections of the linguistic and religious minorities.
4. Immediate stop to communal and secessionist movements in the name of detection of foreigners.
5. Stay of eviction from Government lands till alternative arrangements for resettlement of such evictees were made.
6. Removal of restrictions to transfer of lands.
7. Impartial police and administrative machineries in the state.
8. Compensations for the victims of disturbances.
9. Reopening of educational institutions and holding of examinations.
10. Immediate opening of academic sessions.
11. Security and safety of the students of the minority communities.
12. Renewal of scholarships for the students of the minority communities.
13. Appointments on the proportion of population from the sub-divisional level upwards.

During Assam Foreigners Movement partisan harassment and oppression were committed by the agitationists to minorities at different places of Assam. An AAMSU-
CRPC delegates led by A.F. Golam Osmani met the Prime Minister at New Delhi on 31 May and alleged that:

“The Assam police have become a tool in the hands of the chauvinistic and communal elements. The way in which a section of the police acted on May 26 in parts of Goalpara has clearly demonstrated that the riot in Assam required to be tackled more thoroughly particularly when the Assam Civil Service Association pledged active support to the agitation.”

It was observed that many houses belonging to the minority communities at Tulsibari near Rangia in Kamrup district were burnt during the second week of March, 1979, by the communal elements with the help of the Assam police. After that in the name of detection and deletion of names of foreigners from the voter lists, Assam police launched a systematic campaign of harassment from April to October, 1979. In this process thousands of Indian Nationals belonging to religions and linguistic minorities were deprived of their right of franchise in an arbitrary and illegal manner. Almost simultaneously from the month of August, 1979, onwards at the instigation of the Assam police the communal elements led by AASU and AAGSP started their much vaunted peaceful democratic movement to detect and deport so called foreign national, in consequence of which at least 100 people belonging to the minority communities were murdered, 7500 houses were burnt and 20,000 people rendered homeless all over Assam. The police never resorted to firing to protect the lives and properties of the minority communities since March, 1979, till to day. Even during the Nalbari carnage where at least 44 people were brutally murdered, 4000 homeless, no firing took place. But the police directed firing at Sarthebari against the minority communities in consequence of which two helpless displaced persons were killed.
It is a result of the inaction of the Assam police, inhuman atrocities were carried out by the supporters of Assam movement on the minority communities from 26.5.80 onwards. The Assam police in league with AASU and AAGSP had hatched a conspiracy to deny freedom of expression through peaceful procession by the minority communities.88

The Assam Accord

Rajiv Gandhi succeeded to the throne of his mother on the day of her murder the 31 October 1984. The sympathy wave that it had generated gave the Congress a massive victory in the election of 1984 and confirmed Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister. The new incumbent initiated a move he called national reconciliation starting with the Punjab problem. The Rajiv-Longowal Pact of 24 July 1985 was claimed to have solved that problem but soon it proved illusory, So far as Assam was concerned, more than forty rounds of talks between the state and the central Government and the AASU-AAGSP combine had already taken place from 1980 to 1984.89

However, at last an agreement was signed between the Government of India, the Government of Assam and the AASU -AAGSP representatives. On 15 August 1985 at 7A.M from the ramparts of the Red Fort, the Prime Minister proudly declared –

"We have just reached an agreement, signed just five hours earlier at 2.45 A.M. with the Assam students. ---- The six years old Assam problem has been settled following an Accord arrived at between the Assam Students and the Government. This will eliminate tension from the body – politics of the country and help accelerate its growth. Ten months ago there was a distinct threat to the unity and integrity of the country. The Government on assuming power had made Panjab and Assam problem its number one
priority. Now with the signing of the Accord and lessening of tensions nobody can countenance even the existence of a threat.\textsuperscript{90}

**Implementation of Assam Accord**

After the signing of the Accord the leaders of Assam foreigners' movement formed a political party known as AGP (Assam Gana Parisad) that came to power by winning 1985 election. The AGP came to power with a pledge to implement the Assam Accord in letter and spirit. They promised to drive out foreigners in lakhs.

The agitation leaders had claimed the existence of lakhs of foreigners in Assam. But while in power, they were able to expel only 481 persons up to June 1990 out of those persons who had allegedly came after 1971. Of those who had come between 1966 and 1971, only 14193 were detected and their names deleted from the electoral rolls up to June 1990.\textsuperscript{91}

Homen Borgohain, eminent writer and journalist commented --- "Now they themselves admit that during the long five years they were able to expel only a few thousand foreigners (out of the allegedly forty or fifty lakhs).\textsuperscript{92}

Till to-day, detection and deportation of foreigners has been an important complex political issue to be solved. Unless this foreigners issue is amicably solved there would be political turmoil and the alleged foreigners would face unwanted tension and suffering from time to time.

