Chapter 4

Migration, Conflict and Violence in Assam
4. I Introduction

People while migrating contribute as well as trigger conflict in the host country. Migration can relieve negative or low population pressure, labour shortages and economic growth and relieve poverty in the host. However, the migrants can be a burden in an underdeveloped economy and may trigger conflict. Migration can generate demographic changes, scarcity of resources, environmental degradation and may upset ethnic balances - leading to competition between the natives and migrants for controlling over resources finally ending up in conflict. Assam being rich in resources has been the destination of especially the Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants. But large-scale population increase and the demographic changes led to more impoverishment in an underdeveloped economy like Assam. The presence of large-scale poverty and unemployment led to a fierce competition between the native and the migrant population for controlling jobs and resources. The middle class Assamese also feared of being outnumbered by the presence of migrants.

The feeling of being outnumbered, deprived economic conditions led to resentment among the Assamese people and started demanding the expulsion of migrants from Assam leading to a popular agitation called the Assam Movement. The movement was peaceful later turned out violent leading to the killing of thousands of people. An analysis and discussion of the reasons of the movement are presented in detail in this chapter. A brief discussion of some case studies related to migration and conflict has been presented in the beginning of the chapter. It also presents a detailed discussion of the Assam Movement and other related issues including violence. The State and the Central government responses to meet the grievances of the agitators through Assam Accord are also analysed. Both primary and secondary resources have been used to analyse the chapter. The primary sources comprise of the State Assembly Debate and Parliament Debate especially to discuss and analyse the whole movement. Meanwhile, the interviews with the experts, conducted during the filed trip to Bangladesh and Nepal have also been added to analyse further. The secondary sources include books and various articles that are related to the case study.
4. II_ Theoretical Dimensions of Migration and Conflict

Migration occurs due to environmental, social, economic, some natural or human-made disasters, communal conflict, political instability etc. Individuals, families, group of people migrate to escape stressful situations or make adjustments in changing contexts to seek better opportunities in new locations (Clark 2007: 1). When migrants see ample economic opportunities and higher income including jobs, education and better living conditions in the destination, they migrate (Guibernau & Rex 1997: 2-3).

However, while doing so, they either contribute or trigger conflict in the receiving area. Migrants are considered an asset when their contribution for the development, is beneficial and positive. According to Piore (1979: 1), “Migration is supposed to relieve population pressure, overcome rural unemployment, and generate scarce foreign exchange and to develop the skills requisite for an industrial labour force in the sending country. In the receiving country migrants are supposed to complement native labour and overcome critical labour shortages.” Some countries for instance, Malaysia, Canada, Thailand and Malawi show the stunning capacity of some societies to absorb migrants (Dixon 1994: 21). Migration is a source of low cost labour for host countries, while the remittances of migrant workers are an important source of foreign exchange in sending countries. According to the World Bank, remittances worldwide were estimated at $316000 million in 2009 (IOM 2010: 117).

Migration can be a powerful force for economic growth and innovation in destination countries; and poverty reduction and development in poorer origin countries (UNDP 2009a: 16-17). Migration can have considerable benefits in the host societies, for example, they can help the country to adjust to low or negative population growth, labour shortages, increase the flexibility of labour markets to respond to seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in the economy, fill labour gaps in specific sectors or industries; and strengthen the competitiveness of certain sectors in the global market (IOM 2010: 12-13).

Migration has certainly been source of intense conflict in the host societies. Ancient migrations and colonial expansion involved conquest of territory and peoples; later, spontaneous or colonially induced migrations in Africa and Asia contributed to ethnic
conflict that has persisted in the post-colonial states (Suhrke 1993: 15). Large scale migration can cause demographic imbalances, environmental degradation and has security implications in the host. The receiving country may face scarcity of resources triggering native migrant competition for controlling resources which ultimately lead to conflict in the host causing instability, civil strife and insurgency. Conflict over scarce resources, such as minerals, water and particularly land/territory is a major source of armed struggle between the migrants and native people in the receiving state (Dixon 1994: 6-7; Wenche & Tanja 1998: 303-306; Gleditsch 1998: 381-399; Clark 2007: 16).

For example, the growth of violent insurgency in Tripura (1980-1988) caused due to shift in ethnic balance due to migration of Hindus from East Pakistan/Bangladesh that diminished only after the government agreed to return land to dispossessed Tripuris and to stop influx of Bangladeshis. However, as the migration continued, this agreement is in jeopardy (Hazarika 1993: 60-61). However, a small group of migrants can rarely be the cause of destabilisation in the host. Suhrke views (1993: 15), “If the migrants are destitute and few in numbers, they are too weak to make demands, and too few to be an agent of destabilization, they are more likely to become passive victims than a source of conflict. However, large population flows may cause destabilization by overwhelming the administrative apparatus of the state or the absorptive capacity and in that case, an endemic tension and violence may erupt.”

If the receiving country faces perennial problem of poverty, the large-scale migration can impose new demands upon jobs, local waters, sanitation systems, health and education services etc. leading to shortages culminating conflict between migrants vs. natives (Weiner 1992: 319; Reuveny 2007: 657-659). Richmond (1988: 42-43) views that when migrants having different cultural background migrate to a place which is not culturally cohesive, tends to trigger intense conflict. According to him, “Conflict may arise out of competition for scarce resources, differential distribution of power within the society, fundamental opposition of value supplies and inherent contradictions in the values held and the institutions serving them. Competition between migrants and the local population

---

1 In Tripura, the original Buddhist and Christian inhabitants now make up less than 30 percent of the state's population.
arises when there is a disagreement on the value of given objects or goals, both material and symbolic and when these are in short supply.”

Migration within and into a multi-ethnic society can have a destabilizing effects and tends to perpetuate intense conflicts. The conflict intensifies when different ethnic groups exist in the host and a strong sense of nativism ‘sons of the soil’ persists. The dominance of the settled ethnic groups if challenged due to migration of one distinct ethnic group then conflict is inevitable and it can result in ethnic war and even genocide (Goldstone 2002: 4-5; Safa & Tait 1975: 6; Weiner 1978: 3-8). Such conflict occurred due to movement of the Han Chinese into the Uigher areas of Xinjiang and into Tibet; the Bantu migrations into southern Africa which led to wars throughout the continent; and forced movements of people within the Soviet Union has led to a legacy of ethnic and separatist conflicts (Raleigh, et. al. 2008: 36).

However, migrants absorption capacities, depending on the extent of the problems, developed countries are most successful (in absorbing the migrants) as they likely to mitigate the problems through technological innovation and institutional redesign. But the LDC’s or the underdeveloped economies depending highly on the environment for survival are less likely to alleviate such problems since they lack wealth and expertise (Reuveny 2005; 2007: 658). There are several cases of migration leading to conflict. Reuveny viewed that migration which has been induced by environmental change is likely to be most prevalent in areas that are at the same time affected by severe environmental problems and are highly dependent on the environment for livelihood, such as in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Reuveny 2007: 659-660). Some of the cases related to migration and conflict are the following:

4. II.i Case of Pakistan

Pakistan has experienced a number of social or ethnic-based violent incidents in urban centres such as Karachi during 1980-81. The root causes of such violence are the growing environmental pressures, i.e. population growth, soil erosion, deforestation and water pollution etc. generated shortage of land and water. In rural areas, small farmers were forced off the land by large land-owners heightening tensions between the haves and the
have-nots that led to periodic violence between them. The decreased agricultural output stemming from the scarcity of land and water triggered a massive rural to urban migration in Pakistan (Geweski & Dixon 1996). The urban population swelled due to migration of marginalized farmers has exacerbated urban slums which suffer from a chronic shortage of basic urban resources including tap water. Coupled with the authorities' difficulties to meet these growing demands, the economically strong social groups have successfully appropriated urban amenities which they rent or resell at high costs to poor migrants. Economic inequalities have heightened tensions between long-standing ethnic rivals, and created conditions with a high potential for violence. Thus, urban violence has occurred in the cities of Hyderabad, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi. In Karachi, competition over increasingly scarce urban resources i.e. electrical power, have induced a series of violent incidents between the Punjabis, Pathans, and Sindhi peoples (Dixon & Percival 1996 in Schwartz & Singh 1999: 21-23).

4. II.i Case of Sudan

Sudan devastated by civil war between north and south that engulfed the nation from 1966-1972, has witnessed an outbreak of north-south violence in 1983. Sudan impelled by a restructuring of the international economy and constrained by a legacy of colonial rule that conferred only the capability for resource extraction to the exclusion of industrialization, the Jellaba (Arab Sudanese with relative wealth and political power) introduced large-scale mechanized farming in Northern Sudan after independence was achieved in 1956 (Suliman 1997: 99-102). By the 1980's, arable land scarcity, induced in part by the environmental ramifications such as soil degradation, deforestation, shortage of rainfall (a precipitation decrease by nearly 50 percent) and periodic drought, forced the Jallaba to move southern Sudan in search of virgin land and resources. Development projects in Southern Sudan incited grass-roots mobilization by southern Sudanese and ecologically marginalized northern Sudanese. With the formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA, later the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - SPLM), the marginalized people had a means to pursue action. Violence broke out not long after, when the SPLA organized attacks against the installations of the Jonglei Canal and

4. II.iii. Case of Kenya

In Kenya, ethnic clashes, between varipus tribes i.e. amongst pastoralists, between pastoralists and farming tribes, has become more evident and has claimed lives of thousands of individuals. In particular, the clashes between the Kalenjin (as well as other pastoralists) and Kikuyus, have become acute since 1991. The over fishing by the people and water pollution in the Lake Victoria (toxic chemicals flowing in from the seven Kenyan rivers that feed Victoria) has experienced significant reduction in fish stock levels. The sustainable yield for Lake Victoria is approximately 100000 metric tons per year but the figure exceeded and in 1991, Kenyans alone caught 186000 metric tons of

---

2 The carrying of toxic chemicals has resulted in a massive intrusion of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulphur, which has boosted the reproduction of oxygen-usurping seaweed in the lake and led to a "death zone" for fish.
Depleted fish stocks and increasingly scarce fertile land forced the Kikuyu peoples, who received special privileges during colonial rule, to migrate in search of fertile highlands and new land since the 1960's; especially to the Rift Valley, where the Kalenjin peoples and other pastoralists reside. Violent clashes broke out between various ethnic groups in 1991 and the most prominent clashes have occurred between the Kalenjin warriors and members of pastoralist tribes such as the Masaai, and the Kikuyu peoples. Tribe members of the Luo, Luhya, Kisii, Kamba, Meru, and Teso, have also been targets of the Kalenjin warriors and the Masaai. By the end of 1993, some 1500 people were killed, about 1 percent of the population has been displaced, and the area affected covered about 25 percent of Kenya. More recently, in 1994, the clashes spread to areas that formerly were calm, such as parts of the Coast and Western Pokot and around 10000 people were killed in violence (Lang 1995 in Schwartz & Singh 1999: 26).

4. II.iv Case of El Salvador – Honduras

In 1969, El Salvador had depleted nearly the entire stock of its virgin forests along with the over-irrigation of the small tracts of land that they had been forced onto by large landowners, soil quickly eroded and food production fell rapidly. Similar conditions prevailed in Honduras. Faced with growing resource shortages and declining agricultural activity, small farmers, an estimated of 0.3 million El Salvadoran began to migrate to Honduras - which was perceived as a country with greater resource abundance. A cycle of poverty for small Honduran farmers began which increased environmental degradation and diminished agricultural productivity. The arrival of Salvadoran migrants exacerbated resource competition between the large and small farmers in Honduras and large landowners blamed the Salvadoran for such economic woes of the small Honduran farmers. The Salvadoran migrants were subsequently expelled from Honduras promoting El Salvador to retaliate with refugee restrictions of their own. The political battle quickly

4. III Why Conflict in Assam

The state of Assam is a melting pot of tribes and conglomeration of thousands of languages, traditions and also ethnically sensitive (Hazarika 1993: 11-12). Migration has been a major source of violent conflict in India’s northeast since the early twentieth century. Large scale migration from Bangladesh and Nepal triggered competition for controlling over resources and the identity complexities of Assamese people. The migrants having different culture and religion, and the chauvinist character of the Assamese nationalism led to a violent campaigning against the migrants in the name of preserving Assamese identity (Gaan 2001: 165-166). Initially, migrants were accepted by the Assamese so long as they were only labourers and peasants. Social tensions began to surface when they occupied their land, administration, government jobs and began to prosper. They were seen as a physical, religious and cultural threat to the lifestyles of the Assamese (Hazarika 1993: 57).

