INTRODUCTION

The political history of the Muslims of Assam had started from the year 1206 A.D., when Mohammed Bin-Bakhtiar Khilji, a general of Mohammed Ghuri, invaded Kamrup (Assam) from Bengal. During his invasion, one of the Mech. Kings Ali Mech, by name embraced Islam and became famous guide for Khiliji’s Army. Ali Mech himself encouraged other Mech Tribes to accept Islam. Accordingly, hundreds of mech tribes who were suppressed and oppressed by contemporary caste, customs and traditions of Hindu society had willingly accepted Islam. Khilaji was defeated and hundreds of his soldiers were captured by local Kings. They married local girls and settled in the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. In the process, the number of Muslim population had been in creasing. In 1227 A-D second Muslim invasion of Assam took place under the leadership of Gias Uddin Bakhtier, the Governor of Bengal, Sheik Jalal Uddin Tabrizi, the great Muslim Saint and
teacher, came to Assam with Gias Uddin Bakhtier and helped in preaching Islam. He built two Khankahs one at Gasigaon in Gauhati and another at Hajo. In the beginning of the 14th century, Burhan Uddin, one of the Muslim saints, spread Islam in the region of Badarpur of Cacher. Shah Jalal, a great peer (saint), came to Sylhet during the middle of the 14th century to impart Islamic knowledge. His Shrine at Sylhet still remains a place of pilgrimage of Muslims of Assam and Bengal. (Ahmed, S.U. 199, P-16-19).

Sultan Gias Uddin of Bengal invaded Kamrup (Assam) in 1321-22 A.D. and Conquered Goalpara, Kamrup and Nagaon. This region remained under Muslim administration for 85 years from 1322 to 1407 A.D. During this period Islam was propagated among the local people and as a result of it the number of Muslim population further increased. Hussain Shah, the Sultan of Bengal, Conquered Kamata state which comprised a large areas of Assam in 1498 A.D. During his time Muslims in large
numbers settled in Hajo and other parts of Assam. Gias Uddin Aulia, the great Muslim divine saint, entered Assam during the period of Hussain Shah. He was a first Muslim saint, who settled in Assam permanently and it is he who was responsible for conversion of local people in large numbers to Islam. He built a Mosque at Hajo known as Puamakka and it becomes a holy place of Pilgrimage for the Muslims of Assam even today. Mizjumala, a Mughal General tried to Conquered Assam in 1662. He carried on his invasion of Assam in several times and was able to bring certain areas to the Mughal administration. In the Saraikhat battle which took place between the Ahoms under Lachit Barphukan and the Mughals under Ram Singh, the Mughal army were defeated, yet many of them stayed back and married local girls who were converted to Islam. This also helped in the growth of Muslim population in the state (Alom, Fakhrul, 2004, P- 3-8).

Assam came under administration of the British Government in 1826 A.D. by the treaty of Yandaboo. At
that time, Assam was composed by two Valleys, the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma valley. The districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were included in the Brahmaputra valley. The districts of Cacher, Sylhet and Goalpara were included in the Surma valley. All the districts of Surma valley were Bengali speaking district and were under Muslim domination since the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Assam became a chief Commissioner’s province in 1874. And with it the Muslim population of the province rose to 28.8% percent and the percent of Bengali speaking people both of Bengali Muslims and Bengal Hindus went up to 62% percent. It may be mentioned that before 1874, Brahmaputra valley was an Assamese majority areas. But the figure change to minority with the inclusion of Sylhet and Goalpara district, two Bengali speaking districts, to Assam.

