CHAPTER- IV

MAJOR ISSUES OF THE MUSLIMS IN ASSAM.

The Muslims of Assam lead to struggle for their existence. They have confronted with certain burning issues relating to themselves. Time and again it has been seen that the Muslims have since 1916 met with challenges to their existence in Assam. This related to their citizenship rights as well as rights to live in Assam permanently. Moreover, they have not received as much fair treatment as they needed for their socio-economic and educational development even since the rule of the British. In the political empowerment also the had to fight to assert their political right. Thus, whenever such issues arose the Muslim of Assam unitedly fought for getting what is due to them.
The Line System:--

There were three major types of immigration to Assam as tea garden coolies, ex-tea garden coolies, Nepalis and Settlers from East Bengal. Gradually the number of immigrants increased in Assam Valley. It became serious by 1916. Therefore, the Deputy Commissioners of Nowgong and Barpeta were to take effective steps to control the situation. They introduced a 'Line system' through which immigrants entrance into Hindu areas was prevented. With the help of the 'Line system' the immigrants were not permitted to settle down any where they liked. Some areas of the state were closed to them, except in so far as pattas had already been issued to some old settlers. With the introduction of 'Line System' land was classified into the following categories: (i) those in which immigrants might settle freely; (ii) those in which they could not settle; and (iii) where a line was drawn, only the immigrants could settle on one side of it. The 'Line system' gave birth to

Sir Saadullah, the then Premier of Assam, in his tenure was against the 'Line System', because it would disturb the process of assimilation between the major two communities, i.e. the Hindus and the Muslims. Sri. Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Prime Minister of Assam was, on the other hand, in favour of the 'Line system' and argued for its implementation. The British, on the other hand, was against the 'Line system'. The question of 'Line System' was thus politicalized. According to those who opposed the 'Line system', it had already failed to control immigration. Moreover, it had only succeeded to spread the Hindu-Muslim and the Assamese-Bengali rift. The debates in the Assam legislative Assembly were the standing proofs of dissentions even among the elected representative and the problem had assumed racial, communal, linguistic and political colours, so that no attempt could be made to solve the issue impartially. Saadullah in his tenure as the premier
of Assam appointed a ‘Line system enquiry committee’ to submit a report after proper enquiry. The question of abolition of the ‘Line system’ and its legality was kept pending by ‘Common consensus’ though all agreed to provide special protection to the tribal population. So, the government decided to evict only those who had encroached on land after April 1937. (Zafar Iman, 1975, P-76-79).

From 25 December 1941 to 24 August 1942; Assam was under the Governor’s rule Muhammad Saadullah took up Premiership once again on 25 August, 1942 when the Government of India took a scheme to grow more food. The Government of Assam was committed to implement it. In Saadullah’s cabinet of 1942 and 1945, more than 50% percent of the Ministers were supporters of the Muslim League. So, the policy of the Government for ‘Grow More Food’ was being implemented fully. But the Assamese Hindu specially the Hindu Mahasabha took it aggressively. In an emergent meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha held at
Nowgong on 4th September, 1943, a lengthy resolution was made on “Muslim migration to Assam”. Thus, the matter of ‘Line system’ and immigration was made a political issue rather than solving it. In March 1945, the Coalition Government headed by Saadullah proceeded to implement the scheme “Grow more food” and to open up of Professional Grazing Reserves. On 16 December, 1944 Saadullah called up an ‘All party conference’ at Shillong that conference was attended by Gopi Nath Bordoloi himself on behalf of the Congress. A number of recommendations, unanimously were adopted. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, an Assamese Hindu, was a favourite ally of Saadullah and once he was a cabinet Minister of Bardoloi (1941) did not raise strong voices against the scheme. Each and every Assamese Hindu was supposed to be apposed to Saadullah’s immigrant and land settlement policy and yet there was no agitation against his decision to defer evictions. (Syed. Shehabuddin, 1986, Vol-IV, P- 55-57).
The Eviction Policy:--

The general election which ought to have been held in 1942 was held in 1946, because of the Second World War. The Congress contested 64 seats and won 57 in a House of 108. Thus, the election of 1946 enthroned the Congress to power under the leadership of Gopi Nath Bordoloi. Now, his Government assessed the number of encroachers in the nine reserves of which four were in Darrang and five in Kamrup. The encroachers of other districts remained undetermined. Till 1947, a large number of Muslims was evicted. Saadullah and his allies strongly opposed it, because it was done on communal basis. Even legitimate holders of land were evicted. As a result, it again created debates sharply on the floor of the Assembly House. A meeting was held under the provincial Muslim league on 8 March, 1946 at Gauhati to discuss the situation arising out of "Mass eviction of a large number of immigrants". The Quaid-E-Azam, Jinnah, who visited Assam for the first time, attended the meeting and the committee with his
“invaluable Advice”, adopted an unanimous resolution. The substance of the resolution was.