The exploitation of resources including tea and oil has not been beneficial for the Assamese. Assam produces a major share of India’s tea, jute, oil and plywood but remains economically-industrially backward. The major investments have been in the tea in the private sector and oil in the public sector, which have not benefited Assam so much as the tea companies in Calcutta and India’s foreign-oil import bill (Hazarika 1993: 56; 2001a: 11-15). The economic deprivation for the local population is still there. The presence of high unemployment and poverty has further augmented the tensions. It became acute when the local middle class Assamese inhabitants cultivated their identity and culture feared of being swamped (as in case of Tripura) away by the presence of migrants within their own home land (Gaan 2001: 166-167). Kumar in a discussion viewed, “Ethnic identity of the Assamese people enhanced the level of conflict between the migrants and the local population. Around 32 million people have migrated to USA during 2001-2009 and have contributed towards USA’s consolidation as a superpower but on the other hand it created lots of problems in the USA also. Huntington (2004)
views that he is afraid that by the end of this century, there will no white people in USA
and they will become minority due to migration of the Mexicans, Spanish, Hispanic, South Asians etc. to USA.”

Dahal and Subedi, in a discussion viewed, “When migrants don’t show their identity, there is hardly any possibility of conflict. When migrants do not disturb the existing economic situation in the receiving country they do not become a problem for the locals. And when a migrant stays in a particular place at the lower level of the society and there may not be any problem as such. Once these migrants become prosperous and increases their numbers, the conflict tends to start. Conflict would occur when the migrants make inroads into the economy and develop some social pressures and when local inhabitants start thinking that they might get outnumbered and jobless. To maintain their stronghold they show their ethnic identity.”

4. III.i Assamese Identity and Sub-Nationalism

Due to century old stream of migration, Assam became a home of diverse cultural streams, the indo-Aryan and the Austro-Mongoloid being the central ones. No such groups called Assamese came to Assam carrying Assamese language or culture. The Assamese identity is the synthesis of many languages, culture of various migrated folk (Das 1983: 13-26 & Sharma 2006: 74-77). The Assamese identity has developed with the intermingling of settlers with the original inhabitants of proto-austroloid and mongoloid races, such as Bodos, Kacharis, Chutias, Miris, Mikir’s, Dimasas, Karbis and others over centuries (Chabbra 1992: 3). Credit must be given to the liberal outlook of the various groups of people for assimilation within their varying cultural and linguistic hues. The contributions that Aryañ Hindus have influenced, the same way Tibeto-Burman, Shan-Tai have altogether contributed for creating Assamese group (Das 1983: 14-16). Bhattacharya while reflecting on the composition of the Assamese identity and nationality observes, "Assamese is a heterogeneous community that includes tribal

---

3 In a discussion with Dhruva Kumar, CNAS, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu on 25/04/09, during field visit to Kathmandu.

4 In a discussion with Dilli Ram Dahal, CNAS & Bhim Subedi, Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu on 30/04/09, during field visit to Kathmandu.
groups like the Rabhas, Bodos, the Tiwas, Mishings, Karbis and the Dimasas, compared to these members of this composite nationality, the Bengalis and other are new comers to the land. A large number of Nepalis from Nepal also came here in the last few decades” (Bhattacharya 1980: 83).

The idea of composite Assamese nationality took a shape during the later part of the Ahom rule. According to Chatterji (1954: 54), “The late medieval period in the history of Assam under the Ahom kings was as we have seen, a period partly of travail for Assam, when her various tribal peoples of Mongoloid origin – the original Bodos and others, and the Austric people allied to the Khasis, together with that strong group of Shan new-comers, the Ahoms-were finally welded together as a single Assamese speaking nation – the Aryan Assamese language having already taken shape at the beginning of this period from Magadhi Prakrit and Apabhramsa dialects brought by settlers from Bihar and North Bengal during the greater part of the first millennium A.D.”

Assamese identity is not restricted only to the native speakers of the Assamese language but embrace all those who come within the broader field of Assamese culture (Mishra 2001: 1 & Bhattacharya 1985: 2-14). The word Assamese is anglicized formation built on the same principle of English syntax as Singhalese, Canarese etc. the people call this land Asom, and the word that has been built on it to mean the language and the people who speak it, is Asomiya (Barua 1991: 94 & Das 1983a: 13-14). Thus, the term “Assamese” refers to the linguistic identity –of the Asamiyas rather than to the territorial identity of the people of Assam. The term “Assamese” refers to the group of people who speaks Assamese language and also those people who are having different languages but adopted and acquired Assamese language either formally or informally.

The Assamese language which was spoken for a long time looked upon by Bengalis and non-Bengalis as an uncouth dialect of Bengali. The use of the same script (with two special letters for Assamese) and a very general agreement in grammar was largely responsible for it terming Assamese as vulgar language (Chatterji 1954: 12). This is not acceptable, Gierson viewed, (Linguistic Survey of India: 102), “Assamese is a sister language and not a daughter of Bengali language.” Gierson also viewed that Assamese
language has no relation with Bengali and it is independent language having only a common origin with the later (Das 1982: 18).

The Assamese nationalism started to take shape in 1850 through the political mobilization of the Assamese middle class on the language issue (Guha 1980: 1700). There was a patriotic feeling among the Assamese for their language started against the use of Bengali language started almost immediately after the establishment of the British rule in Assam. However, Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson – Christian Missionaries, were able to appreciate the racy qualities of pure Assamese with their journal *Arunodoi* (1846) and their bible translations sought to rehabilitate Assamese while it was neglected in the school and the law court. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859), started the new literary movement in Assamese and his hard work restored the proper place to the Assamese language. The Lieutant Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, made Assamese the language of education and administration for its native speakers in 1873 (Chatterji 1954: 13).

Calcutta, later on Gauhati and Jorhat became the centre place to many of the Assamese students for development and modernization of Assamese literature and intellectual development. During 1889 a band of young Assamese trained in Calcutta sought to emulate the Bengalis in their creative zeal in literature by bringing out the well known literary journal the *Jonaki* (Moonlight) which marked an epoch in Assam. Assam in this way received three of her greatest modern writers and thought – leaders: Hem Chandra Goswami (1872-1928), Laxminath Bezbarua (1868-1938) and Chandra Kumar Agarwala (1867-1938). These three writers established Assamese as a modern Indian language a worthy sister of Bengali and Oriya, Urdu and Hindi and Gujrati and Marathi (Chatterji 1954: 14).

5 Hem Chandra Goswami was a poet and critic, general essayist and student of Assamese literature, whose voluminous *Asomiya Sahityar Chaneki* or 'Typical Selections from Assamese literature' published at the instance of the late Asutosh Mukherjee from the University of Calcutta forms a landmark in the study of early Assamese literature just as his edition of the *Hem-Kosh*, an etymological dictionary of Assamese compiled by Hem Chandra Barua, was until recently, the most authoritative dictionary of Assamese language. Laxminath Bezbarua was one of the most versatile of writers with an all-embracing genius and a wide knowledge of an sympathy for men and their ways. He was a poet, an essayist, novelist, dramatist, critic, a humorous and a satirical writer. Chandrakumar Agarwala, a romantic poet kept pace with the other two writers in this great trio, by his humanism, his love of nature, his idealism and his intense qualities as writer (Chatterji 1954: 14).
The Assamese nationalism gradually developed as a comprehensive ideology which underwent organized consolidation during 1920s. Tarun Ram Phukan, while presiding over the annual conference of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1927, he said, “We Assamese people are a distinct nationality amongst Indian. Though our language is Sanskrit based, it is a distinct language. A rising nationality shows signs of life by way of extending domination over others. Alas! It is otherwise with us; we are incapable of self defence today, we are not only dependent, but even a dependent neighbour is trying to swallow us, taking advantage of our helplessness. Brother Asomiya! Recollect your pass glory to have an understanding of the present situation” (Guha 1980: 1702-03).

Until 1947, Assamese nationalism was basically protectionist and defensive but later it took an aggressive turn with the help of middle class people started emerging as more ambitious and shaped as more chauvinistic character. The Assamese people started to look at their mother language as an effective tool of collective self-assertion. The middle class Assamese people found it convenient in identifying the Bengali language as barricade on cultivating a sense of grievances against them (Guha 1980: 1703). Later it became aggressive and even riots took place across the state against non-Assamese in 1948, 1950, 1960, 1968, 1972 and 1980 in the Brahmaputra valley. Large scale genocides, giving expression to anti-Bengali hatred in particular, began to take place from 1960 onwards (Baruah 1986: 1184-1205).

The Nepalis having migrated to Assam found convenient the socio-economic climate, decided to settle finally in different parts of the state where the conditions permitted. The settlement of the Nepalis grew up adjacent to the Assamese villages and other tribal belts and their versatility to perform from dairy farming, agricultural labourers to Darban etc. found him mingled with the Assamese people at every walks of life. These earlier migrants have assimilated and integrated and later adopted Assamese as their language and culture preferred to show their identity as Nepali Asomiya (Nath 2003b: 50-51). The Nepalis accepted Assamese as medium of instructions but many other migrants, especially migrant Bengalis declined to do so. The Nepalis being small in number thought that their interests could well be addressed and protected if mingled with the
Assamese community (Nath 2003b: 54). The assimilation of Nepalis with the Assamese society and culture is evident from various angles. In an article written by former ASS president late Tirtha Nath Sharma, Asomot Nepali views, “Ratikanto Upadhaya was a disciple of great Vashnyavite Srimanta Shankardeva was a Nepali. Even the Satras established in Sivasagar and Nagaon district was also known as Nepali Satra.” Even Jitendra Nath Goswami, the former secretary and president of ASS belongs to the Nepali community. Mohanlal Upadhaya, a vashnyavite, and chief of Shankari Sangha, spreading vaishnyavism belongs to Nepali community (Sharma & Sharma 1987: 13-14).

The assimilation of the Nepali migrants is evident when some educated Nepalis took initiative to spread Assamese language through establishing Assamese medium schools in different parts of Assam. For e.g. Chhabilal Upadhaya-freedom fighter took an active part in establishing national Schools in the Assamese medium and gave shape to the formation of Behali High School in Sonitpur district in 1943. Again it was due to the initiative of Babudhan Thapa, that the Jawaharlal Uchha Buniyadi Bidyalaya of Naojan in Golaghat district was set up in 1954 (Nath 2003b: 55 & Handique 1998: 14-16). Some writers like Hari Prasad Gorkha Rai, Agni Bahadur Chetri, Man Bahadur Chetri, Tikaram Upadhaya contributed for developing Assamese language by their writing, have enriched the language. Hari Prasad Rai of Kohima and D. B. Sonar of Shillong were associated with the Assam Sahitya Sabha from its early days. Hari Bhakta Kochowal was also a prolific writer and was the assistant editor of Rodali, published at the Digboi session of the Assam Sahitya Sabha (Nath 2003b: 52 & 54).