In 1905, Lord Karjon divided Bengal into two as East Bengal and West Bengal. East Bengal was a Muslim majority province while West Bengal was a Hindu majority.
Assam was tagged with East Bengal and thereby the greater province of East Bengal and Assam was formed under a chief commissioner. Dhaka was made the capital of this new province. As a result of it Bengali Muslims of East Bengal and Hindu Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley came to close contact. But there were strong protest against the partition of Bengal and against making the new province of East Bengal and Assam. However, in 1912 Assam was separated from East Bengal and was restored under the administration of a chief commissioner with its earlier geographical and administrative structures. This restoration pleased Assamese Hindus. It needs to be mentioned in this connection that during the period of 1905 and 1912 when East Bengal and Assam was one province under one administration with capital at Dhaka, a large number of landless poor Muslims of East Bengal entered Assam and settled in the Government reserve lands. The increase of the Muslim population in Assam was also due to this. Although the line system was introduced in Assam in 1920, in order to check the entry of the migrants from East
Bengal, the migration continued as East Bengal was a part of undivided India. So, migration of the landless poor Muslims from East Bengal to Assam was not illegal but justified as available lands are to be provided to the landless people. An important political event took place in 1937 when a coalition Government was formed in Assam with Sir. Mohammed Sadullah as the Premier. This coalition Ministry was the amalgam of several small political parties, majority of whom belonged to Muslim groups. The Muslims of the State of Assam got emboldened for premier Sadullah who was a Muslim. After, Sadullah became the Prime Minister of Assam, the landless Muslims of East Bengal became encouraged and they began to migrate to Assam in large numbers. Moreover, the British Officials also invited the hard working Muslim cultivators of East Bengal to Assam under the scheme of “Grow more food”. Sadullah and his Government encouraged migration as a matter of policy and practical politics because like the British he also thought of increasing revenues and taxes, so that development works could be done. The British were
interested in increasing the Muslim population in Assam in order to maintain political balance. The British under the “Divide and Rule” policy were more sympathetic to the Muslims and thought that the Muslims must be kept away from the Hindus in order to perpetuate their rule in India. Thus, when there was a movement launched under the leadership of Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani for abolition of line system, the British directly or indirectly, extended its support to it. During the Quit India Movement in 1942 launched by Mahatma Gandhi the Two Nation Theory of Jinnah was vigourously propagated among the Muslims of Assam. The Assam branch of the Indian Muslim league spear headed the movement for Pakistan and in that movement the indigenous Assamese Muslims, Barak valley Bengali Muslims and the immigrant Muslims of Assam took active part. But the Grouping plan of Cabinet Mission was opposed by the people of Assam in which a section of the Muslim population also had participated. The grouping plan was baffled. Assam remained a part of India after 1947 although, a new state of Pakistan was created by the British
who satisfied Jinnah and his supporters. Sylhet went over to East Pakistan following the Referendum held there on the eve of the partition of the country. After independence on 15 August, 1947, the Muslim League in India was banned. The Muslims of Assam adjusted themselves against the new political situation of the country. They sided with the politics of the Indian National Congress and accepted the leadership of Maulana Toibullah and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed who were nationalist Congress leaders hailing from Assam. A landmark event took place in 1951 in the political history of the Muslims of Assam. The Bengal origin immigrant Muslims who settled in Assam permanently recorded Assamese as their mother tongue in Census of 1951. And, as a result of this decision of the immigrant Muslims, the largest section of the Muslim Population of the state, the number of Assamese speaking people of the state increased to 62% percent. Thus, the dispute of the state language as to whether the Assamese or the Bengali language should be the state language of the State, was settled in favour of the Assamese language. Moreover, the
immigrant Muslims of the state began to follow the Assamese culture and way of life which carried forward the process of assimilation of the immigrant Muslims with the greater Assamese society. The process of assimilation has been even continued till today inspite of harassments and injustices meted out to the Muslims of the state in the name of foreign nationals.