In view of the serious situation created by the action of the congress Government of Assam in ordering mass eviction on of hundreds of families of settlers from the so called professional grazing reserves and government Wastelands rendering destitute and homeless and destroying their crops and also in view of the fact that hundreds and thousands of landless people within the province are debarred from earning their livelihood, because of the operation of oppressive and illegal ‘Line system’ and in view that it had the urgent necessity of producing food crops to avert the impending all India famine, the working committee of Assam Provincial Muslim league hereby resolves that the landless and the evicted persons be restored the cultivable wastelands to produce food crops to save themselves and others from miseries of famine, starvation and death (Ahmed, S.U. 1999, P-91-92).
In response to the appeal of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the President of Assam Provincial Muslim League, many volunteer organizations came forward to help them. Different rallies were also arranged in different places of Assam and Bengal to stop the illegal eviction. The All India Muslim league legislator’s, Convention held at Delhi in April, 1946, demanded stoppage of eviction policy of the Bordoloi Government. Therefore, the league council held a meeting immediately and afterwards demanded the abolition of the illegal ‘Line system’ prevailing in Hindu areas of Assam. It also demanded the immediate stopping of eviction to be followed by resettlement of evictees. Thus, the entire situation became grave. At last, Sri Gopinath Bordoloi sought interference of Patel of this situation. Patel endorsed Bordoloi’s stand against the coming of the “Fresh hordes” of immigrants. This created the situation more critical. A meeting under the Assam provincial Muslim league Working Committee held at Nowgong on 9 February, 1947, decided to launch a civil Disobedience Movement, Gradually the situation
became worsened. Sri Gopinath Bordoloi was fully politically biased and was not ready to consider any suggestions made by Muslim league (Karr. M. 1997, P- 16-19).

However, the entire situation changed with independence of India on 15 August, 1947. The Muslim League was banned. The Government also postponed the implementation of the eviction policy.

The Riot of 1950:---

The Communal bitterness had already started between Hindus and Muslims in India as well as in Assam with the Partition of the country. Whatever may have been the causes behind the partition, the intellectuals of Assam specially from the Ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi, started to develop a communal hatred among the Hindu masses to rise against the numerical strength of Muslims in Assam. Hindu militants raised the question that the predominant position of Hindus in the state would be lost by the growing number
of Muslims. So, the internal policy of the Assamese intellectuals was to minimize the number of Muslims in the state. Thus, political as well as social position of Hindus may remain safe for the future. The Assamese intellectuals, no doubt were influenced by biased and derogatory writings of C.S. Mullan and S.P. Desai of Pre-partition period. C.S. Mullan the census commissioner of 1931 wrote, "Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years was an event which is likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than did the Burmese invaders of 1821, the structure of Assamese culture and civilization due to the invasion of a vast horde of land hungry Bengali immigrants mostly Muslims from the districts of Eastern Bengal and Particularly from Mymensingh. The invasion began sometime before 1911 and census report of that year is the first report which makes mention of the advancing horde. But as we know, the Bengali immigrants censused for the first time on the 'Char' (Reverine) lands of Goalpara in 1911 were merely the advance guard or rather the scouts of large army
following closely at their heels. By 1921 the first Army corps had passed into Assam and practically conquered the district of Goalpara (Datta, P.S., 1993, P- 120 -125).

The immigrants in numbers raised sheds and later began to cultivate. The few graziers in the neighbourhood are incapable of doing any thing apart from protesting and appealing to local officers. The only alternative for the grazier is to shift himself bag and baggage. But where he is to go? R.B. Vaghaiwalla (I.C.S) the census commissioner of 1951 also humiliated Muslims which directly or in directly inspired Assamese Hindu to grow hatred against the immigrants. Even today, many Assamese Chauvinists among different groups like- All Assam Students Union (AASU) All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and Assam Jatiatabadi Yava Satra Parishad (AJYSP) do not hesitate to use these humiliating writings as instruments to incite and excite emotions of the Hindu masses. This often leads to agitations against the Muslims. During post independence period, this agitation has been used in
various forms, in different situations in the name of detection of foreigners. The net result was, lakhs of Indian Muslims were harassed in and around the state of Assam.