During Indian struggle for independence, the Nepalis spontaneous participation in Assam was impressive and remarkable one. Guha (1977: 125) views, “The Assam Association which has changed its name and had already been virtually turned into a Congress platform at its Tezpur session, had a special and its last meeting at Jorhat with Chhabilal Upadhaya in the chair in April 1921. Besides condemning the recent evictions of Nepali

---

6 A social reform movement swept across India between the 12th and 15th century A.D. The Vaiishnavite movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva in Assam in the latter period of the 15th century ushered in an era of socio-cultural renaissance in Assam, humanist in content and popular in form, in literature as well as in the vocal and visual arts. It was revolutionary in the sense that Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam meant not only a religious faith but a way of life.
grazers from the Kaziranga Reserve Forest and police atrocities on them, the meeting also discussed the non-cooperation programme and organizational matters'. The British tried to keep him away from the Congress by often making lucrative offers including jobs. However, Upadhaya, a born patriot, refused to accept and committed to the freedom movement. Perhaps being impressed by his patriotic ideals Hem Barua, former president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha had recognised Chhabilal Upadhyaya as a living symbol of Assamese Nationalism (Hazarika 1979 cited in Upadhaya 2003). Chhabilal Upadhyaya also took the leadership of this community in the Non-cooperation Movement in Assam (Bhandari 1996: 47).

Dalbirsingh Lohar and Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan from Dibrugarh and Digboi also actively participated in the freedom struggle. One Deucharan Upadhaya died in Jorhat jail who went for fast unto death in 1922 (Sharma 1972: 78). Around three hundred Nepali community members participated in the Shanti Sena Bahini and Mrityu bahini organized by Jytoi Prasad Agarwala and Puspalata Das during the Quit India Movement of 1942 at Teligaon, Chatia, Behali etc. (Mahanta 1996 & Bhandari 1996: 104-105). A procession marched from the Shanti Sena camp, Teliagaon to Dhekiajuli on 20 September, 1942 and many volunteers were arrested by the police among whom Kashinath Luitel and Homnath Guragain were from the Nepali community. They were sent to Tezpur jail (Sharma 1986: 542-44; Bhandari 1996: 111 & Jaishi 1990: 129-130).

The Bengali-speaking population which increased by only 20.04 percent in the 1951-60 periods showed an increase of 41 percent during the 1961-70 period. However, the Assamese speaking population during 1961-1971 period increased by only 31 percent, despite the fact that a large section of migrant Bengali Muslims may have returned Assamese as their mother-tongue for political and other considerations. The Bengali speaking population in reconstituted post – independence Assam declined from 30 percent in 1931 to 21 percent in 1951 and 20 percent in 1971 and the chief reason behind this was the separation of Sylhet which alone had a population of approximately 2 million as against the rest of Assam’s population of approximately 9 million. According to the census report of 1951, there were 1717381 Bengali speaking people and it increased to
2907100 by 1981 in Assam which shows an increase of almost 1.2 million people within a span of 30 years (Mishra 1981: 290-292; Guha 1980: 1699-1719; Guha 1993: 19).

According to the 2001 Census report, Assam has 7343338 Bengali speaking people and it also reveals the decline of Assamese speaking population in seven districts; Barpeta, Darrang, Sonitpur, Morigaon, Bongaigaon, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. Out of these, Barpeta, Darrang, Sonitpur and Morigaon have a sizable population of migrant settlers (Singh 2008: 305-316 & Hussain 2004). The table shows the decline of Assamese speaking population in the above mentioned districts. The basic fear among the Assamese people is loosing their identity in the hands of overwhelmed number of Bangladeshis migrants (Swain 1996: 198-199 & Guha 1993: 15). Bezbaruah quotes, “The basic fear of the Assamese people was that Assam will be under the control of Bangladeshis and in future there will be scarcities of jobs for the locals and none of the Assamese people would top at the bureaucratic structure” (Bezbarua 1983: 14-15). Singh (1984: 67), views, “The rate of earlier migration was small but it soon increased and what was originally a trickling rill of migrants, so became a torrent and the Assamese developed genuine fear of being swamped by them and eventually reduced to a linguistic minority in their own homeland.”

Farooq viewed that the fear of being overwhelmed – outnumbered by the migrants generated conflict along with competition on control of resources. He further commented, “Migration from Bangladesh to Indian border states, especially Assam and West Bengal has been continuing and ongoing process. The people in the receiving area resented against these people as they took/settled in their land – occupied their lands. Since British rule, Assam and East Bengal had cordial relation with distinct cultural and religious affiliation. Migrants may not prefer other North-eastern due to terrain/inaccessible borders but people always had easy route/access with Assam. The conflict occurred in Assam when the local people started thinking that they would be overwhelmed by the migrants.”

---

7 In a discussion with Lt. Colonel Farooq, Bangladesh Army on 4/06/09, during field trip to Dhaka.
4. III.ii Political Assertion and Participation

It is alleged that the Bangladeshi migrants have always been exploited as they constitute a major vote bank for the political parties guided mostly by opportunistic policies. The migrants belonging to the minority community are the vote banks for the Congress party in Assam (Sarmah 1999: 73-75). There are 23 Assembly constituencies in the state in which Muslims constitute 50 to 90 percent of the total population. In seven other assembly constituencies, they are a numerical strength of 40 to 49 percent. In other words, Muslims constitute decisive factor in 30 out of 126 assembly constituencies (Ahmed 2006: 114).

Stating about using migrants as their vote banks and government inaction, Biraj Kumar Sharma commented, “Most of Bangladeshi migrants managed to get support from the government during 1971 and their names got enlisted into the electoral rolls. During the time of Chief Minister, Sarat Chandra Singha, there was an order from the Ministry of Home Affairs, government of India on 10 August. If that order was followed properly during that period there wouldn’t have been this situation today. The letter reads, ‘as the state and Union Territory administration may be aware, a large number of Bangladeshi nationals have been coming to India unauthorisedly and some of them are reported to be trying to get their names included in the electoral rolls by suppressing information about their Bangladesh nationality and posing as Indian citizens. To prevent this, it is requested that the state CID’s may be instructed to take immediate steps to check the electoral rolls, copies of which can be had from the Electoral Registration Officers concerned. If on check, the state CID’s discover the names of Bangladeshi nationals or other foreigners in the electoral rolls, they may be brought to the notice of the concerned ERO, together with the relevant information and prima facie evidence on the basis of which the individual is considered to be a Bangladeshi nationals or other foreigner for necessary action’. This order was not implemented by the Singha government – if that work would have been completed on time – there would have no foreigners in Assam”. However, in the same discussion, Sarat Chandra Singha replied by saying that the circular was implemented properly (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, 1986, 2 April, Vol. II, No.15: 102-103).
Subramaniam Swamy in a discussion on the issue of ‘Assam’ viewed, “There is certainly Assamese sub-culture which has to be protected. We certainly believe that if we have an electoral roll – that should be devoid of the illegal migrants. A government that is elected on the basis of that electoral roll would be in a position to ensure the Assamese sub-culture. It would see that the sub-culture is protected, but this government is unfortunately not in a position to carry through that and because of lack of statesmanship, and because the illegal migrants who happen to be their voters – that may be the consideration – have prevented them form even removing their names from the electoral rolls” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 373).

Shambhu Kumaran⁸ and Lok Raj Baral⁹ in a discussion also agreed about the vote bank politics of the political parties. They commented, “The political parties in Assam exploited the Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants for their vote bank, particularly by the Congress party. The minority vote bank politics of the Congress party led to inclusion of migrants into the voter list. Nepalis do not constitute a large group but the same party too used Nepalis as candidates in the Nepali inhabited areas during election. Bangladesh government also tries to hide the realities of population migration and that’s what makes the problem more vulnerable and easier for the political parties to exploit them. It’s a very complicated issue and question of national security involves, such population is more vulnerable to subversive activities as they have local links and certain times they create problems.”

In Assam, a steady increase of voters is observed in various years occurred with the help of corrupt government official, Bangladeshis managed to get their names enrolled in voter list. The number of voters during 1957-1962 has increased from 4.493 million to 4.943 million with an estimated growth of 10 percent. Again by the next four years, the number of voters increased by 13 percent to 5.585 million and by the year 1970, the number of voters stood at 5.702 million. However, within a year after that the number of voters rose by 10.42 percent to stand at 6.296 million. The political parties manipulated

---

⁸ In a discussion with Shambhu Kumaran, First Secretary, Indian Embassy, Nepal on 28/04/09, during field trip to Kathmandu.
⁹ In a discussion with Lok Raj Baral on 27/04/09, during field trip to Kathmandu
the migrants for their vote banks in return of their protection and also encouraged to
ensure their survival that resulted in the increasing number of electors in Assam from
1957 to 1979 (Bezbaruah 2005).

If we observe the data given in the Table 4.1, we can see an increase of more than
hundred percent of total electorate since 1952 to 1980. In 1952, Assam had a total
electorate of 4141720 but by 1980 Lok Sabha elections, the total electorate counted as
8655056, an increase of total 4513336 number of electorates. Throughout these years
Assam had a total increase of 18.15 percent electorate in comparison India’s average of
12.63 percent. The Report on the General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam
(1983), “There had been a steady and abnormal influx of population and corresponding
growth of the electorate, more so, after 1962. As against a normal growth of population
on a national average of 2 to 3 percent, there had been tremendous increase in Assam,
obviously, on account of migration of people from across the borders. Such migration
into Assam took place both direct and through other neighbouring states like West
Bengal and Meghalaya” (Election Commission of India 1983: 2-3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Electors</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Percentage of increasing during the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>4141720</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>4495359</td>
<td>353639</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>4942816</td>
<td>447457</td>
<td>10 (In 5 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>5585056</td>
<td>642240</td>
<td>12.99 (In 4 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5701805</td>
<td>116749</td>
<td>2.09 (In 4 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6296198</td>
<td>594393</td>
<td>10.42 (In 1 year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>7229543</td>
<td>933345</td>
<td>14.82 (In 6 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978(Elections to the Assembly)</td>
<td>7974476</td>
<td>744988</td>
<td>10.30 (in 1 year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>8537497</td>
<td>563024</td>
<td>7.06 (in 1 year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 (Elections to the Lok Sabha)</td>
<td>8655056</td>
<td>117559</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Election Commission of India (1983), Report on the General Election to the
Legislative Assembly of Assam, New Delhi, p. 3

The report also blames the state administration for such irregularities in electoral system.
The local people drawn from within the state, especially in the border posts were mainly
responsible for freely permitting the migrants to come to India without any check and settled in Assam regularly even during the normal times. The report blames the local official for such increase of voters and if the local officials had the rectitude of observing the strict rule of law would have prevented migration but the same officials allowed, assisted migrants to purchase property, own houses and started enumerating names of a large number of migrants (Election Commission of India 1983: 3-4). The same corrupt Assamese officials, who allowed migrants to enrolled, seen migrants making inroads to Assam’s economy, expressed their anxiety and felt that if the waves continue and if succeeded occupying political-administrative positions, they would become minorities and identity would be at stake. These generated fear psychosis loosing their strength (Guha 1980: 1706 & Bhattacharya 2003: 4-6).

The Nepali speaking population staying in Assam has been small in numbers actively participated and got assimilated with the Assamese society later became conscious of their rights and privileges started participating in the political process. The political awareness of the Nepalis in Assam occurred with the formation of All India Gurkha League in Darjeeling by Dambarsingh Gurung on May 15, 1943. The Nepali elite started mobilising their community exerting pressure on the ruling authority for adequate share of power in the administration in Assam and wanted to involve in the electoral politics (Upadhyaya 1984: 20). Nepalis participated in the electoral process even before independence; e.g. Dalbirsingh Lohar was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1946 as a Congress candidate from Tinsukia constituency and he was also a prominent worker of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, a labour wing of the Indian National Congress party (Talukdar 1998: 106). Moreover, Chhabilal Upadhyaya was selected as a member of the Tezpur Local Board in 1948 by the Government of Assam whereas Bishnulal Upadhyaya was elected to the same office in 1950 (Upadhyaya 1985: 60).

