CHAPTER - III
GOPINATH BORDOLOI AND THE SOCIAL ISSUES OF ASSAM
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1) PROBLEM OF IMMIGRATION:

After assuming power on 19 September 1938, the Gopinath Bordoloi Ministry was faced with the complicated problem of encroachment of wastelands and reserved forests by immigrants from the populous East Bengal. "One of the main problems for Assam at that time was that land hungry peasants were pouring into Assam from East Bengal and encroaching upon the adjoining grazing and other lands of the tribals and other indigenous inhabitants. The Saadullah Ministry had contrived land settlement in a way to encourage immigration and migration with political motive. For the first time, the Bordoloi Ministry took some positive steps to bring this situation under control in Assam."¹

Bordoloi was conscious of the growing immigration problem and the avowed intention of the Muslim League to include Assam in their projected dream of Pakistan. He took some defensive measures in this regard because of the gravity of the problem. This complicated issue generated intense interest both within and outside the legislature. The problem had started since 1918 when immigrants from overpopulated districts of Eastern Bengal started encroaching on lands set apart for professional grazing reserves.² Gradually they inhabited the other parts of the valley, the plains district of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong and portions of N. Lakhimpur.³ Because of this influx, the Muslim population in Assam increased rapidly between the years 1911 and 1941.⁴

3. NAI, Home Poll. File No. 169/46
4. NAI, Home Poll. File No. 119/46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Muslim Populations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3,55,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>5,85,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>9,43,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>13,03,962</td>
</tr>
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"Probably the most important event in the province during the last twenty five years, an event moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more severely than did the Burmese invaders of 1820 the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization, has been the invasion of vast horde of land hungry Bengali immigrants".5

These were the prophetic words of the British Census Superintendent in 1931. He further remarked "the way in which they have seized up on the vacant areas in the Assam Valley seems almost uncanny. Without tumult, without fuss, without undue trouble to district revenue staffs, a population which must account to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal to the Assam Valley during the last twenty five years".6

To restrict the settlement by immigrants in the Assamese inhabited lands the Line System was introduced in 1920. The aim of this System was to isolate the immigrants from the indigenous people by compelling them to live in particular localities beyond which they were not allowed to settle.7 The problem reached a serious point when the immigrants after occupying all vacant available lands, threatened to occupy land in and around Assamese villages. Several Muslim Legislators demanded the abolition of the Line System, while the Hindus defended it. Because of the gravity of the issue, the Government appointed a Line System Enquiry Committee in 1937 under the chairmanship of Hockenhull.8 On the basis of the Line Enquiry Report, the Congress

6. Ibid
7. Assam Tribune, 14 June, 1946, Report of the Line System Committee, Govt. of Assam Shillong, February, 1938
8. ASA, ALA Proceedings, Vol 1, February/March 1940, p 30
Coalition Ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi prohibited the settlement of land to persons who came from outside the province after 1 January 1938.\(^9\)

The indigenous tribal population particularly insisted that restrictive measures should continue and government should guarantee non-alienation of tribal lands. Bordoloi responded generously and created a number of tribal belts in order to protect tribal lands from encroachments. Bordoloi also pursued a policy of protecting the grazing reserves and reserved forests in order to preserve the valuable forest resources of the province. The Land Resolution passed by the Bordoloi Cabinet on November 10, 1939 was as flows —\(^10\)

1) Land settlement would be forbidden to all persons in village grazing reserves and professional grazing reserves.

2) It was proposed to provide land to the landless people to a total holding of 30 \textit{bighas} in the regular settlement areas.

3) The Government would give protection to tribals and backward classes. Tribal blocs in sub-montane region would be wholly protected and all immigrants residing there would be evicted.

Since the Congress Ministry resigned on 16 November 1939 and Saadullah Ministry came to power the next day the resolution was not executed.\(^11\) The new Premier felt that the landless immigrants should be provided with available land.\(^12\) He formulated a policy known as the "Land Development Scheme" and under the garb of the system, Saadullah and his Muslim League legislatures settled all the landless Muslim immigrants in the Brahmaputra valley.

The motive behind such a move of the Muslim League got exposure, when Kazimuddin Ahmed, the mover of the resolutions of abolition of the Line System

\(^9\) Assam Sectt. Records, Political, Conf. File No. 20/44 "Line System in Assam"

\(^10\) ASA, Assam Gazette, November 4, 1939

\(^11\) Assam Tribune, 14 June 1940.

\(^12\) Asamiya, 5 October, 1940
declared, "We want to see Assam as a Muslim majority province. The settlement of the immigrants is the best means of doing it".13

The gradual increase in the influx of immigrants gave rise to a legitimate fear among the indigenous Hindus of Assam that they would in course of time be swamped and Assam would be converted into a Muslim majority province.14 Their apprehension was confirmed during the census operation of 1941 when Saadullah instructed that population be classified on the basis of community rather than on the basis of religion.15 Consequently a large number of tribal people who had earlier enrolled themselves as Hindus, Christians and Buddhists were now included under the head "tribal" which meant that the Hindu tribals in Assam had been shown as non-Hindu in 1941 census.16 Thus the census figures indicated a considerable reduction in the Hindu population which provoked a country wide agitation.17 Gopinath Bordoloi, the Congress Leader, challenged the Census Report of the Government and demanded its revision by an independent body.18 The Land Development Scheme and Census Policy of Saadullah were subjected to severe criticism all over the Province, which forced the Premier to resign on 12 December 1941.19

The Governor, Sir Robert Neil Reid who took over the administration of the Province for few months after the fall of the Saadullah Ministry cancelled that Ministry's Development Scheme by a gazette notification on the ground that there was not enough wasteland in the Assam valley for settlement with so many immigrants without jeopardizing the interests of the indigenous population of the Province.20 The Governor has since borne testimony to the Saadullah Ministry's politico communal designs in

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13. NAI, Proceedings of the 2nd session of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, File No C-5 (10) 41, P 23(SB)
14. PHA, Vol III, p. 266
15. ASA, ALAP, Vol II, No 18, 1 December 1941, p. 1165
16. ibid
17. Assam Tribune, 22 August 1941
18. ibid, 10 October 1941
19. PHA, Vol III, p. 268
20. ASA, Assam Gazette Notification, March 14, 1942
the garb of Development scheme. In an article in the 'Organ of the Royal Society of Arts' in London, he observed that the Saadullah Ministry was settling large numbers of Muslim immigrants, with a view to include Assam in Pakistan, by making it a Muslim majority Province, in spite of stiff opposition from diverse sections of the indigenous population of the Province.\textsuperscript{21}

When Saadullah returned to power on 25 August 1942, he revived the Land Development Scheme and threw open the grazing and forest reserves which were earlier held to be inviolable. The new Government, at the instance of Government of India, adopted a new resolution on land development under the slogan of "grow more food" on 24 August 1943. Incidentally this was interpreted as "grow more Muslims" by the new Viceroy Wavell.\textsuperscript{22} The salient features of this controversial resolution were — \textsuperscript{23}

a) Resumption of the distribution of wastelands in proportion to needs of different communities in Nagaon and dereservation of select grazing reserves for that purpose, as per Resolution of 21 June 1940.

b) Dereservation of professional grazing reserves in Kamrup and Darrang, if found surplus to actual requirements

c) Opening up of surplus reserves in all the submontane areas and in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur for settlement of landless indigenous people.

Though a senior ICS Officer, deputed to ascertain the available grazing reserves for settlement, had declared that there was no surplus land available for new settlements, Saadullah's Muslim League Coalition Government threw select grazing reserves open for settling immigrants. This led to numerous clashes between the immigrants and the indigenous graziers and there was widespread public agitation against de-reservation and settlement of land to immigrants. The all India Hindu Mahasahha and the Assam Jatiya Mahasahha took this as an opportunity to express

\textsuperscript{21} Harendra Nath Barua, \textit{Reflections on Assam cum Pakistan}, New Delhi, 1944, p.69

\textsuperscript{22} A. Guha, \textit{Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947}, New Delhi, 1977, p. 281

\textsuperscript{23} IAR, 1 July–December 1943) Vol 2 pp. 279-80, citing Assam gazette, 25 August 1943; Assam Tribune, 3 September, 1943
their concern for Assamese and Hindus being in danger. They pointed out that the new resolution was nothing but a "resusciation of the discarded Land Development Scheme under a new garb." 24

On the other hand, the Bengali Muslim immigrants and their leader Bhasani, who was also the President of the Provincial Muslim League, were bent upon the abolition of Line System.

Gopinath Bordoloi who had been prematurely released from jail on 26 January 1944, on account of ill health was greatly disturbed by these activities, but his movements were restricted. He felt that both the imperialist and the communalists were acting jointly to suppress the secular democratic forces. He fully understood that the communal elements were pursuing a policy of division of India on religion basis. The Muslim League made a determined effort to include Assam in their proposed Pakistan; some members of Saadullah Cabinet were affiliated to this League. The Congress Ministries formed in the Congress majority provinces did good work and became popular, the Muslim dominated Ministry in Assam only strengthened the hands of the bureaucracy and set an example of political muddling.

The Congress Assembly party had officially absented itself from the Assam Legislative Assembly for about three years after the resignation of Bordoloi's Ministry on 15 November 1939, 25 in conformity with Congress Working Committee resolution of 22 October, 1939, as the declared war aims of the British did not include India's independence.

After the publication of Rajagopalacharir's partition formula of 10 July 1944, Bordoloi feared that the Congress might agree to Assam's inclusion in Pakistan. He wrote to Rajagopalachari that if the Province or any part of it was to be grouped with Bengal "the whole Province will join to a man opposing it". 26 Bordoloi also forwarded a copy of this letter to Bahadur Sapru requesting him to see that no injustice is done to

25. PHA, Vol III, p. 9
26. A. Guha, op.cit. p. 283

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Assam. In consultation with his colleagues he decided to revive constitutional politics and constructive work together. Bordoloi realised that the alliance between the communalist and the imperialists must be broken through vigorous legislative action. He sent two veteran Congress workers Mahendra Mohan Choudhury and Akhaya Kumar Das with a comprehensive report on Assam's situation to Gandhi to seek his advice. He was rather confused whether as a 'satyagrahi' he should attend the Assembly or not. To this query Gandhi replied "if you are a leader, act as a leader and not as my follower".27

Bordoloi attended the November session of the Assam Assembly with thirteen of his colleagues. As the leader of the opposition he delivered a speech in defense of civil liberties:28

"We re- appear as a party to continue the fight from inside the legislative,... However thinned our ranks might be and however feeble our voice it will continue to be raised against this evil which has brought in its wake so much misery to us. ..........We shall work for the elementary liberties of human beings which in the name of war has been practically nullified".

He also declared that his party's outlook as regards parliamentary activities remained unchanged. He demanded a shift in the land settlement policy in favour of the landless indigenous people and the pre 1938 immigrants.29

To deal with the problems, Saadullah, in accordance with demand from the opposition, held a conference from 16 to 19 December 1944, with representatives from different parties.30

Resolutions were passed according to the recommendation on 16 January 1945, to keep the professional reserves intact. The Government also decided to make efforts

27. Dr. N.K. Barua, (ed), Bordoloi Dinalekha Pt.1, Assam Prakashan Parishad, 2000, p. 104
28. ASA, ALA Debates, November 1944, p.434
29. ibid
30. PHA, Vol-lll, pp.269-270
to locate wastelands for settlement of local people as well as landless immigrants who had entered the province before 1938. There was also a proposal to give special protection to the tribal people. But the resolution could not be put into operation because of stiff opposition both from the Muslim League and Congress. The extremist section wanted full accommodation of all immigrant Muslims even at the cost of local people. The Congress feared that the discretionary powers given to the local officers might be misused.