The Assamese intellectuals specially the Congress party leaders though saved Assam from cabinet Mission's plan, yet they willingly left Sylhet, a Muslim majority area, for East Pakistan. This helped to minimize the numerical strength of Muslims in Assam. The process of reduction in the number of Muslims from Assam directly or indirectly is continuing till today in different forms.

Truly in Assam, no community ethnic, religious or linguistic is really in an absolute majority. But an aggressive and chauvinist section of the leadership of the Assamese group in Assam has been trying desperately to capture and hold the state power for itself for its own sectarian interests by raising mischievous slogans from time to time and misleading the people to fratricidal and useless quarrels. It is due to their misdirected jealousy that there has been communal out bursts in Assam against the
Muslims in 1950 and the Bengalis in 1960. The communal disturbances, before and after the partition (1947) had undoubtedly created tensions among the Muslims. In Assam, the riot of 1950 was a dreadful blow for the security of Muslims. Hundreds of Muslims were killed and their houses burnt. Both movable and immovable properties were damaged. The main ambition of the miscreants was to drive out the Bengali Muslims from Assam state. Compelled by the constant fear for their lives and property and further bloodshed, a large number of the Muslims took refuge in East-Pakistan. The number of Muslims migrated to East-Pakistan was several lakhs. According to some it was eight lakhs. In the same way thousands of Hindus in minority in East-Pakistan also started to migrate to India under similar conditions.

Nehru Liyaquat Agreement (1950):--

In order to reduce communal tension and to maintain peace between both the communities the Prime Minister of
India, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru and the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammed Liyaquat Ali Khan had signed an agreement on 8th April, 1950. This agreement was known as 'Nehru Liyaquat' agreement. According to this agreement, the people who left their own country earlier due to the communal violence may return into their own home on or before 31st December, 1950. If they return (from Pakistan to India and from India to Pakistan) within the appointed time, their citizenship along with the properties would be returned. The Indian Muslims who took shelter in East-Pakistan started to come back to their own home again.

**The Census of 1951:-**

The returning time was limited for them and the last date was fixed as 31st December, 1950. But the tense situation was still continuing. The process of return was very slow, because of the doubt of security and recurrence of riots. Meanwhile, the process of census of 1951 had already been started. This was the first census after
independence. Hence its importance was very great. According to Pakistan census of 1951, the total migration from the territories of the Indian Union to Pakistan was 72,26,600. And specially from East Zone (Assam, West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar) 7,01,300 Indian Muslims migrated to different places of Pakistan during the period 1947-48. Several lakhs of Indian Muslims took shelter in East Pakistan due to communal riot of 1950. Most of them did not return to their own places of Assam before the census of 1951. So, the names of several lakhs of Indian Muslims had been dropped from the census report (1951) which was admitted by the commissioner itself. (Rao. V. Venkata & Hazarika Niru, 1983, Vol- I, P- 253-255).

At the time when thousands of Indian Muslims decided to settle permanently in Pakistan, then the Muslims of Assam who took shelter in East Pakistan due to communal riots could not immediately decide to come back to their own places in India. Meanwhile the census of 1951, in India was completed. The last date of return was also
expired. Therefore, Muslims who returned late to their villages in Assam remained excluded from the census report of 1951.

It was the responsibility of the Indian Government to count how many Muslims migrated to East Pakistan for seeking shelter. And out of them how many returned back to Assam. These were some of the important questions which needed clarifications from the Government of India. It is pointed out from non-Government sources that out of eight lakh Muslims more than three lakhs did not come back during the census of 1951 and therefore, their names could not be included in the Census figures report. The 1951 census figures were, therefore, defective as they did not include lakhs of Muslims. The Government of India completed the National Registration of Citizen (NRC) which was prepared on the basis of incorrect figures of the Census report of 1951. The question why it was done so has been ‘raised again and again’ by the Muslims of Assam. Lakhs of Muslims who had been left out of the census
report of 1951, were naturally and virtually dropped from the National Registration of Citizen (NRC) of 1951. Thus, lakhs of Muslims were deprived of their citizenship. This lead to uncertainty, dissatisfaction and resentment among the Muslims of Assam. (Ahmed, S.U. 1999, P- 98-99).