That’s the beginning of the participation of Nepalis in electoral politics of Assam. Again the Congress party to get support of the Nepalis in Assam preferred candidature in those constituencies where their population constitutes a sizeable number. To persuade the Congress party to increase the number of Nepali candidates during the first general election to the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA) held in 1952, the Assam Provincial
Gurkha League (APGL) in an executive committee meeting held at Singri of the undivided Darrang district on 26 July, 1951, adopted a resolution demanding twelve constituencies\(^{10}\) for the Nepalis. However, the APCC nominates only Dalbirsingh Lohar (won) as its candidate to contest election from Saikhowa constituency totally ignoring the demands of the APGL. The Socialist Party also nominated Prajapati Rijal for South Dhekiajuli constituency (Upadhaya 1984: 20-21). However, Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan – from Digboi, Parashuram Katuwal - North Lakhimpur, Prasad Singh Subba - South Tezpur, Kishan Chandra Thakur - Bihpuria and Dhrubanath Joshi - Shillong, contested as Independent candidates supported by the AIGL (Upadhaya 1984: 21). Since then a number of candidates contesting independently hardly manages to win the election.

In the second general election of 1957, Congress party nominated Bishnulal Upadhyaaya from the Gohpur constituency and he won the election. On the other hand, all the Nepali elite who fought the election either as the nominees of non-Congress parties or as Independent candidates lost the election. The victory of the lone Congress nominee in both the first and the second general elections to the ALA obviously left an indelible impression in the minds of the Nepali elite that their winning prospect would be bright only if they fight the election as the candidate of the ruling Congress Party (Upadhaya 1984: 22). Meanwhile, in the third general election held in 1962, Bishnulal Upadhaya – a Congress nominee from the Gohpur constituency manages to win the election for the second time. One more Nepali candidate, Dharmananda Upadhyaya, who contested election as candidate of the Socialist Party of India from Saikhoa lost the election (Report of the Third General Election 1962: 40-55).

In 1967 election to the ALA, the Congress party nominates two Nepali candidates; Bishnulal Upadhaya and Dalbirsingh Lohar from Gohpur and Tingkhong seat respectively. Lohar lost the election but Bishnulal Upadhaya managed to win for third consecutive term. Some other non-Congress Nepali candidates; Ram Chandra Sharmah of Praja Socialist Party, from Gohpur and another candidate of All India Gorkha League, Shivaji Rai from Sarupathar lost the election (Report of the Fourth General Election 1967:

---

\(^{10}\) North Lakhimpur, Bihpuria, Digboi, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Shillong, Gohpur, South Tezpur, South Dhekiajuli and Paneri
During 1972 election, one candidate nominated by the Congress party; Chandra Bahadur Chetry from Margherita won the election. However, one more Nepali candidate named Ram Chandra Sharma from Praja Socialist Party (PSP) won the Gohpur Assembly constituency seat. Thus, for the first time, there were two Nepali members from two different political parties won in the ALA election (Upadhaya 1984: 31).

With the formation of Janata Party, immediately after the emergency (June 25, 1975), a number of Nepali candidates shifted their allegiance from the Congress to the Janata party and contested election as a Janata party candidate (Report of the Sixth General Election 1978: 23-24). Ram Chandra Sharma who was elected to the ALA in 1972 as a candidate of the PSP from the Gohpur constituency contested as a nominee of Janata party candidate in 1978 election manages to win. The Nepali candidate managed to win four seats out of which three seats went to Janata party; Kul Bahadur Chetry from Margherita and Padam Bahadur Chauhan from Tamulpur, while one to the Congress party - Bishnulal Upadhaya from Behali (Report of the Sixth General Election 1978: 24-25). Nepali leaders fought the 'controversial' general election of 1983. It is interesting to note that both the winning candidates viz. Padam Bahadur Chauhan from Tamulpur and Kul Bahadur Chetry from Margherita, for the first time could manage berths in the Council of Ministers headed by Hiteswar Saikia in 1983 (Report of the Seventh General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1983: 55-60).

A sea change has occurred in Assam politics with the coming of AGP to power in 1985 after a long struggle on the issue of foreign nationals. There was a large number of Nepali candidates contested in the election but only two candidates from the Congress party; Kul Bahadur Chetry from Margherita and Swarup Upadhaya from Behali constituency respectively managed to win. Twenty Nepali candidates from different political parties contested the election, two own and the rest lost (Report of the Eighth General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly and House of the People 1985: 55-179).

In 1991, 18 candidates from different political parties contested election but managed to win three seats who are Congress candidates; Kul Bahadur Chetri from Margherita, Moni Kumar Subba from Naoboicha, Rudra Parajuli from Bodsola. For the first time, Swarup
Upadhyaya, was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1991 (Upadhaya 2003: 257-258). On the eve of the 1996 election to the ALA and Lok Sabha, a number of Nepali candidates contested as nominees of different political parties and as independent candidates. The regional party, AGP and its allies came to power in the ALA. Due to division in Indian Congress party and the consequent formation of Tiwari Congress, Nepali Congressmen in Assam also got divided into two factions. Only Moni Kumar Subba, a Congress candidate from Naoboicha. In 1998, Lok Sabha election, Moni Kumar Subba of the Congress party won from Tezpur constituency of Assam (Upadhaya 2003: 258-259).

During the 2001 election to ALA only one candidate managed to win the election from the Congress party; Tanka Bahadur Rai from Bachala constituency. This time Nepali youths developed an interest in election and the All Assam Nepali Students Union (AANSU) formed a political platform named Special Protected Class Demand Committee (SPCDC) and contested from two constituencies (Margherita and Sootea) and extended issue based support to the independent candidates, viz. Kul Bahadur Chetri and Ganesh Limboo of Rangapara and Dhekiajuli respectively (Upadhaya 2003: 259-260). In 2006 ALA election, Tanka Bahadur Rai, a Congress candidate from Barchala constituency manages to win the seat again, one more Nepali candidate Sanjay Raj Subba from Naoboicha manages to win (ALA website 2011).

4. III.iii Economic Issues

Assam is rich in natural resources but remained poor and economically underdeveloped. The large scale migration of Bangladeshis into Assam is considered as a settler and thereby a competitor for space in every form; land, water, services and jobs etc. The unnatural population growth has contributed towards the growth of unemployment in Assam. The problem of unemployment and poverty continues to be a matter of serious concern. The post-independence Assam witnessed the fast growth in the field of education, but due to lack of proportionate economic development, job opportunities were not generated, a vast number of youth remained unemployed (Singh 1990: 81).

---

11 The Sentinel (2001), “Nepali Students Form Body to Contest Election”, March 5
The incidence of unemployment in Assam is considerably higher than the country as a whole (also high for women). In Assam, the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force has more than doubled during the 1983–2000 period. It has increased from 2.2 percent to 4.6 percent and is twice the figure for India. The unemployment percentage in urban areas was extremely high, 9.8 percent in 1999-2000, and as much as 20.5 percent for women (National Human Development Report 2001: 161). The total number of job-seekers in the Live Register of Assam increased to 1827149 during the year 2006 from 1763430 in 2005-06. A large number of unemployed youths residing in far-flung and less accessible areas do not register their names in the Employment Exchanges and hence the actual figure will be much higher. The percentage of educated job-seekers to total job-seekers was 68 percent (Government of Assam, Finance Department 2008: 39). As per data available from the Employment Exchanges of the State it is revealed that during 2006 the number of educated job-seekers on the Live Register of Employment Exchanges has stood at 1.2 million in 2006 (Economic Survey of Assam 2007-2008: 4).

Assam has been reeling through unemployment since independence and reached an alarming position and it was more acute in pre-Assam Movement period. Citing about the problem of unemployment, Dulal Barua in his statement in the Assembly viewed, “The additional supply of manpower during 1961-71 is determined by three factors; firstly, natural growth of population, secondly, backlog of unemployment and finally the net migration. According to CSO’s estimate the net employable person’s amount to 4.70 million in 1961 and 6.07 million in 1971 adding 1.37 million employable persons during 1961-71. About one percent of the employable persons were unemployed in 1951. By applying the same percentage to the total employable persons as unemployed in 1961 the aggregate backlog during 1961-71 is estimated to be 0.04 million (1 percent of 4.70 million) persons.’ In addition to that nearly 0.2 million people will be added to this figure as migrants coming from outside the state” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1971, April 29, Budget Session, Vol. I, No. 25: 70-80).

According to the Economic Survey of Assam (1975-76: 9-10), “It was estimated that the magnitude of unemployment in Assam during 1975-76 period was of 1.55 million out of
which about 1.15 million - about 74 percent are in the rural areas alone. The total number of applicants according to the live register of employment exchanges increased from 139180 in 1974 to 191118 in March, 1976. The number of educated employment seekers in the live Register increased from 44,371 in 1973 to 85,365 in 1975.” Sarat Chandra Singha during his budget speech for the year 1977-78 viewed, “the number of employed persons in June, 1976 stood at 0.809 million as against 0.774 million in 1975. In the private sector, employment increased by 1.14% as against 5.5% in the public sector for the quarter ending March 1976 over the corresponding quarter ending March 1975. The live register of the employment exchanges showed an increase in the number of job seekers being 0.202 million in October 1976” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1977, 23 March, Vol. I, No. 2: 68-69).

Dulal Chandra Baruah in his statement in the Assembly commented, “There is a circular from Indian Government that at least 75% of the employment should be open for local youths and they should be given preference up to pay of Rs. 500/- i.e. the posts which should carry a salary of Rs. 500/-. But that has not been given effect to by various public sector undertakings; for instances, the Northeast Frontier (NF) railway Assamese local youths having only 22 percent representation till 1971. The Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) Assamese youths representation is 18 percent, in civil aviation it is -2. Because in that organization Assamese youth are working 3 persons in 3rd grade, 4 persons in 4th grade, 2 persons each as drivers and peons. In the public sector undertakings, like the ONGC, though they have shown in the report that representation of the local youths is 40 percent, in close scrutiny it is found to be only 23 percent and most of the employees are 3rd grade and 4th grade. In respect of the first class and second class posts in ONGC non-Assamese constitutes 79 percent in class II and 82 percent in class I and Assamese represents only 14 percent” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1971, April 29, Budget Session, Vol. I, No. 25: 81-82).

According to the sixth Report of the Employment, Review Committee (1976: 17), set up by the Assembly reveals, “Till February 21 1976, the NF Railway headquarters at Maligaon had 4474 employees of whom 59 percent had their birthplaces outside Assam, only 1,830 accounting for 41 percent of the total employee had their birth places in
Assam” (Misra 1980: 1360-61). The same report (1976: 23) revealed, “Among the 2,644 employees of the NF Railway Headquarters at Maligaon with birthplaces outside Assam, the bulk (1504) are from erstwhile Dacca accounting for 57 percent, followed by 22 percent from West Bengal. It has been further recorded that employees with Bengali as mother-tongue predominate all classes of jobs, accounting for 60 percent of the total employees and the Assamese constituted only 28 percent” (Misra 1980: 1361-62). The third Employment Review Committee (1979: 50) views, “It was found that in 28 units comprising 7 public sector industries, 16 private sector industries and 5 banks, with a total strength of 29537 employees, only 10473 or 35% had Assamese as their mother tongue. The committee further notes that of 2095 employees in Class I & II only 762 or 36% belongs to Assam” (Barua 1991: 33-34). There are some instances of depriving employment opportunities to the local educated youth in Assam. Dulal Chandra Barua in the Assembly commented, “In Duliajan, Oil India advertised for recruitment of 38 assistant engineers and interviews were called. Some local Assamese youths having good academic records and specialized training also applied for the posts. But the company abruptly changed the place of interview and arranged it in Calcutta where the Bengali people were recruited depriving the local Assamese youths.” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1971, April 29, Budget Session, Vol. I, No. 25: 84).