The Congress strength in the Assembly was increased to 18 in March 1945. The Saadullah Ministry had become shaky because of the rejection of the land policy both by the Congress and League. Fearing his defeat he was in search of fresh allies. After narrowly escaping a cut motion on 17 March 1945, he decided to enter into secret negotiation with R. K. Choudhury and Bordoloi.

In the Congress Assembly party, meet Bordoloi declared that as a democratic leader he was prepared to act according to the party’s mandate. Apprising Gandhi in a long letter about Assam’s burning land settlement and the immigration question, Bardoloi sought his moral support in agreeing to a Congress supported re-constituted ministry headed by Saadullah. He explained the need of his strategy to curb the Muslim League’s power and concluded, “If I am continuing as a parliamentarian, it is only because there is no alternative for me just at present, and that I would do all that is possible for me not to become a minister consistent of course only with the safety of my province……….”

On 18 March 1945, Bordoloi and Choudhury jointly sent a five point proposal to Saadullah inviting him to form a Congress supported re-constituted Ministry. Saadullah in his reply agreed to the proposals. On 20 March 1945, the three leaders met together to finalize the historic Tripartite Agreement:

I. The restoration of civil liberties and the gradual release of political prisoners.

31. ALA Proceedings, Vol-I, 6 March 1944, p.82
32. Karagarar Chithi, n-17, p. 349
33. Bordoloi’s letter to Gandhi, 14 march 1945 Dr.N.K.Barua, Bordoloi Dinelekha Pt-I, p. 126
34. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 288-89
II. A suitable policy for procurement and distribution of essential goods, with a view to remove corruption

III. A revision of the land settlement policy with a view to accommodate claims of the sons of the soil.

IV. An agreed distribution of seats in the Local Boards among the main contending groups.

V. The re-constitution of Saadullah Ministry on an all party basis.

The agreement was in a way a victory for Bordoloi because civil liberties would be restored in Assam which was essential for carrying out constructive work. Being greatly anxious about the land settlement problem which was causing great discontent he remarked, "I hope the enunciation of this new policy will go a great way in removing that discontent. A lot will depend on how this policy is going to be operated. But I hope that this will at least lead to a better relation between all parties concerned".35

According to the agreement, Saadullah resigned on 23 March 1945, and reconstituted his Ministry as per terms of the agreement, including all the five Muslim Ministers from his last cabinet, one tribal minister chosen by the tribal group and four non-Muslim Ministers selected by the Congress.36

Bordoloi, however was not anxious for power and what prompted him most was to see the end of maladministration in the province

"..................if I wish to take advantage of disagreements in small details to break the negotiations we might have possibly carried even a no confidence motion. But we had given our pledged words and we would not back out. This fact has immensely raised our prestige before the public even before the Muslim league followers. But my personal feelings no less stood in the way of this fulfillment. I wrote to you about distaste for taking government in our hands when our friends are still in jail."37

35. ALA Debates, 1945, Vol 1, pp. 182-3
36. NMML, IAR (January-June 1945) Vol I, p. 213
37. Intercepted letter Bordoloi to Gandhi, 25 March 1945, File No. C-6(4) of 1945; secret Personal Folder of Gopinath Bordoloi
Many Congressmen opposed the whole agreement as it involved a question of principle. But Bordoloi defended the effort of his party for an agreement "Particular problems require particular solution for a particular time and it was with that end in view that we have decided to support the Government which we hope will be able to solve the problem".  

The Triparite Agreement was strongly opposed by Tayebulla who was the APCC President. Meanwhile there were signs of breakdown of Congress League Entente in the Assam Legislature Assembly. It took the new Government four months to officially announce the new land settlement policy. This half hearted action annoyed Bordoloi and on 10 July 1945, he wrote to Abul Kalam Azad, the National Congress President, giving him a detailed report of the Assam situation. He also wrote to Saadullah charging him of procrastination in implementation of the matter. The latter had to work under constraints because the Central Parliamentary Board of the Muslim League was against the resolution, specially regarding land settlement with immigrants. The Congress Coalition Party and Independent Muslim Party held a joint meeting on 14 and 15 August 1945. Suggestion from the Muslim League regarding modification of the land policy were rejected. The meeting authorized Bordoloi to protest against non-implementation of the agreement and accordingly Bordoloi wrote to Saadullah on 21 August 1945, expressing his dissatisfaction.

In the mean time the Government of India announced its decision to hold general elections on 21 August 1945. Bordoloi was a special invitee to the Congress Working Committee meeting held in Pune in September 1945, which took the important decision of contesting the election. The Assam Assembly was dissolved on 1 October 1945, and General Elections took place on 9 January 1946. The Congress secured 50 seats in a House of 108 and with the support of a few independent

40. Karagarar Chithi, p. 367

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members formed an absolute majority. On 11 February 1946, a Congress Ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi assumed office.  

Soon after assuming responsibility of administration he paid serious attention to the immigration problem. During his historic meeting with Cabinet Delegation, led by Field Marshall Viscount Wavel, Bordoloi, in reply to a question stated that he could not agree that there were large areas of uncultivated land in Assam. He pointed out that the Muslim League had been sending in Muslims from East Bengal who had been maiming and killing cattle and oppressing the inhabitants. Sir Saadullah had agreed that they should be evicted but since nothing had been done the present Government intended to carry out his policy in accordance with the Agreement. The Ministry decided to evict the immigrants from the Grazing Reserves. This led the Muslim League members and volunteers to agitate against the eviction policy. They also made an appeal to the Muslim population to contribute towards Eviction Relief Fund. The immigrants had become aggressive towards the police who had been kept in the grazing reserves. The Congress Ministry’s most difficult and delicate task was the eviction of immigrants from the Grazing Reserves and other areas where they had encroached without authority. We have observed earlier that the policy of eviction was actually based on an unanimous agreement reached between all the parties, including the Muslim League, but Bordoloi’s Ministry became the target of all manner of vile propaganda within and outside the Province for implanting the policy. Nevertheless, his Government was firm regarding the eviction issue and so introduced the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance on 18 November, 1946. Meanwhile the Assam Muslim League threatened to launch a civil disobedience

43. Star of India, 30th April, 1946
44. ASR, Annual report of the Assam Congress Parliamentary Party (1946-47), FileNo.Ed.1/1946-47
45. ibid
46. Assam secret (Poll), Conf. B. File No. C-297/46 political, Assam gazette, Part-VI, 1947
programme in protest against the eviction policy and the promulgation of the Maintenance of Public Order Act.

Gopinath Bordoloi made the following statement on the resistance move of the Muslim League

"………………..it must be obvious that so long as the threat of civil disobedience and apprehension of lawlessness remains, the Government shall have to pursue a policy by which these lawless activities may not be made possible and people saved from unnecessary bloodshed which is found to result from the tactics followed by certain people of the Muslim League."47

He sent a delegation of the Assam Congress Party in April 1947 under the Speaker of the Assembly, Debeswar Sarma, to apprise the Home minister, Patel and Defence Minister, Baldev Singh, of the volatile situation in Assam. They related how the police force was unable to contain the armed invasions by thousands of Muslim League volunteers. Sardar Patel then wrote to Bordoloi,

"You will have our full support in your stand on legal rights. Not an inch of land should be surrendered to the illegal immigrants and you must stand solidly and firmly on the policy which you are implementing. To yield to threats, show of force or any direct action would be suicidal and unbecoming of a Government with any sense of responsibility."48

The League movement attained success in immigrant-dominated areas but the Assamese Muslims were mostly indifferent to the activities of the League. It gradually lost its ground and on 11 June 1947, the programme was officially abandoned by the Assam Provincial Muslim League.49

The number of immigrants coming to Assam from Bengal increased after partition. As the time given was upto July 26, within which Hindus from Pakistan could

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47. Assam Tribune, April 1, 1947.
48. Letter of Patel to Bordoloi, New Delhi, April 11, 1947 Sardar Patel correspondence V1, Doc-62, p. 120
49. Conf. B, File No. C. 133/47 Political, Assam Secretariat
move to India and Muslims from India could move to Pakistan, thousands of Hindus migrated to Assam for shelter. At the same time the flow of Muslim immigrants had also increased.

The Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi, realising the gravity of the problem after independence tried to check the flow of immigrants through executive orders and circulars. Circulars were issued debarring non-indigenous persons from getting settlement of land, recruitment in government services and in getting licenses in business and trade. On May 4, 1948, a circular was issued on the question of land settlement:

"In view of the emergency created by the influx of refugees into the Province from Pakistan territories and in order to preserve peace, tranquility and social equilibrium in the towns and villages, Government reiterate their policy that settlement of land should in no circumstances be made with persons who are not indigenous to the province, should include for the purpose of land settlement during the present emergency, persons who are non-Assamese settlers in Assam though they already have lands and houses of their own and have made Assam their home to all intents and purposes".

But the Centre never allowed the Assam Government to play any significant role in this grave problem of continued influx of Bengali immigrants to Assam. Bordoloi met Nehru in New Delhi on 21 July 1948 and asked him to give the Assam Government the necessary power to stop the flow of immigrants. Nehru agreed to do something through the Inter Dominion Conference which Bordoloi found was against Assam’s interest but was not prepared to give Assam any control through a permit system. Nehru’s reply to Bordoloi regarding this influx problem was very casual:

51. Govt. circular No 195/47/188, Assam Gazette, April-June 1948
52. N.K. Barooah, Gopinath Bordoloi, Indian Constitution and Centre-Assam Relations, Gauhati, 1990, p. 52
53. N. K. Barooah (ed), Bordoloi Diaries Pt.II, p. 63
"I feel surprised to learn that you feel yourself so helpless in dealing with the influx of Muslim into Assam ......... I think you should discuss this matter with Mr. Gopalaswami Ayengar ......... In a sense you have to face somewhat different problem (from East Panjab) and surely we ought to be able to devise ways and means to deal with it".54

Though Bordoloi had no power in his hands to do anything he could not take the issue casually and wrote to Nehru "that we have been very anxious to prevent any design of Pakistan on us, but in these Inter-Dominion matters unless we have full co-operation from you, nothing seems to be possible".55 Voicing his concern regarding the problems created by the influx of immigrants from East Pakistan, Gopinath Bordoloi stated in the Assembly in March 1950:

"Popular demand for stopping the influx has been vocal for years and the Government of Assam continually moved the Government of India for controlling this since April 1948. But the Government of India, perhaps desirous to keep in the best of terms with Pakistan, took action only when the rest of India supported this demand of the people of Assam".56

Bordoloi's statement in the Assembly indicated his Government's firmness to solve the immigration problem. In 1948 he toured the border areas extensively and to his utter disgust found that the Eastern Pakistan people were trying to create trouble by instigating and intimidating the people of that area specially of the adjacent Garo and Khasi Hills.57 Being the head of a frontier province, he naturally felt the intensity of the problem and so repeatedly asked for armed forces to be posted. He wrote: "We had hardly any such forces in our borders, except perhaps in two or three stations which are used for the purpose of checking illicit exports of rice and paddy from the provinces."58

But Nehru on 8 March expressed inability "to spare a brigade of the Indian Army for

54. Letter of Nehru to Bordoloi (secret), New Delhi, 18 May, 1949
55. Letter of Bordoloi to Nehru (secret and personal), New Delhi, 29 May 1949
56. ASA, ALAP, March 14, 1950, p. 97
57. Bordoloi's Diary, 5, 6, 9 January, 1948, APAI, 7 April, 1948
Assam at that time."59 Bordoloi hoped that all the problems arising out of the partition would be mutually solved in the Inter Dominion Conference held at Calcutta in April, 1948. But in the discussion, he became disappointed at the manner in which Assam's case was treated. He wrote, that he could not get any assurance from the Pakistan Government that they would take measures to discourage the move or propaganda for the inclusion of Khasi and other Hill areas in their border into Pakistan. He further observed:

"The main grievances that I felt was that in the anxiety to negotiate for East Bengal and West Bengal, the peculiar situation of Assam was not taken into considerations and generalizations were proposed to be accepted for implementation by the provinces, without the provinces being made to know anything about the factor being allowed to be ready to face them."60

The Nehru Liaquat Pact - of 8 April 1950 provided for:

i) The return to India of those East Pakistan Muslims who had been earlier pushed back to East Pakistan.

ii) The return to East Pakistan of those Bengali Hindus who had earlier crossed over to India after partition.