Moreover, a section of the indigenous Assamese Hindus regarded the Muslims dropped from the NRC of 1951 as Pakistani Nationals. The Muslims so dropped were subjected to harassments on suspicion as Pakistani Nationals.

**Language Movement of 1960:**

The language controversy gave rise to language movement. It may be noted that after the annexation of Assam by the British “Assamese” was the language of the Court. It was used with great facility and convenience with universal satisfaction for about 10 years, from 1826 to 1836 in almost all the departments of public offices. Suddenly, Assamese
was replaced by Bengali. The British thought that Assamese and Bengali were one and same language, though they are two distinct languages. The Assamese was treated as sub-language of Bengali. Bengali, thus, was used as official language from 1836 to 1872. It might be noted that, the American Baptist Missionaries pleaded for the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in schools. At last, due to hard endeavour of Christian Missionaries and their repeated appeals infavour of Assamese, the Governor of Bengal directed the Government of Assam that “Assamese” should be introduced in all courts and schools in the Brahmaputra valley, but Bengali language might be used for technical terms for which there was no Assamese equivalent and for which English words could be conveniently introduced. So, the Government of Bengal directed the Assam Government to introduce Assamese in all primary, Middle and lower High schools, other than Bengal areas. Besides if more than 12 students wanted to study in Bengali, they might be taught separately. Thus, from 1873 Assamese was re-introduced in Assam and
started to publish books in Assamese. (Bindra. S.S. 1982, p- 16-21).

Assamese was retained in some parts of the Brahmaputra valley, specially in Assamese dominated areas but Bengali in Bengali dominated areas up to High School level. Although ‘Assamese’ was declared as the language of the courts along with schools and included in the 8th schedule, it was not declared as an official language. Therefore, a demand was raised by Assamese people for the declaration of Assamese language as the official language of the state. As a result of it, an agitation was started in favour of Assamese language by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) in July, 1960. In this movement, the Bengali Muslims were with the Assamese Hindus. Many houses of the Bengali Hindus were burnt, private and public properties were also damaged to a great extent. Law and order situation of the state of Assam deteriorated. In such a situation an “Official Language Bill” was introduced on 10 October, 1960. This Act recognized ‘Assamese’ as the
official language. In this movement at least eleven Muslims were killed by the Police firing at Barak Valley, specially, in Hailakandi for the establishment of Assamese language. Thus, Muslims made great sacrifice for the Assamese language. (Idid, 1982, P- 35-51).

**Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan Scheme (PIP), 1964:-**

With the passing of time the Muslims of Assam specially Bengali Muslims thought themselves to be like local Assamese and also believed that no threat would come from Assamese Hindus to their peaceful living. It is already pointed out earlier that as a part and parcel of the Assamese community, Muslims did not hesitate to sacrifice lives even for the Assamese language in 1960’s. Events turned against Bengali Muslims after 1960 again. Some Assamese chauvinist even forget the contribution of Bengali Muslims and treated them as Pakistani foreigners. They forced the Government to detect the so called Pakistani, who were
actually Bengali Muslims living in Assam permanently. No Indian National Hindu or Muslim can support settlement of foreigners in India. A foreigner is foreigner, who should be driven out from the state or country. But the process should be legal and justified.

There are many legislations namely, the citizenship Act, Foreigners Act, 1946, the Passport Act and the Immigrants expulsion (from Assam) Act, 1950 etc. have been applied from time to time to detect and deport foreigners. No doubt, these were legal procedures but at the time of implementation these were used communally and the Muslims were subjected to harassment. There are sufficient evidences of these harassment, which are protested by different Muslim organizations from time to time.

It has been already pointed out that many Indian Muslims were harassed and forcibly deported without reference to the law courts. In 1964, due to heavy political pressure the then Congress Government of Assam, was
compelled to establish tribunals to detect Pakistan Nationals under the scheme of Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (P.I.P.) of the Government of India. The PIP scheme was formulated in 1964 by B.N. Mallik, the then Director of the Central Bureau of Intelligence. Under this scheme following steps were to be taken:-

(a) Raising of special units of the state police for dealing with infiltration.

(b) Special Tribunals were to be established for speedy disposal of cases.

(c) The Government of India would meet the expenses of those units.

(d) More than 200 Border watch posts were to be raised at a cost of Rs. 6000 each.