Dulal Chandra Baruah favoured reservation of local population in the government institutions and introduced a bill called the Assam Employment Reservation Bill in 1967 in the Assembly. However, the Prime Minister of India sent a letter to the Chief Minister of Assam and other responsible offices not to pass the bill. Supporting the bill in the Assembly, he commented, “Here a reference has been made to the letter (No. VI/E2/-30178/69/L&E-3404, dated 10th July, 1969) from Shri I. Prasad, secretary to the government of Bihar to the Chief Secretary to the government of Assam. It reads like this subject – preference in employment to local people – I am directed to invite a reference to your wireless message No. Parl/18692, dated the 6th June, 1969 that there are no domiciliary restrictions on employment in state government officers/state undertakings. However, Assam government has not initiated any such movement for reservation of jobs for the local people” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1971, April 29, Budget
Session, Vol. I, No. 25: 83). Dulal Chandra Barua added, "For that reason discontentment is prevailing among the Assamese people and they view that the outsiders are taking advantage and exploiting resources" (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1971, April 29, Budget Session, Vol. I, No. 25: 81-82). Kula Bahadur Chetri during discussions on Governor's address argued to take initiative to "Establish industries including the oil refineries to solve the unemployment problem in Assam" (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1979, 28 February, Vol. III, No. 6: 57).

Regarding exploitation of resources of Assam, Kamala Kalita in the Assembly viewed, "There are 3.9 million hectare area of total tea cultivated land in India out of which Assam alone has 2.11 million hectare that indicates the presence of 54% of the total tea cultivated area. The tea production amounts to 560.7 million kg. that indicates Assam produces 53 percent of total tea production. In India, there are 910823 persons working in tea gardens and in Assam it is 468380 persons – contributing 51 percent of the total employment - labour force. But all the offices and tea companies are established outside Assam (Calcutta) for the profit of particular corporate bodies absolutely depriving the local people and the benefits out of it. The West Bengal government levy entry tax and earns an amount of more than Rs. 500 million annually. There is an urgent need by the state government to pressurize the union government to transfer all the headquarters and offices back into Assam." (Assam Legislative Assembly Debates 1988, May 10, Budget Session, Vol. I, No. 2: 136-137). The same is the case with oil, Assam produces 4.5 million Metric ton of crude oil by the year 2006-07 (Government of Assam, Memorandum to the Thirteenth Finance commission 2008: 57) and the annual price of it will be Rs. 7320 million. Assam gets 197.4 million as royalty which is just above 2 %. If Assam gets at least half of the amount of the total annual price, Assam’s economy would have been in much better (Barua 1982: 14-21).

Assam has 19.7 percent population living below the poverty line during 2004-05 compared to 36.09 percent in 1999-2000 and 40.86 percent in 1993-94 as against all-India figures for the same are 27.50 percent in 2004-05, 26.10 percent in 1999-2000 and 35.97 percent in 1993-94 respectively on the basis of uniform recall period consumption (Economic Survey of Assam 2007-2008: 2). It can be assumed that people living below
poverty line much have been higher during the period of Assam agitation. Unemployment, combined with large-scale poverty and deprivation of local Assamese in the job sector resulted in frustration among the youths. When youth faces Joblessness it leads to low esteem and self-worth, and may have a serious consequences damaging social and psychological impact. If reviewed, one of the reasons of Assam agitation on the issue of migrants, the real bone of contention is the political expression of the economic deprivation which Assamese have experienced due to heavy migration since 19th century (Das 1989: 49).

In a discussion on the issue “Assam”, Indrajit Gupta in a statement viewed, “I regret to say that in the whole of the North Eastern region there is a feeling among the people and particularly among the youth that the aspirations of that region, their development – economic, cultural and linguistic – is not given adequate attention. There is a deep feeling of resentment among the youth of that region” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 485). Somnath Chatterjee in a discussion in Lok Sabha on the ‘situation in Assam’ views, “When there is ranging unemployment, to work up an anti-migrant sentiment and then to create complete disruption throughout the country is not a big deal, finally putting an end to our national unity, together with national integrity. The ruling party has not paid due attention for the economic development in Assam. As a result, unemployment is swelling. There is deepening economic crisis, discontentment is naturally there in other part of the country” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 384). In the Vijawada conference CPI (M)’in their political statement (1982) viewed, “Assam along with other Northeastern states showing secessionist tendencies – reasons are the underdevelopment, inadequate industrialization, economic backwardness, increasing economic miseries caused anger/unhappiness among the people that is exploited by the secessionist people and using influx of migrants as pretext” (PRANTIK Report 1983a: 12).

4. III.iv Environmental Issues

The major factors that contributed for the rise of native-migrant conflict in Assam are due to the environmental changes that occurred in Assam due to high growth of population.
especially for the migration from Bangladesh and Nepal. The undocumented migration from neighbouring countries is considered to be the underlying factors of high population growth. The State of Tripura has experienced 78.71 percent of population growth during 1951-1961 periods which is explained in terms of migration of Hindus from East Pakistan during the division of the subcontinent (Gaan 2001: 165-166 & Bezbaruah 2005).

Considering the growth of population during 1901-2001, Assam’s population has doubled in the 40 years during 1901-1941 and again more than doubled in the next 30 years – during 1941-1971. And if we look at the 1981 projected population, it is almost doubled in the 20 years between 1961 and 1981. Due to large scale migration of people across border a steep rise of population occurred. The population of Assam increased from 3.29 million in 1901 to 19.9 million by 1981 showing growth rate of 505.01 percent as compared to only 186.84 percent growth of growth during the corresponding period (Singh 1987: 257-282). Again during 1951-1961, Assam’s population increased by 34.98 percent and by the next decade 1961-1971 it increased by 34.95 percent. The projected population based on 36.04 percent in 1981 would be 19.9 million is accurate. However, after the census of 1991, the projected population figure of Assam for 1981 was revised to 18.04 million (down by about 1.85 million). This gave a comfortable decadal increase in population of just 23.35 percent for Assam against the national decadal growth of 23.5 percent for the same period (Bezbaruah 2005).

In Assam, we can see an increase of the total population by 82 percent during the period of 1951 to 1971 and that changed the demographic pattern in 10 out of 23 districts. Since 1951, the rate of increase of Assam’s population has been much higher than that of India (Dass 1980: 850-859). Comparing to the population increase rate for all India from 1961-1991, was 72.96% whether it was 87.39% for Assam. If this huge difference did not occurred, Assam’s total population would have been of 18 million instead of 22 million in 1991. So at basic level there are estimated 3.55 million migrants in Assam (Gaan 2001: 166). The most disturbing development in the 20th century Assam has been of population explosion. It has increased from 3.3 million in 1901 to 22.3 million in 1991 while India, the country as a whole, from 238.4 million in 1901 to 843.9 million in 1991.
Had Assam’s population increased at the same rate as that of India from 1901-1991, which is 54 percent, the population of truncated Assam in 1991 would have been 14.9 million, not 22.3 million. The extra 7.4 million are by and large migrants and their descendants (Barpujari 1998: 33).

Table 4.11
Growth of Population in Assam (Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>5.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>6.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>8.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>10.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>14.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>19.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>22.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>26.656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Census Reports, various Years, as cited in D. N. Bezbaruah (2005), Demographic Threats in Assam, (online web), accessed on 12 January, 2009, URL: http://www.ivarta.com/columns/OL_050102.htm

According to the Census of India 2001, the Muslim constitutes 30.9 percent out of a total of 26.6 million populations. According to the report, 17296455 were recorded as Hindus and 8240611 Muslims which demonstrates that the proportionate growth of Muslim population in Assam is second only to Jammu and Kashmir (67 percent Muslims). The growth of Muslims occurred at 77.42 percent during 1971-1991, attributed to migration of Muslim population from Bangladesh. Some districts bordering Bangladesh experienced high growth rate of Muslim population, particularly after 1971 (Upadhyay 2005: 3002-04).

The 2001 census reports revealed that six of Assam’s 27 districts have a majority Muslim population and Barpeta district tops the list with 977943 Muslims. The other five districts are Dhubri, Goalpara, Nagaon, Karimganj and Hailakandi. These districts lie close to the border with Bangladesh or the districts in which early migrants from Bangladesh settled. It is also observed that the rate of growth of Muslim populations are the highest precisely
in these districts giving credence to the widely held belief that migration from Bangladesh was the source of these demographic trends (Hussain 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Assam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>22.39</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>22.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>9.91</td>
<td>24.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>25.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>11.21</td>
<td>28.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>28.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>30.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Census of India, various years as cited in Anup Saikia (2005), “Refugees, Illegal Migrants and Local Perceptions in India’s Far East”, Paper presented at the 25th IUSSP International Population Conference held at Tours, France 18-23 July

If we look at the various census figures we can observe a steep rise of Muslim population in Assam between the period of 1971 and 1991. During 1951-61 the growth rate of Muslims in Assam was 38.35 percent, compared to 33.71 percent for the Hindus and the natural growth rate of Assam during that period was about 22.4 percent. The census figures of 1971 and 1991 shows that there has been a steady to rapid rise in the Muslim population in districts proximate to the border, confirming apprehensions of a continuing influx of people from Bangladesh. This, perhaps, goes a long way to explain the rather high Muslim growth rate in Assam, estimated at 77.42 percent between 1971 and 1991. In 1971, Muslims, for instance, comprised 64.46 percent of the population in Dhubri district, rose to 70.45 percent in 1991 - a total growth of 77.42 percent during 1971-1991. By 2001 the proportion of Muslims had risen further to 74.29 percent of the population in Dhubri. By 2001, the Muslim population in Barpeta rose from 56.07 percent in 1991 to 59.3 percent; in Goalpara, from 50.18 percent to 53.71 percent, and Hailakandi from 54.79 percent to 57.6 percent. Significantly, two new districts joined the list of Muslim majority districts in Assam by 2001: Karimganj, where the Muslim population rose from 49.17 percent in 1991 to 52.3 percent; and Nagaon, where the community's population grew from 47.19 percent in 1991 to 50.99 percent (Hussain 2004 & Saikia 2005).
Looking at the growth of Nepali migrants in Assam we can observe that the number of Nepalis increased from 21000 in 1901 to 101335 in 1951; 182925 in 1961; 353673 in 1971; 432519 in 1991; and 564790 by 2001 (Census of India, Language Report 1991: 45-46 & Census of India 2001). Thus, a fast growth of Nepali population is observed in Assam especially during 1951-1971. The number of Nepali population that increased during 1951-1971 period can be attributed for migration from Nepal. The problem of Nepali settlers numbering about 0.35 million in 1971 and about half a million by 1980, was not viewed by the AASU and AAGSP, a very serious problem in the overall prospective. Though not considered serious, but the AASU and AAGSP demanded expulsion of Nepalis. However, the Assam Gorkha Sanmelan in its meeting held on February 10, 1980 decided to request the Assam government, not to evict the Nepali settlers who had come to Assam prior to the introduction of permit system in 1976. The problem was discussed by the AAGSP and AASU classified the Nepali migrants into the following categories: -

- a. Settled in forest land since the period of Ahom rulers. They have been fully assimilated.
- b. Nepalis settled in Assam during the British regime – assimilated fully.
- c. Ex-serviceman rehabilitated by the government of India or those working for absentee landlords – assimilated fully.
- e. Nepalis who had came without RAP.
- f. Nepalis expelled from Bhutan in 1976 and
- g. Floating population who comes for seasonal work and employment (Murthy 1983: 40)

Demographic changes due to tremendous growth rate of population since 1951 onwards for reasons other than natural has resulted in heavy pressure on land and other available resources (Bhattacharya 1998: 18). According to Nath (1980: 50), “Thousands of Muslim migrants entered Assam through the Brahmaputra river, use the Char land as a spring board to seek and secure a permanent foothold in forest land, tribal belt or lands of indigenous population through encroachment, purchase or otherwise with the connivance
and complicity of the local political authorities" (Das 1982: 48). The birds and aquatic life in Char, beels (a beel is an inland freshwater body) forests and low fertile land have disappeared. Vast char area, marshy land, pasture, fallows and waste land, reserve land and forests are now settled by the migrants. Forest land as a whole increased from 15 percent in 1950 to 22 percent in 1973. But in Assam, it has been reduced from 38.32 percent to 28.07 percent during the same period. Assam lost 41.5 percent of the forest since 1951 (Saikia 2002; Das 1982: 48; Bhattacharya 1998: 26).