The Assam Government had to face another problem as the Pakistan Muslim returned to India but the Bengali Hindus did not return to East Pakistan. The Revenue Minister, Bishnuram Medhi, tried to implement the land Acquisition and Requisition Act of 1948 to check the influx and to allot surplus land to indigenous people. Sardar Patel became infuriated as he felt this would go against the Government policy of immediate settlement of the East Bengal refugees and immediately sent a strong letter to Bordoloi criticizing him for not giving priority for the settlement of the refugees. But Bordoloi replied that Medhi was not minimizing the importance of the claim of the refugees.

60. Letter of Bordoloi to Patel, 19 April, 1948, ibid
because the Land Acquisition and Requisition Act of 1948 was passed long before the question of land for refuges had came up for consideration.\footnote{Ibid}

Bordoloi had used all legislative means to control the flow of immigrants from across the border, but the response from the Centre was half hearted. The Congress and almost all political parties treated the immigration problem as a refugee problem and the efforts centred on rehabilitation of the refugees. To discourage Muslim immigrants from Eastern Pakistan the Indian Parliament passed the Immigrants Act on 13 February 1950. This Act provided for the removal of immigrant persons from erstwhile East Bengal. The Government of Assam empowered by the new law ordered a number of Muslim immigrants to quit the province, but inspite of this, infiltration to Assam continued unabated.

\footnote{Ibid}
2) GOPINATH BORDOLOI AND REFUGEE PROBLEM:

The joy of freedom on 15 August, 1947, was marred by the partition of the country in 1947 which resulted in influx of hordes of people from East Bengal to Assam. We have already seen that this was one of the major problems of the Bordoloi Government after independence and one which thwarted his endeavor in building a new Assam. There was a continuous flow of Hindu refugees peasants, artisans, petty traders from East Pakistan to Assam. In 1951 the number rose to 2,74,455.63 With their coming new dimensions were added to the existing tensions between the major religious and linguistic communities. Moreover, a number of surplus officers belonging to Sylhet, which was included in Pakistan by referendum, had to be accommodated in the province of Assam at the cost of local qualified persons who were awaiting employment. Both Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister, repeatedly gave pressure to Bordoloi to absorb all those employees coming from East Pakistan. It was a fact that of these refugees many had initially opted to stay back in Pakistan but harassment upon the Hindus and other economic constraints made them decide to settle in Assam. So Bordoloi, along with the Chief Minister of Bengal, Prafulla Ghosh, wanted that the Government of India should discuss this issue with the concerned authorities. Bordoloi even sent a list of such employees, so that they could be absorbed in the departments of the Central Government64 but did not get any positive assurance from Patel.65 Since the Union Finance Minister was unable to provide the funds needed for the development of Assam by way of post war projects, Bordoloi had to constantly plead with Nehru to intervene in the matter. Nehru pointed out that the Government of India was giving top priority to the refugee problem and "if Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help in solving the refugee problem, then the claim of Assam for financial help would obviously suffer."66

In the same strongly worded letter Nehru wrote:

63. Census of India (Assam) 1951, Vol-XII, Part-I (A), p. 337
"You say there is no further land available in Assam. This is a question of fact which can easily be determined. It is patent, however that if land is not available in Assam, it is still less available in the rest of India, which is very heavily populated barring the deserts and mountains .......67

Nehru even charged some ministers of state that they preferred Muslims of East Bengal to Hindus.68 The position was such that outside the tribal belts and hill districts not more than two lakhs acres of waste lands were available and it was scattered in various blocks of more than 1000 acres.69 On the whole, not more than 25,000 acres would be fit for heavy reclamation. Assam Government, as pointed out by Bordoloi, had to provide land to 1,86,121 landless peasant families and as such if 10 acres were allotted per family, then at least 18,61,210 acres of land would be needed. Besides, about 50,000 peasant families of Assam, who had become homeless in the floods of the previous two years had to be rehabilitated.70 Since Assam was a purely agricultural state which lacked industrialization because of Centre's continued neglect, a popular government must pay attention to the rehabilitation of the peasants. Bordoloi was in great distress on the question of Nehru's economic threat to Assam. He told Nehru:

"I feel extremely hurt when you say that the claims of Assam for financial help would suffer for our incapacity to help solving the refugee problem. It will be quite easy for you to throttle the province of its existence by withholding the necessary help for its life and growth, but I hope it will not be done, not surely on the plea of our failure to solve this particular problem ......... I am sure if we are unable to do more .... it is entirely due to the non-development of the province. A more developed province today might have helped better in solving the problem."71

As the Government of India was unable to settle refugees in Assam, the Central Ministry of Rehabilitation in July 1949 planned to put refugees in vacant railway land in

67. Ibid
68. Ibid
69. NMML, letter of Bordoloi to Nehru, (Secret and Personal), 7 May 1949
70. NMML, letter of Bordoloi to Nehru (Secret and Persona) 29 May 1949
71. Ibid
Assam without prior consultations with the State Government. In 1948 there was a serious law and order situation when Bengali employees of the railways, who formed 90% of the total railway employees in Assam had staged a lightning strike without any notice or cause. The Assam Government feared that this situation might be repeated and as the refugees had communist leanings, as the railway employees, the security of the country in the Eastern region might be endangered. The Chief Secretary communicated these in a letter to the Secretary, Ministry of Rehabilitation.

Nehru, instead of giving due consideration to the difficulty of Assam, charged it of “following a narrow provincial policy excluding others.” He even threatened Bordoloi that “it will be difficult for the Central Government to have any major scheme in Assam. I want you and your Government to consider carefully the consequences of this policy.” Nehru became infuriated, when he heard from some corner that there was a talk going on in Assam regarding dual citizenship. Bordoloi boldly refuted the charge.

“I thought that not only the Government were not suffering from any narrow provincialism; but that they were acting with the sole object of building the various elements in the province into a feeling of homogeneity as citizens of India and Assam. It is an extremely difficult task by itself but is rendered more difficult by the attitude of some local Bengalis and the Bengali Press …….. I indeed feel greatly dismayed when I find that much of these exaggerated and false propaganda against Assamese were believed by persons in authority because they have the support of a powerful press and can get contact at all levels in the rest of India …. All that I can say is that we have not followed that policy and that we do not deserve any criticisms on that score. We are surely more sinned against than sinning.”

72. N. K. Barooah op. cit., p.32
73. Ibid.
74. Confidential Report 2/44/6 dated 20 July 1949. from S. P. Desai to the Secretary, Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, New Delhi
75. NMML, Letter from Nehru to Bordoloi, August 7, 1949, File No. PS 4/49
Bordoloi knew that Nehru's bitterness was caused by the propaganda circulated by interested groups. So he said:

"You have also done the people of Assam wrong in assuming that the people of Assam want a dual citizenship. If some crank ventilates, through press and literature, any fad of his, the blame should neither go the people of Assam nor to the Government. I could understand your bitterness about it if any responsible persons had made such statement or supported it . . . ." 77

All this shows what a delicate and critical situation Bordoloi had to face as Chief Minister of Assam in the formative period of Independence and how he was forced to shoulder the burden of the refugees amidst manifold difficulties.

In 1950, the Government of Assam decided to distribute the Surplus Waste Lands acquired by the Land Acquisition and Requisition Act of 1948, among the indigenous landless cultivators, tea-garden labourers and the refugees. But Ajit Prasad Jain, Union Minister of State for Rehabilitation demanded that lands should be distributed between the local landless people and the refugee on 50:50 basis. When it was not agreeable to the Assam Government he sought the intervention of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.78 Patel found the action of Assam's Revenue Minister, Bishnu Ram Medhi, "at variance with the letter and spirit of instructions of the Central Government."79 Bordoloi explained that already his Government had undertaken the responsibility of rehabilitating one lakh refugees in addition to the 1,25,000 refugees who had come to Assam a year and a half earlier. Inspite of the persistent demands of the local landless people, the Government had already allotted lands to 10,000 refugees.80 Non-fulfillment of the demand of the local peasants made the Government's position awkward and it gave the Socialists and the Communists chance to instigate them for launching agitation. That is why, Bordoloi told Ajit Prasad Jain that "If he wanted an announcement of

77. ibid
79. ibid-Letter of Patel to Bardoloi, 11 June, p.205,op.cit.
a policy declaring the claims of the refugees as superior to those of the local people or even at par with them, we should decide not to contest the next election .... But Patel's assertion was that "priority should be given to refugee against local sentiment." Instead of becoming convinced with the data provided by the Chief Minister of the province, he asserted that "there is considerable surplus land available and it would be criminal waste of that land if we do not turn it as quickly as possible into food production." He surmonized Bordoloi in his reply ".... your Government instead of submitting to this local prejudice must adopt an educative role and persuade the local people to realize the stake involved and appreciate the difficulties of the Central Government in finding shelter for these landless, homeless people." These statements clearly expose the unsympathetic attitude of the Central Government towards the regional problems of the State, as priority was given to the settlement of the refugees ignoring the problem of the local landless people.

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., Patel to Bardoloi, 3 July 1950, pp.207-208, op.cit.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
3) BORDOLOI AND TRIBALS:

Assam which is bounded by hills on all sides except on the west, is a homeland of diverse races and tribes, who are of various ethnic origins and who migrated into the region at different periods of time. It is indeed a meeting ground of Negrites, Austrics, Alpines, Tibeto-Barmans, Dravidians and Aryans. The prominent hill tribes inhabiting the area are the Nagas, Garos, Khasis and Jaintias, Bhutiyas, Akas, Daflas, Adis, Mizos, Karbi, Dimasa while the plains tribes include the Mising, Deuri, Rabha, Lalung, Boro, Mech and Sonowal.

By the Inner Line Regulation promulgated in 1876 the British kept the people of the hills separated from the inhabitants of the plains. The hill areas were excluded from all constitutional reforms until 1937 and remained under administered areas and kept in seclusion as the museum specimens of backward tracts. By the Act of 1935 the hill areas of Assam were classified as 'Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas' in order to keep them secluded from the plains. According to this Act an outsider would have to procure a pass to go the excluded area. Gopinath Bordoloi was so concerned about the hill people that he feared the Indian Government Act of 1935 would totally deprive them of their independence. He observed the rapid deterioration of the cordial relations that had existed between the Ahom kings and the hill people prior to the imposition of British rule. The anomalies in the government policy created a suspicion in the minds of Bordoloi and his colleagues. Only the three districts of Garo Hills and Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Mikir Hills were able to gain some legislative rights. The 'Excluded Areas' viz. Naga Hills, Mizo Hills and North Cachar Hills, were not represented and their administration was in the hands of the Governor. Because of the seclusion, the tribals remained aloof and there was practically no political development in the hills. The Missionaries had provided invaluable service by spreading of western education and thereby contributing to the moral, educational and economic upliftment of the people. But a deplorable isolation persisted among them and Bordoloi

85. A. Guha, op. cit., pp320-21
86. Ibid
commented, "The Missionaries had developed in these tribes a culture which is not only alien to their nature, but actually prevents their association and unification with the world of the Indians ....."87

There was no political development in the hills except for the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District till the end of the Second World War. Since 1938 the all India political parties and organizations had been making some attempts to bring the hill people into their fold.88 During the periods of the War most of the hill people expressed concern regarding the future status of their respective districts. From 1940 onwards some British officers and other interested people formulated a plan of a 'Crown Colony' consisting of all the hill areas of Assam and Burma Professor Coupland of Oxford University, who happened to be the unofficial advisor of the Cabinet Mission, had been making a grandiose plan of a Christian state, comprising the Hill districts of Assam, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Arakan Hills and parts of Burma.89 This plan and thus the gross injustice was highlighted by G.A. Small in a letter to the Chairman, British Parliamentary Delegation:

"It is common knowledge that the Government of India, and possibly the British Government, have in mind to form a Frontier Province outside India by combining the Northern part of Burma with the Hill District of Assam and the Hill Tracts outside the Assam border....In my opinion it would be grossly unfair to the tribal people of Assam to bring them under the same type of Government as the transfrontier tribes.It would also be grossly unfair to the Assamese people to separate the Hills of Assam from the Plains of Assam."90

Gopinath Bordoloi was deeply concerned about the problems of the hill people whom the British had consciously kept in seclusion, by creating the so called "Excluded

87. Gopinath Bordoloi, Our Hills Brethren of Assam, 1941, Bordoloi papers.
88. A Guha, op. cit., pp 322-23
S. L. Barua, A comprehensive History of Assam, Delhi, 1985 pp. 615
90. Letter from G.A. Small, I.E.S(Retd.) to the Chairman, British Parliamentary Delegation, 11 January, 1946, G.N. Bordoloi Papers, NMML
Areas" and "Partially Excluded Areas" in the hill areas. His concern is evident from the
article "Our Hill Brethren in Assam", written while in jail wherein he reveals his sensivity
towards the problem.