(e) From 1964 to 1969, the Government of India had to spend Rs. 50,000,000 on these activities. (Deka Kanak Sen, 1993, P-75-82).

There were many Muslim Ministers and M.L.As in Assam then but they did not say anything about the
deportation. The Government handed over the power to the police to deport the so called Pakistanis from Assam. In the name of detection of Pakistani Nationals, the police started to misuse their powers every where in the market, in the towns and even at foot paths. Even the police suddenly entered Muslim villages at mid-night and seized hundreds of Muslims and deported them forcibly. This was done without a warrant notice or prior warning. Even the people who had citizenship papers were not spared. Such evidences were simply ignored. The Police did not even care to know whether a person was Indian or not? A poor illiterate Muslim was invariably branded as Pakistani by the police. The police was biased. For them, Muslim meant Pakistani. Thus, the PIP scheme became a tyranny for Indian Muslims. During the entire period of 1962-68 neither they could live peacefully nor could sleep comfortably. Anxiety, tension and frustration gripped the Muslims so much that they could not come forward boldly to protest against this tyranny. Thus, Police created a great terror among the Muslims. The Muslims who had already been dropped from
the census report as well as National registration of Citizen (NRC) 1951 were to be detected first as Pakistani. After that, the police started to harass even the Muslims having their names recorded in N.R.C. Thus, Indian Muslims permanently residing in Assam were also harassed and finally deported to Pakistan. According to non-Government sources almost six lakhs Indian Muslims were forcibly deported from Assam to East Pakistan during the period of 1961-66. According to the Government report, more than two lakhs Muslims were deported as Pakistanis during 1961-66. During the entire period of 1951-69, 3,40,000 Muslims were deported as Pakistanis. (Barpujari, H.K., 1990, P- 28-35).

At last, in order to stop the police tyranny on Muslims, Several Muslim organizations including Jamiat-Ul-Ulema- Hind (Assam) had submitted memorandum to the Government of Assam. Even the Congress leaders like Moinul Hoque Chaudhery, Devakananta Baruah and Charat Ch. Singh had submitted an urgent ‘Memorandum’ to
Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then chief Minister of Assam to stop this harassment on Muslims under the P.I.P. scheme and to dismiss the tribunals immediately. At last, the Government of Assam admitted the harassment by the police. After completing the checking, the Government of Assam declared in 1969 that, there were no more Pakistani foreigners residing in Assam and even the last Pakistani had already been deported from Assam. Therefore there would be no further need of P.I.P. scheme and its tribunals. In 1969 all the tribunals were abolished and thus, the P.I.P. scheme was ended. (Ibid, 1990, P- 99-106).

A Question of Bangladeshi Nationals arose after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971:---

Bangladesh was declared as Sovereign Independent Country on 25 March, 1971. During the 1971 war, Some persons both Hindus and Muslims took shelter in the neighbouring states of Tripura, Assam and West Bengal, due to oppression of Pakistan military. In a statement, Mrs
Indira Gandhi said in the Parliament in 27 May, 1971 that, about thirty five lakhs have come into India from Bangladesh during the last eight weeks. They belong to every religious community. They are not refugees. They are victims of war. These people were kept in campus under keen vigilance of Indian Government. According to the Government report nine lakhs Bengali Hindus and only twenty seven thousand Muslims entered into Assam during 1961 to 1971 period. After forming a Secular Government in Bangladesh under Mujibur Rahman’s Prime Ministership most of them were sent back to Bangladesh. There was a commitment of the Indian Government to settle Pakistan Hindu refugees in India if necessary. The All Assam Minorities Students Union (AAMSU) in its report pointed out that according to the Government figures more than one lakh and nine thousand persons were sent back from Assam to Bangladesh. Most of them were Muslims. The Government of Assam decided to wind up the Tribunals in 1972 on the ground that most of such cases of infiltrators has been disposed of. Therefore, the process of detection
and deportation did not take place till 1979. The Muslims of Assam remained peaceful during 1969-79. During this time Bengali origin Muslim who suffered for a long time started to pay attention towards their education and economic development and were able to do something for their socio-economic and educational improvement. (Ahmed, S.U. 1999, P-131-132).

**Indira- Mujib Treaty (1972):--**

After full recognition of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on the invitation of the Government of India visited India from 6 to 8 February, 1972. Mujib expressed gratitude to the Government of India for its hospitality and assistance. After talks between Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman, both the leaders agreed for the alround welfare of both the countries along with immediate withdrawal of forces from Bangladesh. At the same time, it was agreed
that all refugees or war victims would be returned to Bangladesh from India.