4. III. v Social Issue

Assam has been predominantly a Hindu dominated society and maintains a distinct cultural identity and intermingling of cultures due to migration makes Assamese as a unique society (AHDR 2003: 4). However, the stream of migration from Bangladesh has created social divisions. One group- Bengalis always tried to maintain their distinct identity and kept on showing their superiority over the Assamese in terms of education, language and skills that led to spread of jealousy among the Assamese due to their backwardness. Bengalis being unique never tried to mix up with the Assamese people and their culture and maintained their own identity. This resulted in Assamese apprehensions against the Bengalis of being pursuing cultural imperialism on them (Weiner 1978: 107-110).

The fear accentuated when they can see the case of Tripura where Bengali Hindu migrants outnumbered the local tribal and controlled political power reducing the locals to minority. However, in case with Nepalis it is quite different. Though they maintained their distinct identity and social customs, there are some evidences where their involvement with the Assamese customs and culture and traditional festivals is revealed. Being small in numbers, throughout the centuries they mingled with Assamese society and adopted the Assamese language and their culture as their own (Nath 2005a: 57-59).

The Nepalis in Assam actively participates in some of the important Assamese local festivals – the Bihu. There are three Bihus – Bohag, Kati and Magh. The magh Bihu is celebrated in January also Nepali celebrates as Makar Sakranti. The Bohag as Rongali Bihu celebrated in Assam welcoming the new Assamese year – the same way the Nepalis
participate and celebrates. There are number of instances of Nepali girls participating in stage competition. In Behali, Nepali girls excel in the Bihu dance competitions as Bihu Kunwaris (Upadhaya 1994: 19-22).

Large scale migration has materially changed the socio-cultural composition of the Assamese society. These changes have engendered new competitive politico-economic pressures on the Assamese Hindus who were traditionally lacking in competitive skills in comparison with the migrants especially with the Bengalis. However, they managed successfully in resisting the imposition of Bengali language. The jealousness of becoming religiously and culturally dominated by the Bengalis in Assam can be cited as the major cause of launching movement against them. Anti-Bengali sentiment of Assamese has periodically expressed itself in the form of riots from 1950 onward. The period from 1979 onward may in this context be viewed as one of continuous expressions of anti-Bengali feelings (Rastogi 1986: 84-85).

4. III.vi Security Issues

Assam shares a 262 km long border with Bangladesh of which 92 km is riverine out of total 4,096-kilometer long Indo-Bangladesh border marked by a high degree of porosity and checking illegal border crossing by the Bangladesh people has been a major challenge (MOHA 2008: 29 & Goswami 2006). The magnitude of the problem is such that the steady flow of migrants from Bangladesh has significantly altered some Assam's border district questioning the internal and national security (Ramtanu 2005 & Pramanik 2007).

According to the report of the Group of Ministers (2001: 60), "Migration from across our borders has continued unabated for over five decades. We have yet to fully wake up to the implications of the unchecked migration for the national security. Today, we have about 15 million Bangladeshis, 2.2 million Nepalis, 70000 Sri Lankan Tamils and about 0.1 million Tibetan migrants living in India. Demographic changes have been brought about in the border belts of West Bengal, several districts in Bihar, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya as a result of large-scale migration. Such large-scale migration has obvious social, economic, political and security implications. There is an all-round failure in India
to come to grips with the problem of migration. Unfortunately, action on this subject invariably assumes communal over-tones with political parties taking positions to suit the interest of their vote banks.”

The threat perception due to migration from Bangladesh will not be clear without mentioning the view of Bangladesh regarding the Northeast India. Since partition, the Muslim psyche in Pakistan’s both parts is suffering from an injury of loosing half of Bengal and Assam (Pramanik 2007). The Governor of Assam, Sinha report to the President of India, views, “Failure to get Assam included in East Pakistan in 1947 remained a source of abiding resentment in that country. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1969) in his book, Myths of Independence wrote, ‘It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though undoubtedly the most significant. One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute, that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan. To these Pakistan has very good claims’. Even a pro-India leader like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his book, Eastern Pakistan: Its Population and Economics, observed, ‘Eastern Pakistan must have sufficient land for its expansion and because Assam has abundant forests and mineral resources, coal, petroleum etc., Eastern Pakistan must include Assam to be financially and economically strong’ (Assam Governor’s Report 1998).

The Assam Governor’s report (1998) views, “There is a tendency to view migration into Assam as a regional matter, affecting only the people of Assam. Its more dangerous dimension of greatly undermining our national security is ignored. The long cherished design of Greater East Pakistan/Bangladesh, making inroads into the strategic land link of Assam with the rest of the country, can lead to severing the entire land mass of the North East, with all its rich resources, from the rest of the country. This will have disastrous strategic and economic consequences.” The report also views, “This silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geo strategically vital districts of Lower Assam. The influx of these migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim majority region. It will then only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made. The rapid growth of international Islamic fundamentalism may provide the driving force for this demand. In this context, it is
pertinent that Bangladesh has long discarded secularism and has chosen to become an Islamic State. Loss of Lower Assam will sever the entire land mass of the North East, from the rest of India and the rich natural resources of that region will be lost to the Nation.”

The magnitude of the problem of Bangladeshi migration into Assam and India’s secular polity is also in danger due to increasing distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims threatening communal harmony prevailing in the states. The ceaseless migration assumes a new dimension when it slowly and steadily takes a shape of the demographic expansion and its consequent socio-political disturbances that can possibly destabilize the entire North-Eastern regions. These migrants can finally turn volcanic enough to disrupt and bring disintegration of the country (Pramanik 2008). The issue of migration has an implication for India’s national security. It is now an established fact that most Northeast insurgents, i.e. ULFA, KLO, NDFB and others groups have their base in Bangladesh and established strong linkages with Pakistan’s external intelligence agency – Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) for its larger design to destabilise India (Singh 2002: 58-59; Singh 2002: 142). These groups are not only getting support from the Bangladesh government but also through the facilitation provided by a network of migrants from within Assam to the ULFA. The October 30, 2009 attacks in Assam which killed 83 civilians and injured 30 was suspected to be the handiwork of ULFA, NDFB and the Harkat-ul-Jihadi-e-Islami (HuJI) from Bangladesh with perhaps certain elements from the migrant population helping them in their devious tasks (Goswami 2010 & Khanna 2010). India’s External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in the BJP led government surmised the growth of anti-India terrorist activities inside Bangladesh and that “Some Al-Qaeda elements have taken shelter in Bangladesh. ... the foreign media has ... reported several such instances, our own sources have also confirmed many of these reports” (Jha 2003 & Saikia 2002: 187-189).

Siddique viewed that the conflict in Assam occurred due to increased tendencies of assertion of the rights of the indigenous people. The conflict in Assam is about the participation of people in the mainstream politics. Sub-national identity is the main problem in Assam for which these conflicts arise. According to her, “The Assamese
people started thinking that the migrants started taking their jobs, lands, and other civic amenities. The mainstream community started having this perception when their demands for more participation didn’t get fulfilled within the system. The state deliberately did it; it is the state that couldn’t do it. The conflict arises due to securitization of migration problem. The securitization of migrants automatically led to people’s thinking or propagation that migration is a security risk. The issue of securitization came through the writings of journalist, academicians etc. and then were exploited by the political parties. A section wants migrants as their vote banks and other to do politics. The BJP made the migration issue as security risk for the country.¹²

The BJP along with other organizations like the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has been criticizing the government for accommodating Bangladeshi migrants (Gillan 2002: 75-76). The party accuses the Congress for their narrow and selfish reasons for neglecting the issue. The party estimates the total number of migrants about 17 million and advocates that the influx of population posses grave magnitude and even security (BJP, Election Manifesto, Our Nation’s Security, 2004). The BJP through Communalisation of the issue successfully extended the insecurity syndrome across the society and gives a dangerously xenophobic stand that all alleged migrants must be summarily expelled from Assam (Bhushan 2005). By creating a spectre of Islamisation the BJP singled out on the Islamic character of such migration for possible electoral gains motivated the BJP to launch a well orchestrated propaganda and termed it as cultural and religious invasion from a neighbouring Islamic state (Pathania: 2003: 47). The party published popular articles and books on the issue and in addition a systematic speech campaign against the threat from migrations largely responsible for exacerbating national security anxieties. The very caption of such writing such as “Demographic Aggression Against India: Muslim Avalanche from Bangladesh” and “Is India Going Islamic” both written by a leading BJP ideologue Baljit Rai sent a

¹² In a discussion with Tasneem Siddique, Department of Political Science, Dhaka University, on 1/06/09, during field trip to Dhaka.
chill amongst the readers and played on common people’s fear against the Bengali Muslim migrants (Rai 1993: 199-200). The speech and the ideological writings made a clear distinction between the Hindu refugees and Muslim migrants and circulated speculative figure of more than 15 million Bangladeshi Muslims settled in various parts of India. The party also warned the about the grim consequences of such exodus of Muslims from densely populated Bangladesh. And that “the pushing of millions of Bangladeshi Islamic morons into India is fraught with gravest threats to our very existence” (Baljit Rai 1993: 201). The right wing party also extensively cited from select Bangladeshi media and scholars to caution against their demand of finding lebensraum (living space) for the burgeoning population of Bangladesh as Muslim Bango Bhoomi will comprise large parts of West Bengal, Bihar and Assam and finally merge with Bangladesh. Baljit Rai’s hatred for Muslims is too blatant when he quotes, “these millions of hungry Muslims are a shameless lot and resort to every conceivable stratagem to conceal their identity” or ... “the infiltration of Muslims from Bangladesh is cancerous” (Baljit Rai 1993: 218-219, as cited in Upadhaya 2009: 11-12)

4. IV Assam Movement

The long tradition, slow economic development, the threat in the reduction of the size of the state and quest for identity, directed the student to launch an agitation against the migrants/foreigners for the triumph of regionalism and economic development in Assam. According to Deka (1996: 174), “No change or development, whether social, economic or political, could be brought about without resorting to agitation. Agitation seems to have been the only way of bringing change or development in Assam and the student community practically spearheaded all agitations and protests and hence formed their nucleus.”

13 Rai Baljit (1993), Demographic Aggression Against India: Muslim Avalanche from Bangladesh, Chandigarh: B.S. Publications and Is India Going Islamic in at http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Bridge/9684/art1.htm. Also see How Bangladesh will Destroy India? Demographic Challenge! at www.geocities.com/hsitah9/ how_bangladesh_will_destroy_indi.htm
14 Ibid, p. 201
The fear of being swamped by the presence of migrants, discontentment and the failure of both the Union and the State government’s disinclination to resolve the problem of migration led to a popular agitation in Assam. The AASU was the traditional torchbearer; All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD) and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) were the prime organizations launched the movement in support of detecting, deletion and deportation of migrants/foreigners from Assam (Guha 1993: 14 & Baruah 1986: 1189-90). The movement was more or less peaceful but later turned violent as the state and the central government failed to meet their popular demand of deportation of foreigners. However, the consequence of the agitation are still being felt; throwing the region into turbulence and created deep divides among the communities (Hazarika 2001a: 11-20).