"But the great pity is that the Indian hardly know anything as to what is
happening to these people within the hill fortresses either under or outside the
administration of the British rulers. Those of us who think about them think only
as to how cheap we could purchase the cotton, the lac, the red pepper etc. and
other raw materials they bring out to the market and yet there is so much to be
thought about them. The dreamer of an independent India must also dream how
they are going to deal with these tribals, whether they would continue the policy
of aggression by working on the fear, envy, and hatred of these tribes and
develop isolation in them or whether they would adopt and try to raise the moral
and economic standard of these people and concede to them equal right with
the rest of the people of India. The humanitarian organizations have even now
vast fields for their activity for no less than a million of these brothers living as
they do in a most primitive stage."91

During discussions with his colleagues at Jorhat jail, Bordoloi expressed his
opinion that representative government should be extended to the hill areas, and
that the frontier tracts of Balipara and Sadiya should come under the provincial
administrations. He also felt that the Centre should consult the Government of Assam
over any problem concerning the hill tribes. His deep concern for the future of the
hill tribes is reflected in these words,

"While the whole of India buzz with the talk of Pakistan or its antidote, very
few seem to cast any thought about the surroundings of a province which in itself
comes for so little consideration for the rest of India in any connection excepting
perhaps for knowing that the province as the Eastern Frontier of India, should
come within the sphere of influence of some rival 'Stan' or Dom ..........92

91. Gopinath Bardoloi, Our Hill Brethren of Assam, 1941, Bordoloi papers, NMML
92. ibid’

65
Immediately after assuming office as Premier of Assam in 1938, Bordoloi deputed S. P. Desai, one of the ablest ICS officers, to make an in-depth study of the tribal issues and to draw up a plan for protecting them in their habitats. But before the plan could materialize, the Ministry had to resign after 14 months in office. Saadullah, as the next Premier of Assam, encouraged the influx of several lakhs of refugees from East Bengal under the garb of "Grow More Food" causing displacement of the indigenous tribal peasantry. These efforts of the British created suspicion in the minds of the tribals and there developed an urge for autonomy and political participation. Thus several district political organization like the Garo National Council, Khasi Jaintia Political Association, Karbi Dubai, Naga Hills District Tribal Council which was reorganized as the Naga National Council in 1946, Mizo Union and United Mizo Freedom Organisation were formed. The Tribal leaders joined hands by forming the "Tribal League" in the pattern of the Muslim League. Towards the end of 1945 in its plenary session at Lakhimpur, the Tribal League Conference invited Bordoloi to attend it. He had been released from jail on health grounds and was convalescing. In his address at the conference Bordoloi citing historical facts and figures and political context and perspective, emphasized that there was no fundamental or major differences between the tribal and non-tribal common people of Assam and the fulfillment of the aspirations and the general progress of all tribals and non tribals depended on their unity. His message was greeted by a standing ovation.

When the modality of transfer of power by the British was being discussed in the forties the Cabinet Mission made a statement on 16 May 1946, to the effect that the tribal areas and the excluded areas would require special attention of the Constituent Assembly. On his meeting with the Cabinet Mission Delegate, Bordoloi stated that the hill people should be associated with the administration with a high degree of

93. Gaurisankar Battacharya, op. cit., pp. 25
94. S. L. Barua, A comprehensive History of Assam, Delhi, 1985, p. 615
95. Gaurisankar Battacharya, op.cit., p.26
96. ibid
autonomy. The Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribals headed by Sardar V. Patel, set up in February 1947, two sub-committees of which one was for the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas and the other Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas in Provinces other than Assam. 

For his deep understanding and keen interest in the development of the tribals, Borodoloi was made the chairman of the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. Besides Bordoloi as Chairman, J. J. M. Nichals Roy, Rup Nath Brahma and A. V. Thakkar were its members. This Committee was formed to enquire into the probability of tribal autonomy within the provincial structure of administration. The main aim behind this constitutional set up was (a) to preserve the tribal way of life (b) to provide maximum autonomy to manage their own affairs (c) to keep the tribals living in strategic areas free from exploitation and domination by more advanced sections of the population and (d) to protect legitimate tribal economic interests and right of management of forest, land etc.

Regarding the tribals dwelling in border areas of Assam Bordoloi said,

"The policy to be followed should be one of complete non-aggression. The Province should render all co-operation to develop themselves in their respective areas and friendship with them should be cultivated. A Board of specialists, to study their mode of living etc. and to investigate the real needs and above all their psychology should be set up."

Despite his disturbing health Bordoloi toured the hill and tribal areas extensively in order to meet all the important representatives of the hill people and to take their views on the future administration of the areas. His tour included visits to the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar Hills subdivision, the Mikir Hills and the Naga Hills District. The Committee could not visit the Garo Hills District on account

98. ibid.
99. B. K. Bhattacharya, Builders of Modern India, Publication Board, 1986, pp. 64-65
100. Gopinath Bardoloi, op. cit.
of bad weather. Several district level tribal political organizations had been formed in
the hills since 1947. Representatives were invited and examined as witnesses from
those tribes whose areas could not be visited by the Committee. Rev. J. J. M. Nichols
Roy, the Khasi leader, was one of the members of the Sub-Committee. In early 1946
a Khasi-Jaintia Political Association was set up which raised the demand for a
federation of the Khasi areas within a sovereign Assam.101 The Garo National Council
was formed in March 1946.102 A draft Constitution for an autonomous Garo region was
submitted to the Bordoloi Sub-Committee which envisaged the maintenance of
links with the provincial as well as the Central Government.103 In the Mikir Hills the first
political organization of the Mikir people was formed in early 1947 with the aim of
consolidating the Mikir areas into a single administrative unit.104 Thus the post war trend
all over the partially excluded area was one of growing desire for local autonomy within
Assam and India. In June 1946, the Naga National Council under the leadership
of Y. Aliba Imti Ao, demanded autonomy within Assam. But in February 1947, it
demanded an interim Government with financial assistance for a period of ten years at
the end of which the Nagas would be free to choose any form of Government under
which they would live.

In Lushai Hills at the initiative of the District Magistrate, a District Conference
was convened which formulated the Macdonald Scheme. Its proposals were not
accepted by the Mizo Union. They desired that all Mizo areas should form into a single
administrative unit with the power of self-determination within Assam. But on 20 July,
1947 the United Mizo Freedom organization propagated secession of all contiguous
Mizo areas from India to form a separate Union with Mizo areas of Burma.105 It
was solely due to Bordoloi's able guidance and statesmanship that all these tribal

A. Guha, *op.cit.*, p.325
103. Ibid, p. 72.
104. Ibid, pp 71-72

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organizations finally agreed to be included in India.\textsuperscript{106}

In the Garo Hills, the Garo National Council demanded an autonomous Garo region and envisaged maintenance of links both with the Centre and the Province.\textsuperscript{107} In the Mikir areas the Karbi-a-Durbar wanted a single administrative unit, which would put due importance to the protection and preservation of local customs and introduction of free and compulsory education.\textsuperscript{108}

When the Constituent Assembly of India took up question of integration of the hill areas with the rest of Assam they had to deal with the complicating situation created and nurtured by British imperialism, as artificial barriers were created by the British administration between the people of hills and plains. Under the existing circumstances, building of an independent Assam was a challenging task. The Constituent Assembly was of opinion that this challenging task could be accomplished by non other than Gopinath Bordoloi with his vision of a united Assam of hills and plains on the foundation of freedom and extended democracy.

The Constituent Assembly of India had constituted a North East Frontier (Assam) and Excluded Areas Sub Committee with Bordoloi as its Chairman and guide, and had entrusted this Sub Committee with the task of recommending a scheme of political and administrative reforms for the hill tribes which was to be incorporated in the constitution.\textsuperscript{109} The Sub-Committee had to deal with the uphill task of ending British legacy of autocratic rule in the hills and isolation of the hill people and to unite the people of the hills with those of the plains of the province of Assam.\textsuperscript{110}

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee submitted its reports to the Constituent Assembly on 28 July, 1947, in two parts containing analytical assessments and concrete


\textsuperscript{107} S. Chaube, \textit{op.cit.}, p.72.

\textsuperscript{108} V. V. Rao, \textit{A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India}, 1874-1974, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 167-170.

\textsuperscript{109} Ajit Kumar Sharma, 'Gopinath Bordoloi- The Maker of History' Birendra Dutta(ed), \textit{op.cit.}, Guwahati, 1990, p.83

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid
recommendations for constitutional provisions to its parent body. On the latters' suggestion, on 7 December 1947, the Drafting Committee incorporated in the Draft Constitution provisions on the basis of the recommendations of the Sub-Committee.\footnote{Patel to President, Constituent Assembly, 4 March 1949, FIC, III, pp 586-7} According to this Report, the hill areas were divided into two categories for administrative convenience. Six autonomous tribal districts, namely the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, the Lushai Hills district, the Naga Hills districts, the North Cachar sub division of the Cachar District and the Mikir Hills District, all belonged to the first category. The Sadiya and Balipara frontier tracts, the Tirap frontier tract the Lakhimpur frontier tract and the Naga Tribal Area belonged to the second category, where at that time regular provincial administration was not possible. These frontier areas were to be under the Central Government, with the Governor of Assam acting as its agent till the establishment of regular administration, when all these frontier regions would be transferred to the provincial administration.\footnote{CAD, Vol. VII, pp. 102-142}

The Report further recommended that each of the tribal districts was to be administered by a District Council set up by the Governor. The District Council would have power of legislation over the occupation and use of land, other than land comprising reserved forests. Primary schools and dispensaries and such other institutions would be managed by the District Councils. In the administration of justice, the hill people would have full power of administering their own social laws by the tribal councils of courts for the trial or offences other than those which would be punishable with death, transportation for life or imprisonment for over five years. Regarding the finance, the Committee recommended the allocation of certain taxes and financial power to the Councils. The development programme for the hill area prepared by the Government of Assam would be financed liberally both by the Central and provincial Government.\footnote{V.V. Rao, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.176-192}
The Drafting Committee accepted the Bordoloi Sub-Committee's recommendation and these were incorporated in Article 255 of the Draft Constitution of February 1948 and the Sixth Schedule.\textsuperscript{114} The provisions of the Sixth Schedule were considered by the Constituent Assembly on September 5 and 6, 1949 and eventually adopted by the Assembly with some amendment moved by Ambedkar.\textsuperscript{115} The incorporation in the Constitution of Article 275, (Article 255 of the Draft Constitution) which prescribed the amount of financial assistance the Central Government would provide for the development of tribal areas in Assam, was indeed a great achievement of Bordoloi and other representatives of Assam in the Constituent Assembly. Article 255 had provided for special assistance in the form of grants-in-aid to Assam for administration of the tribal areas and the scheduled tribes and the development of backward tribal areas.\textsuperscript{116} Intervening in the Constituent Assembly Debates, Bordoloi forcefully explained the background of investigation,

"...People of Hills area were already fully suffused with these ideas of isolation and separation. The most important fact that presented itself before this committee was whether for the purpose of integration, the methods of force, the methods of the use of the Assam Rifles and the military forces should be used or a method should be used in which the willing co-operation of these people could be obtained for the purpose of governing those areas .... The point therefore that presented itself to us was whether we should raise in them a spirit of enmity and hatred by application of force or whether we should bring them up under the broad principle of government by goodwill and love. The advisory committee thought that the latter course was the course that should be adopted."\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Patel to President, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 682-683
\textsuperscript{115} ibid
\textsuperscript{116} B. Shiva Rao(ed), \textit{The Framing of India's Constitution: Selected Documents, Vol-III}, p. 614
\textsuperscript{117} N. K. Barooah, \textit{Gopinath Bordoloi, Indian Constitution and Centre-Assam Relations}, Guwahati, 1990, pp. 125-126,
Bordoloi further elaborated: \(^{118}\)

“There are certain institutions among these hill tribals which in my opinion, are so good that if we wanted to destroy them, I considered it to be very wrong. One of the things which I feel is very creditable to those tribals, is the manner in which they settle their disputes. Cases which would go in the name of murder according to our penal code, were settled by these people by the barest method of Panchayat decision. Then the democracy which prevailed there, though limited in the sense, as it is confined only to the tribals of a clan or region—will raise the admiration of any students."