On the invitation of Bangladesh Prime Minister, Mujibur Rahman, the Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi landed at Dacca on 17 March, 1972 and made a statement that India wanted Bangladesh to become strong and prosperous. And to strengthen the cooperation between the two countries, a treaty of friendship, co-operation and peace was signed between India and Bangladesh on 19 March, 1972. This treaty was famously known as "Indira-Mujib Treaty" or "Indo-Bangladesh Treaty". After this treaty was signed, both the countries declared that there shall be lasting peace and friendship between the two countries and their people each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side. (Ibid, 1999, P- 133-136).
The Assam Movement (1979-85) against so called foreigners:--

The Assam Movement has its roots in history and society like other significant social movement. A social movement cannot emerge suddenly, it emerges gradually. The Assam Movement, too, took a long time to take the shape of a social movement and this happened in the last part of 1979.

Prior to the elections of 1978 to the state legislature, the regional political parties like Assam Jatiatabadi Dal (AJD) and the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) raised the issue of the outsiders in Assam and their threat to the Assamese identity but failed to find popular response.

The Mongoldoi Parliamentary seat had fallen vacant due to the death of the Janata M.P. Hiralal Patwari, who died on March, 1979 and the process of holding a bye-election was started. As the revision electoral rolls started, some 70,000 complaints were lodged that a large number
persons who got their constitutional rights to franchise are outsiders. All Assam Students Union (AASU) very successfully built up public opinion among the Assamese people that till the names of all foreign nationals were deleted from the electoral rolls, the bye-election to the Mongoldoi constituency should be postponed. With this issue the Assam Movement was begun. It should be noted that the issue of foreign nationals divided the people not only in Mongoldoi but gradually in entire Assam. The main cause behind this movement was the problem of infiltration of illegal foreigners, mainly from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Nepal and to a less extent from Bhutan and Burma. By November, 1979, the Assam Movement reached its peak and continued up to 1985. Within this period, the entire society of Assam faced unprecedented violence and a lots of people were killed. (Alom Fakhrul, 2004, P- 41-42).

A memorandum of understanding known as, Assam Accord, 1985 was signed between the Government of India
and the leadership of the Movement in New Delhi on 15th August, 1985 which led to an end of six year long struggle in Assam.

Moreover, the Assamese need not feel feared by the outsiders if the latter try to maintain their identity in Assam. In Kolkata, for instance, there are people from many races and languages of India. But that has not frightened the Bengalis and they never think that the outsiders will be able to harm the Bengali Society, literature and culture. The Assamese are suffering from an artificial crisis of identity. This is at the root of many evils and social tensions in Assam. It is to be born in mind that to broaden the base of the Assamese society they must learn to exist with the outsiders irrespective of their race, religion and language. Moreover, the Assamese blame the outsiders for their backwardness. The tribal groups of Assam, on the other hand, are blaming the Assamese for their backwardness. These are the factors which are responsible for the present unrest in Assam which has led
to the demand of autonomy (Deka, Kanak Sen, 1993, P- 59-60).

The leadership of Assam Movement propagated the idea that the Assamese people are facing a serious threat to their identity due to the continuous illegal immigration to Assam from Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. They believed that the immigration of foreign nationals threatened the socio-cultural linguistic economic and political identity of the Assamese people. That is why, the Assamese people are suffering from an identity crisis. Identity crisis has today become a phobia in a section of Assamese people. It is necessary that the other side of the coin has also to be looked into. The social structure of Assam needs to be reviewed closely. Even today there are people of some ethnic tribal groups leading the life of half naked primitive cavemen. They are ignorant of any other language except their dialects. They still prefer nomadic life instead of permanent settlement. Thus, the economic factor needs to be closely studied in view of the feelings of
separatist tendencies that have grown among certain sections of the people of Assam. It is, therefore, necessary that plans and policies for integrated economic development have to be formulated and, moreover, the feeling of apprehension that Assamese identity, culture and language is in-danger from the Muslims is baseless, as the Muslims of Assam, having accepted Assamese language and culture have contributed immensely for forming a composite greater Assamese society, where there is scope of the Assamese Hindus to lose their identity whatsoever. (Alom Fakhrul, 2004, P- 43-44).