The AASU shocked by the whole affairs of migration of Bangladeshis and Nepalis into Assam, started drawing a 21 point charter of demands to the Assam Government on February 21, 1974 and included the demand for detection, deletion and deportation of migrants from Assam. The AASU in support of their demand, expulsion of foreigners, started a stir on August 8, 1978, at every district headquarters; followed by Satyagraha, hunger strike etc. (Guha 1993: 14-15). In the AASU memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India (1980) viewed, “A silent invasion by foreign nationals from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal is taking place. We cannot remain silent spectators when sovereignty of India is at stake. The problem has been deliberately neglected by the leaders leaving the destiny of Assam at the mercy of foreign nationals. The foreign nationals pose a challenge to the integrity of India”. The memorandum again stated, “Foreign nationals try is to enrol their names in the voters' lists with the connivance of antisocial elements, politicians and officials on this side of the border. The motive is crystal clear. The infiltrators vote for the politicians who protect them in all respects. In fact, politicians encourage infiltration to ensure their political survival”.

The agitation started with an electoral check in 1979 after a bye election to be held following the death of Hiralal Patowary - Mangaldoi constituency in the Darrang district. While revising the electoral roll, the election official found a total number of 600000.
voters in that constituency, drew public attention due to rapid increase in the number of voters. During a routine revision of electoral rolls, published on 20 April 1979, 70000 names of migrants were found in that single constituency. Across the states flood of complaints swept the local electoral offices and in one particular week as many as 320000 complaints were filed. This event followed reports of fresh large-scale migration of Bangladeshi migrants into the state (Hazarika 1996: 7).

The previous electoral revision, done in 1977 at the time of the general election, substantiated the fact that the mass arrival of migrants had taken place in the latter part of 1970s. The Chief Election Commissioner, Shakdher, during the conference of the Electoral officers held at 24-26 September, 1978 commented, "In one state (Assam), the population in 1971 recorded an increase as high as 34.98 percent over the 1961 figures and this increase was attributed to the migration from Bangladesh. The influx has become a regular feature. I think it may not be a wrong assessment to make, on the basis of the increase of 34.98 percent between the two censuses. The increase that is likely to be recorded in the 1991 census would be more than 100 percent over the 1961 census. In other words, a stage would be reached when the state would have to reckon with foreign nationals who may probably constitute a sizeable percentage, if not the majority of the population of the state" (AASU Memorandum 1980). The Chief Election Commissioner also added, "Another disturbing factor in this regard is the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the names of such migrants who are not Indian citizens without even questioning and properly determining the citizenship status" (Chabbra 1992: 74-78 & Hazarika 1996: 8).

The AASU memorandum (1980) further states, "The political parties who would have benefited by these migrants votes used all the influence and forced the authorities to stop deletion of foreigner's names from the electoral rolls. The experience of burial of Indian democracy in Mangaldoi constituency was too fresh to be forgotten. What was true for Mangaldoi became true for whole of Assam. How could the people of Assam let their fate be determined by lakhs of foreigners in the electoral rolls?" The Chief Election Commissioners verdict arouses questions among the Assamese people about the growing numbers of migrants. After a sincere scrutiny by the Election Commission of the
presence of foreigners in a single constituency, the people feared about what would happen to other constituencies? At least 320000 complaints swept the local electoral office during April, 1979 (De 2005: 75-78).

However, denying the role of political parties of using migrants as their vote bank, Promod Gogoi, on the issue of ‘inclusion of names of foreigners in the voter list’, in the Assembly commented, "It is alleged by the Chief Minister of Assam - Golap Borbora that some political parties were involved in inclusion of names of foreigners in the voter list for the purpose of vote bank which led to the inclusion of names of foreigners in Mangaldoi constituency. I feel that no political party is interested in inclusion of names. It is also viewed by many political parties that Bangladeshis whosoever came to Assam after 1971, 25 March, their name should not appear in the voter list. But while deporting the foreigners, the Indians should not be harassed. Some of the names included in the voter list of last three elections got deleted this time. In Mangaldoi, 40000 people were given notice – and these lists are prepared by the police force. Now I heard that 5000 police personnel are sent to Barpeta to check the voter list and this kind of incidence are happening across the state" (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1979, 4 September, Vol. IV, No.2: 53-54).

Condemning such acts of harassment of genuine Indian citizens and deletion of their names, Ahmed Hussain in a statement made in the Parliament of India, regarding the issue of ‘Reported removal of names from Voter List in Mangaldoi Constituency in Assam’ viewed, "I strongly condemn the harassment of genuine Indian citizen and deleting their names from the electoral rolls by the police, is an illegal act. June 4, 1979 was fixed as last date for submitting application for correction of voter lists in Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency. Information revealed that the Home department has asked for 50000 objection forms. The election department could not supply the full quantity and only 10000 forms could be supplied. Another 40000 forms were printed locally at Mangaldoi for the police at the instance of the state government. The forms were taken in bulk in hundreds and thousands to a police station or to inspection bungalows. The village head, secretaries of VDPs or such other persons were called there. They were asked to
sign the blank forms. In some cases who, the person concern objected to sign, they were either allured or threatened to sign such blank forms which were subsequently filled up by the police and submitted to the election office” (Parliament of India Debate 1979, Lok Sabha, July 27: 298-300).

The AASU accused the CEC of negligence to delete the names of migrant’s from the voter list spread anger among the people. Contrary to his (S. L. Shakdher, CEC) all previous statement, the CEC directed the authorities to stop deletion of foreigners names and viewed, “A person whose name has been included shall be a presumed to be a citizen of India....the process of establishing citizenship is time consuming ...scrutiny of electoral rolls can be taken after the election is over” (AASU Memorandum 1980). The statement of the CEC acknowledged the inclusion of names of migrants. Again in a report of the North East Regional Students Union (NERSU) estimation indicated the presence of 4.5 to 5 million during 1971, constituting 31 to 34 percent of the total population. The AASU leaders placed the numbers of such migrants at four million and said that they would swamp the predominantly Hindu-Assamese culture and disrupt the fabric of society. These two views about the presence of large scale migrants sanctify the AASU cause for launching an agitation (Hazarika 1993: 49-51). When appeals and request to the state and the central government failed to evoke any response, the leaders of AASU and AAGSP decided to take it to the streets (Swain 1996a: 198).

The main demands of the AASU and AAGSP were mainly to detect, disenfranchise and deportation of the migrants on the basis of 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC). The AASU’s slogan was “a foreigner is a foreigner; a foreigner shall not be judged by the language he speaks or by the religion he believes in” (AASU Memorandum 1980). The AASU forwarded five principle demands. Firstly, foreign nationals must be detected and deported. Secondly, voter list must be totally free from the foreigners name before holding any election in Assam. Thirdly, a ‘no man’s land’ should be created all along the Indo-Bangladesh border to stop infiltration effectively. Fourthly, identity cards must be issued to every eligible Indian voter in Assam and fifthly, Assam government should be free to reject any doubtful citizenship certificates issued by the Governments of West Bengal and Tripura (AASU Memorandum 1980).
Widespread protests were organized in support of their demand. The demands were justified by arguing that Assam shouldn’t be a burden of migrants and the foreigners, who do not substantively qualify for citizenship in terms of the constitution has to be deported. It was accepted by a large number of political parties and was reiterated again and again by all major Indian Political Parties during 1979. Following the acceptance by the parties and pressure groups, an echo of protest for deporting migrants turned into a massive movement (Baruah 1999: 115-143).

4. IV.i Phases of the Movement

The AASU leaders observed the first state wide strike to protest on the foreigners issue and called for 12 hours Bandh on June 8, 1979, remained peaceful and managed to get good response across the state. Two months later, this was followed by the AASU-AAGSP call for mass squatting throughout Assam in front of major administrative offices like, Deputy Commissioner, Sub-Divisions, Sub-Deputy Collectors and Block Development Offices for two days on September 6 and 7, 1979, manages to get warm response from the people. The agitation paralysed the administration and other establishments like Banks, railways etc. In some places the protesters clashed with police. At the ONGC headquarters – Nazira (Sivasagar district), protesters clashed with the employees, most of them Non-Assamese and the cases of intimidation were reported. The ONGC throughout the country went on strike demanding security to its personnel working in Assam (PRANTIK Report 1984: 18-23 & Deka 2004: 212).

Again, the leaders asked for a mass rally at Guwahati on October 6, 1979 and about 0.1 million people participated. The AASU and its allied organizations announced a drive out foreigner campaign on October 9. Around that time clashes broke out between Assamese and Bengali speaking people in the upper Assam, particularly in Tinsukia, Naharkotiya, Doomdooma area. Many of the Bengali speaking people fled to West Bengal and the then Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu objected and took up the issue with the Union Government to stop influx of Bengalis from Assam and the leaders condemned the move. The AASU and AAGSP leaders again announced a week long Programme of offering Satyagraha,
courting arrest in front of the Deputy Commissioners, sub-divisional officers etc. from 12 to 18 November 1979 (Deuri & Pator 1984: 29-30).

During the last three days this Programme, massive participation of people including students, government employees occurred clearly defying the government orders. Mass arrest occurred, the administration and police have to make temporary jails that too failed to accommodate the Satyagrahis, clearly demonstrate the support the movement build up. The AASU sufficiently strengthened the organizational network through the state during the same time and the response was so overwhelming that the people voluntarily opened up branches of AASU&AAGSP to demonstrate their support, that strengthen the movement and mobilisation all way become easier (Hussein 1993: 108-112).

The then Chief Minister of Assam, Jogen Hazarika, insisted on holding Lok Sabha Election in 1980 on the instructions of the CEC. The AASU opposed the move and determined to stop holding the election unless and until the names of the foreigners are removed. Accordingly they mobilised through press and protest were intensifies when the Election Commission determined to hold election. Earlier, as a result of non-cooperation of enumerators, refusal to print the draft rolls by the press owners in Assam, continuous abnormal situations for months together, forced the election commission to go ahead without substantial revision in 1980 which the movement leaders didn’t accepted. The government imposes president rule from June 30, 1981 to January 13, 1982, reimposed again on March 19, 1982 to February 27 1983 (Hussein 1993: 109-113).

4. IV.ii__Strategies of the Movement

The AASU and AAGSP opted several tactics and agenda’s to put pressure on the administration for not listening to their demands. Their demand for detecting, deleting and deporting illegal migrants from Assam was a must and adamant on their agenda not to allow holding election without revising the voter list (Borbora 2001: 99-101). A series of strikes, demonstration, blockades, civil disobedience leads to the boycott of elections. The AASU in collaboration with the local Assamese press successfully managed to mobilize people against the government decision to held election in 1980 (Hazarika 1996: 7-8). The AASU-AAGSP appealed the political parties and the candidates not to file
nominations and accordingly they organised dharnas to prevent filing nominations. The AASU and other allied parties even organized house arrest activities over the candidate and threaten social ostracism and resorted to very techniques to ensure that the intending candidates were vetoed from filling nomination papers. No nominations papers were filed except in the Cachar district. The atmosphere of the state capital, Guwahati was that of the situation like ‘wait and watch’ and hope for the best (Chhabra 1992: 79).