This was one side of the picture. There was another side documented in Bordoloi Committee Report. The tribal people entertained great fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of their superior organization and experience of business. The hill people felt that if suitable provisions were not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, a large number of them would settle down and not only occupy land belonging to the hill people but would also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions. Thus the hill people attached special importance to the "Inner Line" to cross which the non-tribals required a pass and the provisions prohibiting non-tribals from settling down, of carrying on business without the approval of the District Officer. They were also concerned with the question of preserving their ways of life and language.\(^{119}\)

His advocacy of a system of full fledged self government in the hill districts was a positive expression of goodwill and love. This was a unique experiment of decentralization of political power.

"It provided the hill with the fullest freedom to live accordance to their age old laws, customs and institutions and at the same time gave them the opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with their brethren in the plains in building up...

\(^{118}\) ibid.

\(^{119}\) Prof. B. K. Ray Barman, 'Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi and Tribals', Gopinath Bordoloi Birth Centenary Volume, Dr. Nagen Saikia(ed), New Delhi, 1991 p. 61
a healthy Assam in a strong and powerful India. Bordoloi wanted to consolidate the province of Assam on the basis of district autonomy in the hills. "He carried the vision of a united healthy Assam which he had sought to build not by force and centralized control but by recognizing freedom of the people and granting them local power."121

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution bears testimony to Bordoloi’s understanding and in-depth knowledge of the problem of the tribals. The tribal people regarded him as their friend and he tried his best to fight separatism and to bring about a genuine integration in the region.122

Under his auspices ‘Hills and Plains Festival’ was organized at Shillong with a week-long programme for strengthening of friendship between the people of hills and plains.123

But unfortunately Bordoloi passed away before the proper implementation of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Thus he could not play the desired role by giving wise guidance in the working of district autonomy. During his tenure as Premier he continuously strived for the development of the Hill and other backward areas. His government encouraged the development of co-operative societies and passed regulations in this regard :124

“The Government of Assam has made the Assam North East Frontier (Abor Hills, Mishmi Hills, Balipara, Tirap and Lakhimpur) Tracts Co-operative Societies Regulation, 1949, and has submitted it for the assent of the Governor General. The establishment of Co-operative Societies in the North East Frontier Tracts consisting of the present

120. Ajit Kr.Sharma, Birendra Dutta (ed), *op.cit.*, p. 83
121. *ibid*
122. Bordoloi’s Diary, 15 February, 17 February and 15 March, 1948 (Family source)
123. M. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 85
Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, Abor Hills District and Mishmi Hills District, which are Excluded Area of the province of Assam, for the distribution of cloth, consumer goods etc., and for the implementation of other schemes in connection with the general development of those areas, has become a pressing and urgent necessity. The provincial Government have accordingly considered it necessary to extend the salient provisions of the Co-operative Societies Act, 1912 (II of 1992), to those areas.

Bordoloi’s deep concern for the upliftment of the hill people is evident from his work. He was a leader who had a catholic outlook and empathised with the hill people. That he could convince the tribals about his sincerity for their development is clearly reflected in the condolence messages sent to the Bordoloi family on his death by A. Z. Phizo, the Naga rebel leader:

"With only a few others, Bordoloi saw, years ago, amidst the gathering storm, a patch of the blue sky. In that great vision of his and his unremitting contributions towards its realization will be found truly depicted the impress of his character which neither death nor time can rob away. In life, Bordoloi was a friend of the Nagas whose friendship they held dear. Nagas have been made poorer that he had gone."[125]

Plains tribals belonging mostly to the Mongoloid race felt exploited and suppressed in social and political development. Andrew Clow, the Governor of Assam (1942-1946) expressed the opinion that “the Assamese, both caste Hindus and the Muslims professed solicitude for the tribes but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathy with the tribes.”[126] In 1933 different local tribal organizations like Kachari Sanmilan, Koch Rajbongshi Sanmilan, Chutia Sanmilan, the Muttock Association etc. formed the All Assam Plains Tribal League. Under the able leadership of Bhimbar Deuri, the League took up measures for the improvement of socio-economic

125. Condolence Message. (Family source)
problems of these tribals. Gopinath Bordoloi could also realize the gravity of the situation arising from the unabated infiltration of the Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh district and their subsequent settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley, thereby pushing the plains tribes to the interior. Bordoloi therefore proposed a protective system of tribal belts as a safeguard against the immigrants. It was for such reasons that the Tribal League extended him support in throwing out the Saadulla Ministry.

Though in 1940, the Tribal League leader, Rupnath Brahma, joined the Saadullah Cabinet, yet his land settlement policy and the handling of the Line System was severely criticized by other tribal leaders. The Assamese, both tribals and non-tribals, strongly denounced Sadullah when he supported Assam’s inclusion in the grouping in accordance to the Cabinet Mission proposals. The hill people were greatly disturbed by the prevailing political uncertainty and thus extended their co-operation to plains tribals in the process of forming a common political association. With the aim of having a common platform for all the tribal people, the Assam Tribes and Races Federation was formed. In its first session held at Shillong on 21-23 March, 1945, the Federation demanded a sovereign independent status for Assam as a means of safeguarding the distinct identity of the tribes. All Assam Hills and Plains Tribal Students Sanmilan formed at the same time fiercely criticized Saadulla’s move of including Assam into Pakistan and proposed that Assam should become an autonomous unit. On the other hand, Bordoloi’s participation in the session of Tribal League held at Dangari in Lakhimpur District in 1945 convinced the tribals that the fulfillment of the aspirations of the tribal as well as non-tribal people of Assam depended on their conscious unity. Bordoloi thus endeared himself to the tribals and his proposal of joint electorate with reservation of seats for the tribals was widely acclaimed. As a result of that, Bhimbar

127. PHA, Vol. III,
129. Assam Tribune, 2 February 1943
130. Assam Tribune, March 28, 1945
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127. PHA, Vol. III,
129. Assam Tribune, 2 February 1943
130. Assam Tribune, March 28, 1945

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4) GOPINATH BORDOLOI AND THE PROGRESS OF EDUCATION:

"Education was one of his chief concerns and to me, my father was primarily an educationist, the aim of education he envisaged in Assam was not of merely attaining individual degree but that equipped with their degree the young blood would enter society and serve the people."\(^{136}\)

Lily Mazinder Baruah pens the ideology of Gopinath Bordoloi who was an educationist first. As Premier of this state he made immense contribution in the field of education, the lack of which he realized was one of the main reasons of the backwardness of this state and was an impediment to its development.

After the establishment of British rule in Assam in 1826 the indigenous system of education continued to exist. It was Major Jenkins, who realizing the importance of education in this backward region, took the initiative to establish the first English School at Guwahati in 1835, followed by another of the kind at Sibsagar in 1840. After this, the Christian Missionaries played an active part in spreading modern education and established many schools in the hills and plains of Assam. But the progress of education in Assam was very slow due to the various factors. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, in his _Observation on the Administration of the Province*, pointed out the defects of the administration in matters relating to education and was particularly critical of the imposition of Bengali as the medium of instruction in Assam. Though collegiate education was started in the Guwahati School in May 1866, it failed to make much headway. The cause of higher education received some importance only after 1874 when Assam was made a Chief Commissioner’s Province. In 1899 Manik Chandra Barua submitted a memorandum to the Government requesting for the establishment of a second grade college at Guwahati. The memorandum, backed by tremendous popular support, received the consent of Sir Henry J.S. Cotton, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, and in June 1900, a college named after Henry Cotton was established at Guwahati.


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The educational policy in Assam before the assumption of office by the Congress Ministry in 1946 was virtually the continuation of the old British policy that arose out of administrative considerations and essentially remained keyed to the parent policy of domination inspite of being subjected to long and searching criticism. The century old educational policy had one primary objective-viz- to create human resources to help run governmental and other allied machineries. The educational policy designed, as it was to suit the interests of the foreign masters was hardly national in content and form.

The educational policy and activities in India had a chance of some reform, when in seven out of eleven provinces of India, the Congress Ministries came to power in 1937, under the Government of India Act of 1938. The prospects of education under provincial autonomy appeared encouraging. But the magnitude, variety and complexity of the problems were such that it was hardly possible for the popular Ministries in different provinces to tackle all of them at once. Moreover, the country was still under foreign rule and therefore, no radical reform that would clash with the interests of the foreign rulers could be thought of.

The problem of Education in Assam with her varied and often-conflicting interest, was very difficult. Yet the Congress Ministry in Assam lost no time in enthusiastically improving and reorganizing education in this province as far as their powers permitted. They planned for universal and compulsory primary education for all children of school going age, for providing education to the adult illiterates, improving education by giving it a practical bias, and for making education on the whole more related to life and national in content.