Assam is passing through intense social and political crisis. In one hand, there is movement for preservation of identity and culture of each tribal and ethnic group in the state, on the other hand, the insurgency problem of the state has posed a great threat to social peace and political stability. The wave of separation has created the terrorist groups like United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), National Democratic Front
of Bodo land (NDFB), Bengali Tigers Force (BTF) Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), Hindu Liberation Army of Assam (HLAA), United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Adibasi Cobra Militant (ACM). It may be mentioned that some Muslim organizations like United Reformation Protect of India (URPI) and Harkat Ul Mujahedin Assam Branch (HUMAB) have become very active in the lower and middle Assam (Sheikh, M.S. 2003, P- 177).

Since the thirtees, there have been instances of Assamese frustration at the progress of cultivators, mechanics and petty traders coming from Bangladesh, Nepal and West Bengal etc. Regarding this matter, petitions were sent to the Indian National Congress but were ignored by the national leaders.

In the decades after independence, Assam remained backward and under developed state, there was not agricultural development nor industrial development and due to that unemployment problem has been increasing.
The Assamese people made the Central Government responsible for the backwardness of Assam. They also alleged that they were being exploited by the central Government. Because, Assam is rich in natural resources like coal, oil, tea, forest etc. But, inspite of such richness in natural resources Assam remain backward, because the centre is totally neglecting Assam.

In the Assembly Election of 1977, CPI (M) won II seats. Assamese people started to think that CPI (M) won II seats because of the support of Bengali Hindus who came from West Bengal, who would pose a threat to Assamese language. Thus, in order to check it, they formed a political party, namely, the Assam Jatiatabadi Dal (AJD) and launched a propaganda against CPI (M) as a Bengali Party. Moreover, the chauvinistic forces have been directing their propaganda against the Muslims also getting support from the Assamese middle class (Gohain Hiren, 1980, Cudgel of chauvinism, EPW, Vol-XV, P- 418-420).
The growth of chauvinistic forces in the indigenous Assamese community has done a lot of hamper to the Assamese society. As a result of it, there has grown an identity consciousness among the different tribal and ethnic groups of Assam. Moreover, the tribal are facing economic exploitation, social, Cultural and Political oppression.

The signing of Assam Accord in 1985 has added fuel to the fire of the separatist tendencies that have been going on among certain groups of people of Assam. The section 6 of Assam Accord says “Constitutional, Legislative and Administrative Safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the Cultural, Social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people”. This provision of the Assam Accord has created apprehension and fear among the minds of the different tribal and ethnic groups of people of Assam that their racial identity, language and culture would be extinguished if this part of Accord is fully implemented. The Muslim organizations like youth organization, student organization
and political parties expressed their bold reaction to the Accord as they were totally ignored at the time of signing the Accord. (Ahmed, S.U. 1999, P-163-169).

Development and Empowerment:---

The term ‘Development’ is used to depict an existing condition or to project a desirable alternative. It is a vision for a better life, a life materially richer, institutionally advanced and technologically more efficient. Development is promoted when certain necessary and sufficient conditions have been achieved locally to overcome the initial disadvantages of places or people. One fact needs to be added that it is at the same time difficult to assess the grade of development of a community or country, because development is an unending process and in that process it is found that even a developed nation is not satisfied with what it has achieved. For example, the United States of America and a few European countries though are materially and technologically advanced, yet they are aspiring for more development. Thus, development does not
mean that at a particular stage of development, a nation or people should stop with a satisfaction that it has achieved development in its full extent. However, a comparative study of different communities or people is necessary to understand the grade of development, a community or nation has achieved. In this background, if the Muslims of Assam are compared with the people belonging to other religious or ethnical communities, then it becomes clear that the Muslims are more backward educationally, economically and socially also. The Muslims, Particularly, living in char areas of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam are most backward. Almost 4.6% percent of the total areas of the state are char areas, where 9.35% percent of the state population live. But 75% of the char people live under poverty line and the literacy rate of them is only 19% percent. Even, the economic conditions of the Muslims living in other areas of the state are far more backward than the other communities. This backwardness of the Muslims of state is due to certain factors like
(i) The Government has given less attention to the problems of the Muslim community.

(ii) Most of the Muslims of the state live in the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra, the Barak and Beki and Manas etc. valleys. Thus, every year hundreds of them become victims of river erosions having lost their houses and properties. The Government have neither taken steps for preventing erosions of rivers nor have taken any steps for rehabilitating those people and this is one of the reasons for the backward economic conditions of the Muslims of Assam.