The United Minorities Front (UMF) a political party of the minorities formed during Assam Foreigners Movement. The Front raised voice of harassment to minorities in the process of detection and deportation of foreigners. The harassment is clear from the following data given by the Government regarding detection and deportation of illegal migrants under the foreigners (Tribunals) order 1964 between December 1985 and January 1987.\textsuperscript{93}
The following figures were submitted by the Chief Minister and Home Minister inside and outside the house on various occasions with regard to detection and deportation of foreigners since 25 March 1971: 94

(i) Total number of inquiries instituted 50064
(ii) Total number of cases referred to Tribunals 2497
(iii) Total number of persons declared foreigners 669
(iv) Total number of persons expelled 44

From the above data it is not difficult to understand the extent of harassment made to large number of persons who were discriminately summoned to the police station to prove their antecedents for investigations.

5. D Voters (doubtful voters) Issue

‘D’ voters issue is another common political problems of the Char area Muslims of Assam. This problem creates a panic in the minds of the char area Muslims when the Election Commission of India by an Act in 1997 put the letter “D” before the names of voters in the Electoral Rolls disfranchising the right to vote in elections on alleged foreigners till the verdict of the court. In consequence of this, lakhs of Char area Muslims of Assam are deprived of voting powers in elections. The number of ‘D’ voters throughout Assam was 1,57,465 at the initial stage but increased later on to almost 3 lakhs. 95 The Gauhatin High Court after trials of 83471 ‘D’ voter cases has identified only 5577 people as foreigners up to 31.3.2011. 96 From the verdict of the Gauhati High Court it is observed that the Election Commission of India has debarred a large number of
genuine Indian citizens from exercising voting powers in elections. This is an setback to a democratic country like ours.

In the Char area of Barpeta district 'D' voters has assumed a political problem. In Baghmara constituency of Barpeta district Char area people have been marked as 'D' voters. In Majarchar village the number of 'D' voters is 70, in Alopati the number of 'D' voters is 82 and in Baghmara the number of 'D' voters is 74. All the 'D' voters of Baghmara, Alopati and Majarchar have been deprived of voting powers since 1997. The right to vote is a fundamental right of the Indian citizens.

6. ISI Allegation:

The Muslims of Assam in general and the Muslims living in Char area in particular are criticized for their alleged involvement in ISI activities by indigenous Assamese people. The researcher has taken this issue seriously and investigated into it. During the investigations the researcher has roamed across the Char areas of Barpeta district and asked more than fifty persons about their alleged involvement in ISI activities. All of them heard it with surprise and reacted that they did not even see any persons living in char area having involved in ISI activities. Every citizen of char area is very loyal to motherland. To make any conspiracy against mother-land having involved in ISI activities is not only a kind of sin but also a distinct sign of treachery. The bulk of the Char people are illiterate and poor. They have no other alternative than agriculture for livelihood. Now-a-days, agricultural land has been shrinking due to some obvious reasons like growth of population, erosion, abolition of joint family etc. The people of Char area now are bound to go to cities and towns in search of earnings for livelihood. Under such a pitiable condition their involvement in any disruptive activities is beyond imagination. There is no reason for alleged involvement in ISI activities by the Char people.
Fortunate enough that Pakistan intelligence ISI did not even dare to step on Assam’s land until a group of terrorists could establish relation with the former in support of a large number of anti-national Assamese people. The Pakistan-favoured terrorist groups and the fundamentalist organizations are now a matter of great terror for us. But how many people are related with the ISI and how organized they are in Assam is still a matter of doubt.

Specific Political Problems:

The following are the specific political problems of Char area of Barpeta district

1. Lack of political awareness among masses

In a democratic country like ours the masses should be politically aware to avail welfare service of the Government for all round development. There remains every possibility for deprivation of Government developmental services due to lack of political awareness. The Char area people of Barpeta district are educationally backward. Only 22.89 percent of people are educated. Due to illiteracy, they do not know the real meaning of democracy. As a result of this, they cannot elect ideal representatives although their active participation in election is worth mentioning. It is observed that more than 80 percent voters cast their votes in elections. Most of them cast their votes in favour of the candidates preferred by Dewani without considering the efficiency and performance of the candidates. The Dewani who plays a key role in choosing candidate is also unaware about latter’s efficiency due to illiteracy. In such a circumstances, the MLAs and the Panchayat representatives have been being elected since independence. Moreover, due to lack of political awareness they keep silent when their elected representatives look at their own vested interest ignoring the greater interest of the masses. As a result of this, the
Char area is still backward in all respects after more than half a century of India's independence except making their representatives luxurious and affluent. The leaders of Char area never think themselves liable to illiterate masses.