Gopinath Bordoloi's Budget Speech of 1939 proposed: 137

"Our attention is, however, mainly directed to the urgent claims of mass education and the wants of those classes who have been so long left in the cold. We propose to inaugurate a campaign for the removal of illiteracy,

137. ASA, Budget Speech of Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, read out by Gopinath Bardoloi, 1939, ALA debated, Vol-1, p. 57-58
which will necessarily imply that we shall have to consider seriously the question of our financial resource and gradual steps. We are determined to make a beginning in this direction. Therefore, with a view not only for taking up more venture schools but also to enforce compulsory primary education in selected areas, a total of three-quarters of a lakh will be found to be devoted to these purpose besides a sum of Rs. 10,000 generously promised for five years by Mr. G. D. Birla for the education of the scheduled castes and tribal people. About Rs. 25,000 of the money goes to providing the people of the Mikir, Garo and Khasi Hills with nonsectarian Government schools. A sum of a quarter of a lakh is provided as new expenditure for the expansion of primary education in the province. A similar sum is provided for the spread of education among the tribal people, scheduled castes and the immigrants. We proposed to increase each of these provisions by a further grant of quarter of a lakh and fifteen thousands respectively thus making the total of new expenditure on primary education to one and a quarter lakh excluding the sum allotted by Mr. G. D. Birla for this purpose. Among minor provisions may be mentioned Rs. 132 as a first beginning in scholarship for the Mikirs. In the short time Government have had at their command, it has not been possible to effect any extensive re-organization of education. The questions of a University or Universities for this province, of overhauling the whole secondary system with a view to give it a more practical and morally wholesome basis and of the spread of primary education, are, however, engaging their earnest attention. One of the most urgent needs is an attack on adult illiteracy, a detailed scheme about which is being framed and intended to be put into force in the course of the year. It is proposed to allot for this scheme a sum of thirty-five thousands rupees, though no provision could be made in the budget for the provision of this amount as of the other two aforespoken items, Government will come before
the House with a supplementary demand. A provision is made in the budget also for training two teachers in the Wardha system of education as that it may be possible to start on the organization of rural education as soon as financial resources have been provided for expansion and make full use of the at present often wasted-existing funds. The modern tendencies of enlightened thought are also recognized by the allotment of Rs. 1,000 for the spread of the *lingua franca* of India through the *Hindustani Prachar Samiti*. Sums of Rs. 300 and 120 are devoted to assisting private effort at coping with long standing problems in the education of the deaf and dumb, and the provisions of instruction in subjects of commercial value. There has for some year been a growing demand, that the traditional system of Sanskrit learning, so long practically neglected, should be encouraged to organize itself and make its stores of learning available to the public. Here as in other provinces the indigenous systems of medicine have been awakening and trying with official aid to throw off stigma that they are unorganized and cannot therefore be recognized. A sum of Rs. 600 is therefore provided for the purpose of aiding a Sanskrit College which is being organized in Kamrup, a stronghold of the traditional learning. Finally, the budget contains a provision of Rs. 4,500 for maintaining the Museum at Gauhati which the province largely owes to the generosity of Rai Bahadur Naupat Rai Kedire. This institution, which will serve as an inspiration to the province in the new world of education, will, it is proposed, be as far as possible under non-official care and direction."

Thus Gopinath Bardoloi who was himself in charge of the education portfolio took interest in all branches of education. He laid special emphasis on the expansion of primary education in the province and for the education of the backward communities. Despite severe financial constraints, his proposals show a genuine desire to remove or at least to reduce mass illiteracy in the province. A method of distributing special college scholarship among the indigenous students has been devised. Fifty percent of
the allocated amount was set aside for tribal students, 20 percent for scheduled caste and 30 percent for other backward classes.\textsuperscript{138}

Some of the important measures taken by the Bordoloi Ministry for the expansion of Education:\textsuperscript{139}

(a) A movement for Mass Literacy was inaugurated and a temporary additional staff was created for the purpose, both on divisional and sub divisional basis.

(b) A number of Primary Schools in different Local Board areas received direct grants from Provincial Revenues. All these schools were absorbed into the Board School system and the grant transferred to the Boards concerned.

(c) An impetus was given to education of Tribals both by starting new schools in their midst as well as by advancing some old ones to higher status. A number of special scholarships were instituted for the benefit of the tribal people and the scheduled and other backward classes. A separate Primary scholarship Examination was also instituted for the Mikir Hills area.

(d) Preliminaries in connection with the introduction of Compulsory Primary Education in three municipalities and one small town were finished and government grants were sanctioned for giving effect to these schemes.

The work of educational reconstruction started by the Congress Ministry in Assam was however cut-short with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, when the Congress Ministry in Assam resigned. Whatever educational progress had been achieved or was about to be achieved in Assam was either halted or negated by the war activities.

\textsuperscript{138} ASA, Assam Gazette, Part VI, January-March, 1939, pp. 1064-1065

\textsuperscript{139} ASA File A/4583, Quinquennial Review of the Progress of Education in Assam during 1937-42, p. 1
The province had also suffered from the adverse effects of floods earlier in 1938-39. The period was therefore not only unfavorable for the launching of new schemes and projects but even the very existence of the Department of Education was threatened by military exigencies of the situation that demanded buildings of schools and colleges for military hospitals as well as for the residence of the officers. Education was almost struck off from the list of important state-subjects. Not to speak of educational improvement and expansion, even the normal work of education was grievously arrested all through the period from 1942 to 1945.140

Although the horrors of war were no more when the Government took office in February 1946, the conditions remained as unsettled and unhinged as during the war. The conditions of life were so difficult and management of affairs so complicated that the Government after taking over charge of the Province found itself placed only in a vortex of problems. The Government considered that the first and foremost thing necessary for a permanent solution of these paralyzing problems and growing vices was the spread and improvement of people's education. The Government also realized that not only the success of the great democratic experiment but also the very independence of the country that was soon to come, depended upon the proper education of the people.

Accordingly, the Government addressed itself wholeheartedly to the all-important task of education in all its stages. It is assuring to note that inspite of trials and travails inevitable in a period of transition marked by great political changes and partition of the country, there was a steady progress in the sphere of education in the Province during the time of this Congress Ministry.

The record of the educational activities of the Bordoloi Government is evident in the Annual Report of the ACPP which recorded :141

140. Ibid
"Government have decided to introduce the Basic system of education based on Sergeant and Wardha schemes in the provinces ............ It is expected that a part of the Scheme will be financed from funds under the Post War Scheme. The Government have made some extra provision in the Budget, this year for the encouragement of the middle Vernacular teaching. With the sure fact of the British rule coming to an end, it is now time to take to our mother tongue. This year the Government have taken up through Local Bodies and direct grant 419 L. P. Schools and 58 Schools have been favoured with non-recurring grant. Special education of Backward, Tribal and Scheduled caste people has been one of the major items of the Education Budget this year."

The Assam Primary Education Bill of 1946 was placed in the Assam Legislature which sought to transfer the control of Primary Education from the Local Bodies to a Provincial Board and to Sub Divisional Boards in each subdivision. The Bill later became an Act with the assent of His Excellency, the Governor of Assam in 1947.142 This Act, known as Assam Primary Education Act of 1947, provided for a State Primary Education Board in charge of a Secretary appointed by the Government and a school Board with the Deputy Inspector of Schools as the Secretary in each subdivision in the Plains. Thus the control of the Primary Education was transferred from the local Bodies to the state Primary Education Board.143

Bordoloi held an Education conference on the 4 July 1946, to which many eminent educationists, officers of the Education Department, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and the Advocate General of Assam were invited to formulate a distinct policy on matters relating to Education, realizing that education was vital for the development and modernization of the Province.144

142. ASA, File A/4707 Queinquennial Review of the Progress of Education in Assam during 1942-47, p. 9
143. Ibid., p. 54
Thereafter certain changes were effected in the Education Policy.

Policy changes from 1946:

(a) Primary Education – The control of Primary Education was transferred to a statutory body with a view to make it universal and compulsory in the plains areas of the state. In the Hill areas a policy of planned advancement was taken in hand.

(b) Basic Education – The introduction of Basic Education in the lines of the recommendation of the Central Advisory Board of Education was decided upon and steps taken to implement this decision gradually.

(c) Secondary Education –

1. The principle of grants-in-aid to High Schools were revised with a view to placing the schools at a better footing and also to improve the pay scale of the teachers.

2. Arrangements were made for the introduction of vocational subjects and the teaching of Hindi in High Schools.

3. For development of Education in Tribal areas a scheme for provincialisation and establishment of new schools under government management was put into operation.

4. Liberal provision was also made for grant of scholarships and free studentships to the tribal and the scheduled caste students.

5. Plans for the establishment of a Secondary Education Board was under consideration of Government

(d) University & Collegiate Education -

1. Gauhati University was established in January 1948 and the control of education hitherto exercised by the Calcutta University was taken up by that body.

145. Ibid., pp 3-4
The Government Law College, which had started in the Cotton College premises prior to the establishment of the University was also transferred to the Gauhati University with a view to maintaining a uniform policy for development of higher education in the state.

2. A uniform policy was adopted for giving grants-in-aid to non-Government Colleges with a view to placing these institutions on a sound footing and assuring better pay to the teaching staff.

(e) Introduction of Social (Adult) Education with special stress on citizenship training.

(f) Introduction of N.C.C./Military training in Schools and Colleges.

(g) Provision of facilities for extramural activities in schools and colleges.

(h) i. Transfer of control of Technical Education from the Department of Industries to the Education Department and appointment of the Director of Public Instruction as Secretary to the Government for Technical Education.

ii. Transfer of control of the Assam Civil Engineering School from the P.W.D. to the Education Department.

Transfer of control of Basic Education to the Director of Public Instruction (hitherto Basic Education formed a separate Department outside the control of the D.P.I.) with a view to bringing the general and the technical education under a uniform control.

(i) A Scheme for rendering financial assistance to Non-Government Public Libraries in rural and urban areas had been put into operation from 1948-49.
4) Primary Education:

In 1946 when Bordoloi's Government took over the administration, Primary Education was a responsibility of Local Boards, Municipalities and the Town committees of the Province. However the inspection and supervision of Primary Education was a responsibility of the Government. Thus Primary Education in Assam was subjected to dual control. The Report on Education made the following statement regarding Primary Education:\(^{146}\)

"Primary Education was made compulsory in 30 areas of the 15 plains Sub-divisions of the State of Assam with effect from February 1949. By 1950 it covers an area of 2881.5 sq. miles which included 11 towns and 2637 villages with a total population of 1,04,4901. Thus, from the point of view of the area, the scheme has covered 1/9 of the total area, being half the total number of towns and 1/7 of the total villages under its operation. From the point of view of population, it has affected 1/6 of the total population. During 1948-49 alone as many as 1477 new schools were started and provision was made for nearly 4000 additional teachers. In the year following 1469 more schools were established. In 1950 there were 9110 Primary Schools in the plains districts, together with 13402 teachers, and 5,12,826 students. Almost 50% of the child-population in the state had enrolled themselves in schools, a fact which, incidentally, had been corroborated by the findings of the Sample-Survey conducted in 4 districts by the Statistics Authority of Assam. Efforts were also made to train up as many teachers as possible; there were 2433 trained teachers in the state. According to the Report on Education, Government spent nearly Rs. 10/- on the average, per child. The total Government grant for education for 1950-51, was Rs. 55,63,302/-."

Progress of Primary Education:

146. \textit{ibid}, p 7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Primary Schools</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td>9884 (before partition)</td>
<td>Rs. 32,78,729/- (before partition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948-49</td>
<td>9144 (after partition)</td>
<td>Rs. 35,14,896 (after partition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>10970</td>
<td>Rs. 62,77,607/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Data compiled from Report on Education in Assam during 1945-50, p. 7)*

In the budget of 1947 the Government set apart a sum of Rs. 85,000/- including Rs. 30,000/- for expansion of primary education.\(^{147}\) There was also provision for maintenance grants to venture Primary schools and *Moktabs* and Primary Schools for ex-tea garden labourers, tribals, schedule caste and immigrants.\(^{148}\) A sum of Rs. 2 lakh had been provided for expansion of Primary Education in rural and backward areas and for re-organization of the Primary Education under the Compulsory Primary Education Act.\(^{149}\)

In the 1949 Budget, the Bordoloi Government increased the allotment for expansion and reorganisation of primary education to Rs. 26 lakh in pursuance of the scheme of Compulsory Primary Education, which had been introduced in February 1949. 30 areas in 15 different subdivisions of the Province, were selected, taking particular care to include backward and tribal areas.\(^{150}\) Of a total provision of recurring grants of around Rs. 50 lakhs, a sum of over Rs. 47 lakhs had been allotted to the Education Department, including a sum of Rs. 60,000/- for the excluded areas.\(^{151}\)

The Primary Education Board which had been set up in 1948-49, expanded its activities which included 683 Primary Venture Schools by 1948-49 mostly in Tribal Areas, and 1069 schools in 1949, of which 677 new Primary Schools were started mostly in Tribal areas.\(^{152}\) Fifty new Primary Schools were started in the backward areas inhabited

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147. ASA, Budget speech of Bishnuram Medhi, 1947, ALA Debates, Vol-I, p-59
148. ASA, Budget speech of Bishnuram Medhi, 1948, ALA Debates, Vol-I, p. 70
149. *ibid*
150. ASA, Budget speech of Bishnuram Medhi, 1949, ALA Debates, Vol-1, p. 38
151. *ibid*
152. *ibid*
by Miris, Kacharis and ex-tea garden labourers. By 1950 Primary Education had been made compulsory in 7 towns and more than 1200 villages. 153

Secondary Education:

Prior to the establishment of Bordoloi’s Government, the facilities for Secondary Education existed only in the sub-divisional towns and a few large rural centres. However during his tenure, the grant-in-aid system was extended to more Secondary Schools in the state. During 1949-50 Government made additional recurring provision of Rs.8,36,000/- for the improvement of Aided High Schools. 154 Provision for teaching Vocational subjects and for the introduction of teaching of weaving in the Government High Schools and Aided High Schools were made. These led to improvement of Secondary Education in Assam.