The Muslims of the state continued to support the politics of the Indian National Congress and hence it was possible on the part of the Congress to remain in political power till 1978. But after 1975 when emergency was imposed in India on advice of Smt. Indira Gandhi and her Government by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the President of India, the Muslims throughout the country including Assam resented against the Government for forceful implementation of family planning programme. It may be mentioned that the traditional Muslim Ulema are always opposed to family planning programme and hence they began to propagate against the Congress Governments both
at center and states for imposing forcefully the family planning programme upon the Muslims who were convinced to believe that family planning is anti-Quoran and anti-Hadith. But there are two opinions on this proposition. The pro-change Muslim Ulema are of the opinion that the Quoran and the Hadith are not in a sense opposed to the view of limiting family and according to economic capacity, a Muslim family should be formed. However, the Muslims of Assam like other parts of India voted against the Congress in 1978 Assembly elections as a result of which for the first time in the political history of independent Assam a non-Congress (I) Government headed by Sri. Golap Bortha, was formed in Assam with the support of the Muslims. But during the reign of Golap Bortha, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSO) started the Assam Movement against the foreign Bangladeshi nationals. But during the period of this movement, the Muslims as a whole were subjected to unnecessary harassments. During this movement period parallel minority organizations, namely,
All Assam Minorities Student’s Union (AAMSU) and the All Assam Minorities Yuva Parishad (AAMYP) predominantly dominated by the Muslim students and youths were formed. Under this political situation, the Assam Accord was signed on 15 August, 1985 by the central and state Government on one hand and the movement leaders on the other. But the Muslims of Assam were highly offended because they were not consulted before signing of the Assam Accord. In the aftermath of this political background the Congress Government headed by Sri. Hiteswar Saikia was dissolved and arrangements were made for holding fresh elections. In that, situation, two new political parties diametrically opposite to each other, were formed. The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) came into existence with the sponsorship of the movement leaders. On the other hand, the minority leaders who opposed the Assam Movement formed the United Minorities Front, Assam (UMFA). As a result of Muslim estrangement from the Congress the AGP formed the Government headed by Sri. Prafulla Kr. Mahanta. But, however the UMFA was
able to win as many as 17 Assembly seats in that Assembly elections. But in 1991 general Assembly elections the Muslims of Assam extended support to the candidates set up by the Indian National Congress and as a result of it the Congress (I) Government headed by Sri. Hiteswar Saikia was again formed in Assam. The majority of the Muslims again withdrawn support from the Congress in 1996 Assembly elections because of the creation of Bodoland Territorial council (BTC) where in 1993 a large number of Muslim families were forceful evicted by the Bodo activists and they were compelled to leave their villages and to take refuge in refugee camps. It was believed by the Muslims that the Hiteswar Saikia Congress Government failed to give protections to the Muslims living in the Bodoland areas. It is thus seen that in 1996 Assembly elections the Congress was again defeated. The AGP under the chief Ministership of Profullah Kr. Mahanta was able to form Government. During the AGP Government (1996-2001) a large number of Muslim voters were recorded as “D” (Doubtful) Voters. This had infuriated the Muslims of
Assam and because of this in 2001 Assembly elections the Muslims again supported the Indian National Congress and it resulted in the formation of Congress (I) Government headed by Sri. Tarun Gogoi. But during the first tenure of Tarun Gogoi (2001-2006) the Government gave little attention to many basic issues related to Muslim interests and because of this a good number of Muslims estranged themselves from the Congress and formed another political party, namely, Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) under Badaruddin Ahmal. In 2006 Assembly elections it is seen that the AUDF was able to win 10 Assembly seats and in certain other Assembly constituencies it was AUDF which contributed to the defeat of the Congress candidates. However, after the Assembly elections 2006, though the Indian National Congress was able to secure 53 Assembly seats in a House of 126, Mr. Tarun Gogoi was able to form a Congress (I) coalition Government with the support of Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) which got 10 seats and some independent MLA's. A study of the long political history of the Muslims of Assam is indicative of
one clear-cut point that the Muslims of Assam are a balancing political force. No political party can get the taste of power in Assam ignoring the Muslims of the state. In this background it is indeed interesting and significant as well as to do a research work on 'The Role of Muslims in the politics of Assam'.

**Methodology:**

The study is mainly a library research. The data has been collected from both the primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources included the published official documents by the leaders and organizations of the political and non-political party's of the minorities of Assam, the Gazettes, and informal discussions and interviews with some political leaders and activists. In addition some of the teachers as well as social activists were also contacted to get a feel of the role of the Muslims in the politics of
Assam, and reports, directives by the Government of Assam.

The secondary sources include published scholarly works, books, unpublished dissertation, research articles on the political history under consideration. The relevant information in the English, Assamese and Bengali newspaper’s was also obtained for study.

**Chapter Scheme:**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I “Socio-economic profile of Assam” mainly deals with a brief political history of Assam, for the purpose of conceptualizing the role of Muslims in the Assam politics. It also describes demographical profile of various groups and social, economic and political conditions of the Muslims along with other various groups in Assam. The chapter II viz, “Major Muslim organizations” discusses the origin, aims and objectives nature and development of the
Muslim political and non-political organizations. Chapter III entitled, “Muslims and the party Electoral politics in Assam”. It deals with the Muslims participation in electoral politics, their performances, party alliances and mode of political mobilization. This chapter also throws a light on the pattern of leadership, representation of the Muslims.

Chapter IV “Major Issues of the Muslims in Assam”, mainly deals with various issues for the existence struggle of the Muslims in Assam. This chapter focuses on the line system, PIP schemes, a question of Bangladeshi nationals, development and empowerment issues of the Muslims.

Chapter V is the Concluding one, which summarizes the broad features of the role of Muslims in the Assam politics and subsequently seeks to evaluate its impact on Assam politics in general.

A select bibliography is appended at the end of the study.