(iii) There is no perspective plan for economic development of the Muslims of Assam. Though there is a political will to do something for uplifting this community socially, economically and educationally, but the buaraucratic machinery is not so interested to implement the schemes meant for the upliftment of this community. In this connection, it may be mentioned that the Gopal
Singh committee formed in 1984 and the Sacher Committee formed by the hon’ble Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh had made a detailed study about the socio-economic, educational and political status of the Muslims of India as a whole and these two committees were of the opinion that the Muslims are even more backward than the scheduled castes and Tribes communities and thereupon made certain recommendations for their upliftment. Even the Prime Minister’s 15 point programme for the upliftment of the Muslim community could not yield any visible result because of non-implementation of the schemes meant for the Muslims. In this respect, the buaraucrates are mainly responsible because they did not take up this matter honestly. The recommendations of the Sacher committee are indeed based on ground realities and if those recommendations are honestly and sincerely implemented then it may be said that the socio-
economic and educational conditions of the Muslims also would to a great extent improve. (Hussain Ismail, Sr, 2005, P- 9-16).

In respect of empowerment of the Muslims of Assam, it may aptly be said that they are in many respects denied political representation. The Muslim population in Assam is almost 31% percent of the total state population. There are seven seats in Rajya Sabha from Assam. As per population of the Muslims they are entitled to three seats, but there is only one Muslim member in the Rajya Sabha from Assam. Similarly, in the Lok Sabha of Indian parliament, there are fourteen seats from Assam. Out of this fourteen seats two are reserved for scheduled Tribes and one is reserved for scheduled castes. Out of the remaining eleven general seats the Muslims are entitled to four seats according to their population. But, there is no quota of reservation as such for the Muslims in the parliamentary (Lok Sabha) constituencies of the state, although there are five parliamentary constituencies where Muslims are heavily
concentrated and because of absence of quota (reservation) for them not more than two representatives of this community can get elected to the Lok Sabha as and when political parties setup Muslim candidates. It is worth mentioning that the political parties, National or Regional, do not have the will for giving due representation to the Muslims. In an overall assessment, it may be said that there is a need of giving political empowerment to the Muslims for their overall development.

The 'D' (Doubtful) Voters Issue:--

After 1991, another issue arose regarding the disfranchisement of many Indian citizens belonging to the Muslims community. In 1997, voter list, published after thorough checking, it was found that 3.75 lakhs of Muslims voters in-spite of being genuine citizens have been recorded as 'D' voters i.e, Doubtful voters depriving them of voting rights. The Muslims of the state have been fighting against this deprivation of political rights of the Muslims of the
state. It is established that in order to check the growing Muslim political influence in the politics of the state, certain political forces in collusion with the bureaucracy have dis-enfranchised a large number of Muslim voters in the voters list. This issue has deep influence in the electoral politics of the state.

Rehabilitation Issue of the displaced Muslims:--

In 1993, there was a communal outbreak in Bodoland areas of Assam. In that violence 30,000 Muslim families have been forcefully driven away from their villages. They have been since then staying in refugee camps set up in Bongaigaon and Kukrajhar districts of Assam under deplorable conditions. Inspite of repeated appeals and movements no Government have taken any steps for their rehabilitation. Moreover, the river eroded people, having lost their properties and houses by erosions, do not get security when they go to other parts of the state seeking jobs for their livelihood. The recent happening in upper
Assam of the state is an example of harassment and insecurity that they face there because certain organization harassed them on suspicion that they were Bangladesh Nationals.

**Employment Issue:**

The number of Muslim educated youths is rising day by day. There is no reservation of jobs for the Muslims though they have been demanding that considering their backwardness there should be declared OBC and at least 10% percent of Government and Semi-Government jobs should be reserved for them. For lacking of proper facilities and poverty many Muslim brilliant students can not perform good results in examinations. Moreover, they are not properly trained to compete in competitive examinations. These are the reasons which are responsible for poor performance of Muslim candidates in job markets. It is therefore believed that without reservation the Muslim
educated youths will not get due justice and they will be deprived of Government jobs in the process.

In the last but not the least, it may be said that the Muslims do not get proper safeguard and supports for their over-all developments neither from the State Government nor from the Central Government. They also do not get recognition from the local people in view of their contributions to Assamese language and literature.

The problems faced by the Muslims were instrumental in facilitating their political mobilization. This in turn was facilitated by the Press.