Government decided to take over six Aided High Schools and convert them into Academic High Schools. The following High Schools were taken over-Khowang, Charali, Howli, Sapatgram and Chhaygaon. The buildings for four of them-Khowang, Charali, Howli and Sapatgram were constructed.

The education policy pursued by the Bordoloi Government from 1946 to 1950 led to a gradual and steady increase in the number of secondary schools and also in scholarship. The table below explains the progress of Secondary Education. 155

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Secondary Schools</th>
<th>No. of Pupils</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1019 (before partition)</td>
<td>134,157</td>
<td>22,11,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>172871</td>
<td>44,50,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1171</td>
<td>187,871</td>
<td>53,41,655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For expansion of education in the excluded areas, 149 Primary schools had been taken over in Lushai Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills, Mishmi Hills, Balipara

153. ibid
154. ASR, Report on Education in Assam during 1945-50,op.cit., p-11
155. ibid
Frontier and Abor Hills.\textsuperscript{156} Two special schools for training teachers in North Cachar Hills and Lushai Hills were started and one secondary schools in the Lushai Hills and one in the Naga Hills had been provincialised.\textsuperscript{157}

\textbf{Basic Education :}

Bordoloi being a true Gandhian had deep faith in Basic Education as a national system of Education. His vision of the educated youths was expressed in these words:

"It is very necessary our educated young men should be men with full knowledge of needs and necessities of our masses and of the means to satisfy them. They should be the fountain head of the basic culture of communal unity and should represent a common meeting ground, where all communal difference have found their settlement. They should be able to breathe freedom and exhibit character in all they would feel, think and will. We can expect such young men to lead us and guide us ....."\textsuperscript{158}

With this vision in mind, he took great initiative to make the Basic Education scheme, as sponsored by Gandhi and formulated by Dr. Zakir Hussain Committee, a success in Assam. The Basic Education scheme was more successful in Assam than in the neighbouring state of West Bengal. The success was due to the service rendered by a group of devoted teachers trained at Wardha who were personally selected by Bordoloi himself.

"Government appointed a Touring Sub-Committee which submitted their recommendations early in 1947. Steps were taken to start Basic Training Schools and to train instructors for these Schools. Six Training Schools were started at Shillong, Udarband, Titabar, Sootea, Raha and Dudhnai. In 1946-47, 22 teachers, in 1947-48, 14 teachers, in 1948-49, 27 teachers and in 1949-50, 88

\textsuperscript{156.} ASA, Budget speech of Bishnuram Medhi, 1949, op.cit., p.39
\textsuperscript{157.} ibid
\textsuperscript{158.} G.N. Bordoloi, 'A case for a University in Assam', Jorhat Jail, 1941 (family source)
12 teachers, i.e. 75 teachers in all were sent for training in Sevagram and Jamia Millia during these years. Of these 75 teachers 17 were women and 15 from the Hills.\textsuperscript{159}

The Basic Schools started functioning from March, 1950. 85 Primary Schools were taken over and converted into Basic Schools, where the first two grades had been introduced. Two Senior Basic Schools, one at Shillong and the other at Raha, were also started. The total number of pupils in these schools was 5229 of which 1917 were girls.\textsuperscript{160}

The entire scheme of Basic Education was financed from the Central Grant on Post-War Development Schemes upto March 1950. Subsequently when this grant was withdrawn, reduction had to be made in the Basic Education budget and in 1950-51 only Rs. 4,70,800/- was provided for Basic Education in the State Budget. In 1951 there were 5 Training Centres which were situated at Shillong, Udarband, Titabar, Raha and Dudhnai.\textsuperscript{161}

The Government's policy was to gradually convert the Lower Primary Schools to Junior Basic and the Middle Schools into Senior Basic Schools.

\textbf{Collegiate Education :}

In the words of Lily Mazinder Baruah:

"A Gandhian by nature, father knew higher education to be integral to the development of a state. At the same time he was not unaware of its repercussion on the society. Higher Education would create a chasm between the village and the city .........."\textsuperscript{162}

Bordoloi was associated with higher education long before he became the Premier of this State. The B. Barooah College was established at Guwahati in 1943.

\textsuperscript{159} ASR, Report on Education in Assam during 1945-50, op.cit., p. 10
\textsuperscript{160} ibid
\textsuperscript{161} ibid
\textsuperscript{162} Lily Mazinder Baruah, 'Bardoloi, An Educationist First' in Nagen Saikia(ed), \textit{Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi Birth Centenary Volume}, Delhi, 1981 p. 37
at his initiative.\textsuperscript{163} He did his utmost to search for master degree holders to start the college in the premise of Kamrup Academy H. S. School at Uzanbazar.\textsuperscript{164} With the help of a few noted social reformers like Harikrishna Das, Lokabandhu Bhubaneswar Barooah, Durgeswar Sarma, Gaurikanta Talukdar, Keshab Kanta Barooah, Bordoloi decided to establish this college as a venture college for the poor students of Guwahati.\textsuperscript{165} This is how the B. Barooah College came into existence and Bordoloi took the responsibility of serving the college as the first honorary Principal. When he took over the reins of the Government, Bordoloi laid special emphasis on higher education. During his tenure as Premier, he adopted a uniform policy for giving grants-in-aid to non-government colleges with the aim of placing these institutions on a sound footing and assuring better pay. The table below gives the number of institutions scholars and expenditure on collegiate education:\textsuperscript{166}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Colleges</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5014</td>
<td>1364065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5535</td>
<td>782311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948-49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6796</td>
<td>1291544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7084</td>
<td>1293544</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Report on Education in Assam 1945-50, File No. EMI 621/50)

Establishment of a University in Assam:

The establishment of a University in Assam was a great necessity. The Assamese students had to go to Calcutta and Dacca for Post Graduate and Research studies. The difficulties experienced by the Assamese students in finding accommodation and in other aspects in these places, particularly due to communal disturbances created great agitation in the country. Consequently the Government decided to open

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{163} Premadhar Choudhury, 'Gopinath Bardoloi - A Man of Culture and Sports', B. Dutta (ed), Gopinath Bordoloi, A Centenary Tribute Guwahati, 1990, p. 87
\item \textsuperscript{164} ibid
\item \textsuperscript{165} Lily Mazunder Baruah, 'Bardoloi, An Educationist First' op-cit, p. 38
\item \textsuperscript{166} AS, Report on Education in Assam, 1945-50, File no. EMI 621/50
\end{itemize}
Post-Graduate classes in the two Government Arts College at Guwahati and Sylhet, in different subjects beginning from 1947-48.\textsuperscript{167} A University for Assam had been on the agenda since 1917, when the Sadler Commission first conceived the idea. In 1944 a group of eminent Assamese persons in Calcutta held a meeting to devise ways and means for carrying out high-pressure propaganda for establishment of a University in Assam. In the same year a University meeting was held in Sibsagar mainly through the efforts of late Madhav Chandra Bezbarua and others immediately after the Assam Sahitya Sabha session, that was held there.\textsuperscript{168} A provisional Trust Board was formed in that meeting and a resolution to hold a University Convention in Guwahati was also passed.\textsuperscript{169} In the Guwahati convention a resolution for the establishment of a University at Gauahati was passed and a Trust Board with Gopinath Bordoloi was formed. With the co-operation of the public and the untiring efforts of the Trust Board, specially of its President, Bordoloi, a sum of six lakhs rupees was collected in six months in 1945.\textsuperscript{170}

In his words:

"This movement for a University is not a matter in which Government are alone taking the initiative. It is a sort of a movement from among the people and I am glad to tell you that in this move, almost every one in the Province irrespective of community or religion showed great enthusiasm. Therefore, Sir, if we can bring the University into existence, I feel, we shall be satisfying the aspirations of the people of the Province and we shall be doing an act so long needed and felt by the people."\textsuperscript{171}

When he became the Premier of the Congress Government he took up the matter in right earnest and prepared a bill for the establishment of a University at Guwahati. A name was given to it and land was selected for acquisition at Guwahati. Gopinath

\begin{tabular}{ll}
167. & AS, Quinquennial Review of the Progress of Education In Assam during 1942-1947, op.cit., p.24 \\
168. & ibid \\
169. & ibid \\
170. & ibid \\
171. & ASA, Gopinath Bordoloi in presenting the Gauhati University Bill, 1947 in the Legislative Assembly, ALA Debates, 1 September 1947. p. 958
\end{tabular}
Bordoloi introduced the Gauhati University Bill, 1947 in the Assam Assembly and after the Select Committee had scrutinized it, the Bill was placed before the House on September 12, 1947. It was passed unanimously and the Governor gave his assent on October 15, 1947. The Gauhati University was established in January, 1948. Bordoloi's first choice for the Vice Chancellorship was Kaka Kalelkar, but since he declined the offer, his choice fell on the world renowned Sanskrit scholar, K. K. Handique. He believed that the University would not only be a cultural centre for higher education, but would contribute towards the real growth of the Assamese people and towards the development of rich resources of the region.

"There can be no doubt that the bulk of the revenue for running this institution (University) shall have to be found from the toiling masses of the villages. The educated men instead of keeping in touch and improving the village have left it to indulge in the comforts of the town. The whole outlook of the so called educated men has been one of self indulgence and self aggrandizement with neglect of and often at times at the cost of the interest of the villages. This is of course an indictment against the modern higher education but it does not mean that we should perpetuate a recognized evil or at any rate could not take into serious consideration when we are out on a venture of higher education. To me, it is quite possible to bring in a new outlook into our society—an outlook of service and duty to our fellowmen, with a properly constituted educational centre, sacrificing leadership is as much necessary for the services of the masses as it is necessary to feed and clothe them. It is very necessary that our educated young men should be men with full knowledge of the needs and necessities of our masses and of the means to satisfy them. They should be the fountainhead of the basic culture of communal unity and should represent a common meeting ground where all communal differences have found their settlement. They should be able to breathe freedom and exhibit character in all that they would feel, think
and will. We can expect such young men to lead us and guide us and any institution that would train them should receive our support."172

This is what Gopinath Bordoloi had written about the Gauhati University. Bordoloi wanted that this institution should inspire students to serve the people of the region, including the tribals, in a spirit of humility and self-sacrifice. Bordoloi also had the wisdom to desire that in the University in Assam, education should be as free as possible with least state interference.

"In the sphere of higher education, state interference should descend to a minimum. In other words education whether secondary or university, should be left in the hands of experts, who by virtue of their knowledge and experience, would be able to take an absorbing interest in it, detached from the gross party politics of the day. This body of experts must therefore have not only sufficient power to execute their will force free from interference by anybody, except probably such as may be necessary in very extreme cases."173

In 1947-48, a grant of Rs. 11,00,000 was made to the University for the purpose of constructing essential buildings from the Post-War Grant in addition to the contribution of Rs. 5,00,000/-made to the University from the Provincial Exchequer under section 37 of the Gauhati University Act.174

Besides the University, Bordoloi was also instrumental in establishing technical colleges in Medicine. The need of a medical college in Assam was a long felt necessity. Realising this Bordoloi, after becoming the Premier in 1946, had given assurance in the first session of the Legislative Assembly that he would do his utmost to convert the Berry White Medical School at Dibrugarh into a full fledged college. He appointed an Advisory Committee to prepare a complete scheme for the organization of the Berry White Medical College and its associated hospitals in Dibrugarh and

172. Lily Mazumder Baruah, 'Bardoloi, An Educationist First' op. cit., p. 37
173. ibid p. 38
174. AS, Report on Education in Assam during 1945-50 op.cit., p. 5
of the Sylhet Hospital Medical College of Sylhet including the various departments in each with necessary building accommodation, equipment and staff required for each department and to give advice on the number of students to be trained as well as the curriculum of studies.