At present, the role of Dewani in elections is diminishing with the spread of education. But political bias of the educated people prevents the voters from electing representatives according to their choice. In consequence of this, efficient representatives are not elected who can present social, economic and political problems on the floor of the Assembly and Parliament for immediate solution.

2. Lack of able leader

Since the time of independence the lack of able leaders has been a common feature in political scenario of Char area of Barpeta district except a few leaders. Among the few exceptional leaders the names of Late Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed, the fifth President of India and Late Ataur Rahman ex-minister of Mahendra Mohan Choudhury's cabinet can be mentioned. Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed represented Jania constituency dominated by Bengali Muslims for two consecutive terms (1957-63 and 1962-67) who tried for Char area development. Ataur Rahman, represented Jania constituency for two consecutive terms after Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed in 1967-72 and 1972-78 periods. Ataur Rahman was popular among the masses for his community feeling and was locally called Jananeta (leader of masses). These two leaders had linkage with the masses and tried to develop Char area with the little facilities provided by the then Governments.

2011) who have represented various constituencies of Char area of Barpeta district.
Almost all these leaders have proved themselves failure in presenting socio-economic and
political problems of their respective constituencies on the floor of the Assembly. These
MLAs, it is allaged that have nothing to their credit except making personal lives
Luxurious.

Dildar Reza who emerged out as a leader from Alopati Char area during Assam
Foreigners Movement is popular among the Char people. During his period a Mini PHC
is setup at Alopati. Moreover, an agricultural sub-divisional office and a Police outpost
are established at Alopati-Kalardia Bazar. The Char area of Barpeta district will remain
underdeveloped till the emergence of able leaders.

3. Lack of organized political platform

Organized political platform has become an essential part of a democratic system
of Government. Organized political platform of any kind can work as pressure group to
point out various problems for solution. In entire Char area of Alopati-Majarchar
Panchyat, Baghmarachar Panchayat and Bhatnapaity Dharmapur Panchayat no organized
platform was found before 2005. It is only in 2005, the “Char Area Welfare Society for
Socio-Economic Research” (CAWSER) has come to existence for the first time in
Alopati area to bring to light the socio-economic and political problems of the Char area.
This organization did a commendable work by organizing an International Seminar at
Alopati-Kalardia Bazar in 2005, where research scholars from various parts of the state of
Assam and abroad participated. They highlighted various problems of Char area with
suggestive measures for solution.
It is alleged that no follow up actions were taken up by the Government to solve the problems highlighted in the seminar.

4. Lack of female leadership

Lack of female leadership in Char area can be regarded as one of the important political problems. Now-a-days, every society is constituted with almost equal male-female population. So all round development of a society is impossible without equal development of both male and female. Moreover, female leadership is essential for making female section politically aware of. In Char area, female leadership was beyond imagination a few years ago. In consequence of this, a section of the female people knew nothing about politics which is really a set back to democracy. Till today, there is no female state leader in Char area of Barpeta district except a few female reserved members of Gao-Panchayat Level.

As for example Kahinoor Begum, 35 years of old, read up to higher secondary level, is the President of Baghmarachar Gao-Panchayat.

5. Lack of rural educated leader

Lack of rural educated leader is another serious problem of Char area. It is alleged that, there were no educated rural leaders in Char area for many years after independence. As a result of this, Char area were backward in all respects. The cultivating people of Char area did not know the value of education in those days. Now-a-days, rural educated leaders are most essential for our country to point out rural problems for solution. Unless rural leaders are educated rural problems will remain unfocussed and no strategy will be taken by the Government for solving those problems. At present, emphasis has been given on rural development through Panchayat system administration. So, Panchayat level leaders should be educated to implement Government’s developmental projects and programmes.
Of late, a few rural educated leaders have emerged out in Char area of Barpeta district. As for example, Sabed Ali, B.A., is the President of Alopati-Majarchar Gao Panchayat. Newaz Sharif, B.A., is at present, the President of Bhatnapaity Dharmapur Gao Panchayat.

6. **Political favourism**

Political favourism is another important political problem of Char area. Political favourism means enjoyment of political benefit by virtue of same political party identification to which the MLA belongs. Of late, it has become a trend in Char politics that to get political benefit one must be a supporter of the political party to which an MLA belongs. The opposite party supporters cannot get any political benefit from the standing MLA. Political favourism has divided the society into two parts pausing a threat to real democracy.

7. **Money power**

Money power is another political problem of Char area. It is alleged that each and every party candidate tries to win the election by money power. During election money is directly distributed to individual voter by the candidate or through candidate’s agents. Most of the voters of Char area cast their votes in favour of the candidate who gives them money. As a result of this, able leader is not elected from Char area of Barpeta district.
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