The following is an abstract from the proceeding of the Government of Assam in the medical department: 175

"Plans for the improvement and development of medical education in the province have for a long time been under the careful consideration of Government but it has not been possible for many years to take up the work on account of the peculiar financial disabilities of the Province and in recent times on account of the war emergency which prevented all development of a capital nature. The time has now come when no further delay in this important nation building service can be allowed, the present Ministry has decided to go ahead with the plans at the earliest possible date. The report of the Health survey and Development Committee, 1946, commonly called the Bhare Report, is now under the close consideration of Government and it is necessary to create the facilities for turning out fully trained doctors and nurses in much large numbers than hitherto possible, if the schemes for the betterment of the public health and welfare of the towns and rural areas are to be improved in Assam along the line laid down for the creation of State Medical Services capable of affording adequate official aid in all circumstance within the reach of even the humblest and furthest inhabitants of every corner of the provinces."

"In according with the assurance given on the floor of the Legislation Assembly by the Honourable Prime minister Gopinath Bordoloi during the last Assembly session, the Government have decided to create a post of the Post War Development plans of the province, a Medical College in Dibrugarh, 175. Abstract from the Proceeding of the Government of Assam in the Medical Department No. MMO. 135/45, 11 June, 1946 Gazette, Medical Education ,National Library, Kolkata
in place of the Berry White Medical School and a post Graduate Training college as the first essential steps for the fulfillment of their responsibility."

Accordingly, a scheme for raising the present Berry White Medical School to the college standard and for opening a Post-graduate Institute for imparting higher Medical training to medical graduates and an abridged course of the licentiate medical practitioners was prepared by the Committee and submitted to the Central Government for approval.\textsuperscript{176} In November 1947, the Assam medical College was established. Commenting on the visit of the Governor to the Medical College in August 1949, the Principal, Prof. G. D. Kapur, wrote to Gopinath Bordoloi thus: \textsuperscript{177}

"Welcoming H.E. the Governor, in his recent visit I said, 'Two eminent accoucheur have been responsible for bringing forth this fine institution to see the light of the day. Sir Bordoloi, the beloved Premier inaugurated the college on 3 November, 1947 and your Excellency had opened the Hospital on 27 February 1949.................The Premier and your Excellency are the godfathers and it is only fit that you look ahead to secure your infant, abundance of life and of strength.'

A training centre for the training of nurses was started in 1948 at Dibrugarh and provisions were made open two centres at Nowgong and Guwahati.

There was a great demand for providing adequate facilities for the study of Ayurveda in the Province. The convocation of the Assam Sanskrit Association held in 1944, also recommended very strongly the establishment of Ayurvedic institution in the Province.\textsuperscript{178} The Government of Assam therefore appointed a Committee in 1947 to prepare a scheme for the study and development of the Ayurvedic system in Assam and in accordance with the recommendation of this Committee, the Government established a regular Ayurvedic College at Guwahati and it was formally

\textsuperscript{176} ASA, Budget Speech of Bishnuram Medhi 1947, ALA Debates Vol I, p. 63
\textsuperscript{177} Letter of G.N. Kapur, Principal, Assam Medical College to G. N. Bardoloi, 10 August, 1949 Gopinath Bordoloi Papers, NMML
\textsuperscript{178} AS, Quinquennial Review of the progress of Education in Assam 1942-47, op.cit., p. 54
opened on the 20 December 1948. Similarly, a Veterinary College was established in Guwahati in 1948 and classes started in the month of August.

One of the most important works under the Post War Reconstruction schemes of the Bordoloi Government was the construction of school buildings at Jalukbari for the establishment of a forest school in Assam. Works under this project commenced in 1946-47. The formal opening ceremony of the Institution was performed on 15 June 1949, by the Premier. Because of the initiative taken by the Bordoloi Government, an Agricultural College was established at Jorhat. The college started to function from 16 August 1948 with 30 students in temporary buildings taken over from the military and renovated.

Regarding technical education, there were only two Government Technical Schools in Assam before 1946, one at Kohima and the other at Jorhat, but both of them suffered heavily due to the World War II. After 1946, Technical Education in Assam saw a bright period of expansion and improvement under the newly created Department of Technical Education. The Prince of Wales Technical School, and the Fuller Technical were upgraded and new courses were introduced. In 1948 a Civil Engineering School was started at Guwahati and an Industrial Training Institute was started at Jorhat.

Bordoloi realized that the success of his Government depended on raising the percentage of literacy among the people. Because of this, his Ministry had advocated a scheme for launching a mass literacy campaign in 1939, but the formal inauguration of the campaign had to be shelved till September 1940, on account of change of Ministry. This scheme of mass literacy campaign initiated by the Government in 1939 was revived later when Bordoloi formed the Government again in 1946.

179. ASA, Budget Speech of Bishnuram Medhi, Assam Gazette, 1950 Jan- Dec 1950, Part-vi, p. 67
180. ASR, Education (General) Dept.; Key Statement and Details of Individual Schemes for 1948-52, Secretarial Administration, Assam Secretariat (C), p. 22
181. ibid
182. ibid, p. 13
The Government instituted the Social Education Department to bring about a complete change in both organization and content of Mass Education. This Department, set itself the four fold task of imparting general education to adults, including the organization of libraries and recreational activities, of introducing handicrafts and Cottage Industries through Social Education Centres and improved methods of agriculture, by the organization of "Young Farmers Clubs". About four to five Social Education Centres were opened in each subdivision for the introduction of handicrafts. Bamboo and cane work, pottery, net making weaving and spinning have been found very popular. Local crafts and industries were encouraged by organizing rallies and exhibitions. During 1949-50 a total of 21,426 persons were made literate through Social Education Centres. A literature, bearing on various subjects like-civics, rural economy, health and hygiene, biographies of Indian patriots, everyday science etc. had been created and five new booklets were published and the Departmental journal "Janansiksha" had been regularly published.

Bordoloi could perceive the significance of higher education and technical education for the development of a province. Hence, during his tenure as Chief Minister, institutes like the Gauhati University at Jalukbari, the Assam Medical College at Dibrugarh, Agricultural College at Jorhat, a Veterinary College and an Ayurvedic College at Guwahati, a Police Training College at Dergaon and a Forest School were all established with Government fund. A number of other colleges, schools, vocational institutions were also started during this time. Bordoloi also laid considerable emphasis on the spread of Hindi (Rastrabhasa) in Assam.

184. ASR, Social (Adult) Education, Report on Education in Assam during 1945-50, op.cit.,
185. ibid
186. ibid
5) G. N. BORDOLOI AND OPIUM PROBLEMY

The consumption of opium spread alarmingly in Assam during the first two decades of the 20th century which led to grave social problems. Opium was primarily consumed by people of the hill areas and plains tribal. Since Assam had a large number of tribal population, the per capita consumption of opium was very high compared to other states.188

Opium was the most important source of provincial revenue, so inspite of a popular demand for its eradication the British Government was not anxious for its prohibition.

It was a gold mine for the Government not to be lightly surrendered.189 A maund of opium would have cost the treasury Rs290/- as the ex-factory cost in 1883-84, but it brought forth a gross revenue of Rs1040/- when sold at Rs26/- per seer.190 British Government constituted a Royal Commission of Opium in 1891 but it had little effect on the opium consumption in the province.

The first organized movement in Assam against the opium traffic was started by the Congress. "Mahatma Gandhi when he first came into contact with Assam could at once see that opium was the main disease Assam was suffering from and if the Assamese people were to thrive, this disease must be cured. In accordance with the direction of Mahatma, the Assam Congress took up the opium prohibition as the main plank in the national fight for freedom."191 During the Non Co-operation Movement, the Congress workers launched picketing at opium dens and liquor shops, as a result of which, opium consumption was reduced to a great extent. At Gandhi's directive, C.F. Andrews, who had termed Assam Government as 'Opium Government', visited Assam in May 1921 and initiated the constitution of the Assam Opium Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Kuladhar Chaliha. After a careful survey, this

188. ASA, Assam Legislative Council Proceedings, No3, 1908, p. 75-87
189. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 55
191. ASA, B. Ch. Bhagwati in ALA debates, Sept 1948, p. 1294
committee made certain recommendations, which emphasized that the traffic in opium should be limited to medical and scientific uses in the province.\textsuperscript{192} The Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report (1925) thoroughly exposed the uncommitted Government policy. As a result of primarily non-official efforts during the Non Co-operation Movement, the consumption in 1923-24 came down to 816 maund and 35 seers from 1,689 maunds 28 seers of 1919-20. In 1927, when the opium addicts were registered, the number of addicts in the whole Province was in the neighbourhood of one lakh. By 1938, as a result of the 10 year policy of Government, backed by organized public opinion led by the Congress the total number of addicts came down to 30,366 from nearly one lakh.\textsuperscript{193}

The first Congress Ministry under the Premiership of Gopinath Bordoloi made a bold attempt to eradicate the opium evil by declaring total prohibition in the two sub-division, of Dibrugarh and Sibsagar from 15April, 1939.\textsuperscript{194} As a first step in the programme of total prohibition, a large number of camp clinics in rural parts of two Upper Assam districts were set up for the treatment of addicts. By the time the Congress Ministry was withdrawn in November 1939, over 8000 addicts were treated in those clinics.\textsuperscript{195} In March 1940, the opium revenue decreased to Rs 5,20,000/- and the consumption to 94 maunds.\textsuperscript{196}

During the second Bordoloi Ministry, the Opium Prohibition Bill was introduced in the Budget Session of 1947 and was subsequently passed.\textsuperscript{197} After obtaining the assent of the Governor General, the Assam Opium Prohibition Act 1947 came into force on 1 April, 1948.\textsuperscript{198} An honorary Prohibition Committee and about 500 honorary prohibition officers were appointed to accomplish the long drawn eradication

\textsuperscript{192} AS, Assam Opium Enquiry Report, Jorhat, 1925, p. 97
\textsuperscript{193} ASA, Md. Tayebulla, Discussions, Re:Suppression of Opium Smuggling, Assam Gazette, 1948, Part VI, p. 817
\textsuperscript{194} PHA, Vol II, p. 215
\textsuperscript{195} Md. Tayebulla, ALA Debates, Sept. 1948, p. 1301
\textsuperscript{196} A. Guha, op. cit., p. 283
\textsuperscript{197} ASA, Md. Tayebulla, ALA Debates, Sept. 1948, p. 1301
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid
programme. By this Act the Government was empowered with more powers to deal with the opium smugglers. The Government appointed a Deputy Commissioner of Excise to deal with Opium Prohibition in co-ordination with the Honorary Prohibition Commissioner. Because of the sincere efforts of the Government, the consumption of opium decreased to a great extent in the state, but smuggling of opium into Assam continued. The Congress Government had undertaken the huge task of fighting this evil and they had succeeded to a large extent but inspite of their earnest endeavour, their efforts towards total eradication remained unsuccessful because of large scale smuggling of opium.¹⁹⁹

Although as a result of the prohibition the Government faced a loss in revenue of about Rs 5 lakh annually, Bordoloi and his colleagues felt justified in sacrificing that much revenue in return for the better, happier and healthier lives of the people.

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¹⁹⁹. ASA, Gauri Kanta Talukdar, Discussion under Assembly Rule 41, Assam Gazette, 1948 Part VI, p. 813