However, Begum Abida Ali, the wife of the former president of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, decided to file her nomination despite AASU’s repeated warning. The AASU leaders were determined to stop her for filing nominations and they followed a tactic of keeping day-night vigil in Barpeta. However; she managed to file her nominations through elaborate plans of the state administration. But during this programme, one AASU member, Khargeswar Talukdar was killed, igniting more violence in the district. During that period, violence caused lives of innocent people, Anjan Chakravarti, a Bengali speaking doctor was murdered on December 12, 1979. The leaders condemned the act and viewed that such violence would hurt the image of the agitation and pledge its members and other not indulge in such activities (Chhabra 1992: 80-81 & Baruah 1999: 126-127)

Moreover, P. C. Sethi, the then Home Minister of India in a discussion regarding the tactics of the agitators on the issue of ‘Assam’ commented, “Immediately after the announcement of elections by the Election Commission in January 1983, a prolonged, intensified and a militant programme of agitation was launched by the AASU and AAGSP. All kinds of intimidatory tactics were adopted and a climate of terror was sought to be created by resorting to violence. The candidate along with their supporters, family members, party office and party workers became the target of attack. One candidate, Satya Narayan Ram for the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA) and in another incident, the proposer of a candidate was brutally killed; some family members of the candidates were abducted” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 347).
Further, in a discussion on the 'situation of Assam', the Home Minister of India, P. C. Sethi commented, "In the initial period of anti-election violent activities in the month of January 1983, the agitators had mainly concentrated on the coercion of prospective candidates in the form of Gherao, kidnapping, assault, arson and disruption of communication links; roads, bridges and sabotage of railway tracks. However, their failing to prevent the filling of nominations by large number of candidates made them desperate and by February 1983 there were both quantitative and qualitative changes in their violent activities" (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 14: 429).

In a statement ‘Assam’ Minister of Home Affairs P. C. Sethi comments, “The Assam agitation was started by AASU/AAGSP for ostensible purpose of removing foreigners from Assam but in reality removing all outsiders – citizens or foreigners. I am aware that loud protestation is made by the supporters, but what could have been the intentions in issuing documented instructions which *inter alia* directed its volunteer forces: -

a. In rural areas shops owned by the non-Assamese persons should be boycotted and cooperative shops should be opened instead.

b. Number of Assamese employees and non-Assamese employees in all central and state government offices, factories, industries and business establishments in respective areas will be found out. One copy of each of this assessment will be sent to central office of AASU. Besides, data about sources of business transaction, Head of office, daily income etc. of such business establishment.

c. The local volunteer forces will take steps to ensure that the foreigners/non-Assamese/anti-Assamese employees are removed and in their place local Assamese are appointed in such firms.

All kinds of intimidatory tactics were adopted against those who did not support the agitation. Officials/MLAs and their families were subjected to threats of physical violence and also social ostracisation” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 14: 425-426).
During the agitation, people who supported were hassle free but those who opposed or criticized the movement were targeted, either killed or assaulted by the agitationist. The employees of the state government also supported the agitation wholeheartedly and even police and bureaucrats sided with the movement. The workers of Congress and left parties who ideologically opposed the movement were the main target. The local Assamese newspapers also wrote the news in favour of the agitation and condemned highly the arrest of the leaders. In a discussion regarding the Assam Movement, Durgeswar Patir try to take attention of the members in the ALA on a news published in The Assam Tribune, September 5, 1983 – ‘Arrest of Agitation Leaders Condemned’, he commented, “If the police atrocities continues on the leaders of the movement or the people involved in the agitation, the leaders would target the people including the government employees, political leaders etc. who stand against the agitations and the news justified the act of the agitators. On September 1, 1983 the agitators killed Lakhi Das and Satish Burhagohain in Nagaon district. On 17 September two youth Congress leader was brutally murdered. Similarly, at Dhakuakhana police station one more person was brutally assaulted and another was injured in an incident of stone pelting. But the Dhakuakhana police have not yet taken any action against the perpetrators. The agitating leaders targeted those people who are against the movement – the government employees, who opposed, were prevented in going office or were threatened for life” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 42-43).

Giving another instance of attack on Congress party worker, Abdul Mutadir Choudhary in the ALA commented, “A question of law and order and security of life, a news item published in The Sentinel, dated 13-11-84 under the caption ‘Day light Murder of Retired Headmaster’ on 10/11/84, a written FIR was lodged at Patacharkuchi Police Station by complainant Binoy Ranjan Kalita to the effect that on the same day at 1030 am his father Manoranjan Kalita, retired headmaster of village Dakshin Bang, under the same police station while returning from Pathsala Bazzar was attacked and killed on the No-Ali road leading to Bang village from the National Highway. The deceased Manoranjan Kalita was an active member of Congress (I) and he was opposed to the present agitation launched by the AASU/AAGSP on foreign national issue. There is ample evidence to
suggest that the agitationist elements bore a grudge against him” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1984, 3 December, Vol. IV, No.4: 123-126).

Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister of Assam in a discussion regarding the Assam Movement viewed, “Some of the agitating leaders and members were arrested under the National Security Act (NSA). Several leaders and members supporting the movement were arrested in various place; Palashbari, Jalukbari, Gauhati University, Doomduma, Digboi. At Digboi College agitating members assaulted a lecturer who was opposing the Assam Movement. However, the newspapers are writing in favour of the agitators. The true stories are not published in the newspapers – in fact when people involved in such activities of torture or violence that news published as police atrocities (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 43-45).

Lekhon Lahon in a discussion regarding ‘Assam Agitation’ commented, “In Lakhimpur 5 cases of brutal murder were reported. Two youth congress activists were killed on 18 September 1983. On 14 at Chilonibari area two people belonging to the minority community while going for fishing were killed brutally. Those people who were involved in this act also prevented a large number of government employees going to their office. There was Assam Bandh on 29&30 August, 1983, those people who didn’t support – they were targeted. The perpetrators of all these incidents are the AASU and AAGSP members” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 47-48).

Somnath Chatterjee in a discussion ‘Situation in Assam’ also mentions some incidence of attack on the supporters on the left party members, commented, “Our party members were murdered by the agitators. In Kamrup district, Birinchi Patowary and Niranjan Talukdar an important leader and a worker of the SFI were murdered 8 and 11 February, 1983. Samir Pal, a DYFI leader was killed on 20 February while returning from the poll duty. Fatik Kalita, ex-circle secretary, All India Postal Union Class-III leader was killed on 1 February for opposing the burning of bridges and the houses of opponents of the boycott. Chandra Kanta Das, a railway worker was attacked while returning to his place of work after polling in the Dibrugarh district, while Kusheswar Bora, an SFI worker,
was found dead 25 February. In Lakhimpur, Bolan Barua, 26 years of age, was killed on 13 February, with 25 year old Rajen Gohain being killed on 14 February. I can give numerous example of how the young workers who were helping the process of election, who were fighting resolutely against the movement - which is against the unity and integrity of the country were put to death” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 389-390). A left party member in the ALA, Mathura Deka, in his speech revealed, “The left parties who supported the election were the target of the agitationist. The agitationist targeted the party workers and their leaders and the police instead giving security to the victim sided with the agitation leaders and in some cases they attacked the people who were not sided with the agitation” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 109-112).

Apart from that the agitationist followed a crucial method that is the blocking and stoppage of pumping of crude oil outside Assam affected the functioning of the Barauni refinery in Bihar which was set up exclusively to process crude from Assam. The blockade raised important questions on the national security. How could such a major step be organized without mobilizing support in advance and alerting the authorities about the design behind it? Could this have been anticipated after the imposition of a blockade on the movement of plywood and jute? Due to the prolonged spells of bandhs and picketing, traffic on the national highways frequently disrupted. This had severe adverse impact on the economies of the Northeastern states and union territories of India. The interdependence nature of the state in India, and the blockade imposed by AASU disrupted the supplies of food and other essential materials to the other states. There was counter blockade from the neighbouring state West Bengal, the government of West Bengal imposed blockade in trains going to Assam. But this was handled by the administration properly (Das 1982: 84).

4. IV.iii Support of the Movement

Apart from above mentioned strategy used by the AASU and their allied organization. The leaders managed to get support of the masses and also the freedom fighters participated and sided with the agitationist. All the Assamese speaking police and top
level bureaucrats and NRI's supported the agitationist and sided with them. In a query by H. N. Nanje Gowda on the issue of 'Assam agitation' about the announcement of 20 day strike state-wide from March 12, 1982 and also about the involvement of the freedom fighters, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, “the freedom fighters in batches of 4 to 9 restored to 12 hours, day time hunger strike before the offices of deputy commissioners, sub-divisional officers and sub-deputy Collectors on March 12 and 13, 1983, at various places in the Brahmaputra valley” (Parliament of India Debate 1982, Lok Sabha, March 31: 19-20).

While discussing the 'Situation in Assam' about the support of the bureaucrats and police in the Assam agitation, Somnath Chatterjee commented, “The police, bureaucrats and the administration in Assam are acting as adjuncts of the agitationist. We also had reports that even those who were brought before criminal courts on specific charges were being given bail, as though they were brought there on ordinary charges. We have seen this attitude of the magistrates and complaints to this effect” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 391). Benoy Kumar Basunotary in a discussion in the ALA about Police inaction commented, “Our honourable Chief Minister is aware of that our party (PTCA) participated in the last general election, the agitationist branded them as dacoits, and during the lasts holidays on account of Viswakarma Puja some tribal girls were sought to be kidnapped for immoral purposes. To protect them against such act, Rabha, Bodo and Kachari boys of Tangla tried to contain the tribal girls from witnessing cinema shows and the Pujas at night; but one Abul Laige S.I of Tangla police out post had arrested our boys and severely beaten them up – I have got medical reports with me. This officer is trying to create communal tension between the Muslims and the tribal around Tangla” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 46).

The then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, further on Police inaction in the ALA commented, “There are lot many incidents of police inaction. In Lakhimpur, Dulumoni Phukan and Pushpendra Phukan were killed and policeman who came to inform the family members of the deceased said, ‘Moja Paiso Atia’ (Learnt the Lesson) -
the policeman got suspended and was arrested” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 45). Again, in a query of Joy Nath Sharma regarding the misuse of powers by the police personnel during the Assam agitation, the Home Minister of Assam, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan replied, “These kinds of allegations are there and at least 55 cases have been registered in various police stations and there may be some more cases pending in the court. But no cases has been proved so far” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, 1986, 2 April, Vol. II, No.15: 44).

Apart from that the agitationist also managed to get support from the Non resident Assamese Indian citizen. Many of the Assamese people staying in US also protested in support of the movement. In a letter by D. K. Dutta to PRANTIK reported that 80-100 Assamese NRI took a rally in Washington and met the Indian Ambassador and asked to take adequate steps to stop police atrocities and viewed that Assamese people to protect their rights against illegal migrants is a democratic right and steps must be taken in favour of the people to render peace in the state. Even the people gathered there contributed $ 4000 in support of the movement. The people also reacted strongly against a published interview of Indian Ambassador K. R. Narayan in The New York Times, 22 February, 1983, “Immediately after partition, a lot of refugees entered in every state of India, West Bengal received a lot of refugees from East Pakistan. Similarly Punjab also received millions of refugees from Pakistan. Even southern states also received a lot but it becomes a problem on Assam only, only these emotions are deliberately burnt in Assam” (Dutta 1983: 29-30).

4. IV.iv Orientation of the Movement

The movement started and directed against the foreign nationals living in Assam including the Bangladeshis and Nepalis. However, the movement leaders also tried to sharply raise the question of ‘Bohiragotos’ or the outsiders in Assam. At the initial stage the movement tried to build up opinions for expulsion and restricted entry of Bohiragotos. As the concept of Bohiragotos includes all outsiders including the Indian citizens living in Assam, it became difficult for them to realise that sending back or restricting the entry of outsiders Indians would not be possible within the present constitutional framework.
Therefore the leadership gave up the Bohiragoto issue and took up foreign nationals to mobilise the people (Hussein 1993: 263-64). The Assam Movement launched by the AASU and its allied groups continued for more than six years (1979-1985). The movement started peacefully and it was secular in approach, not directed against the minority communities but always run a risk of turning communal because of the religious slant given to it as most of the migrants were Muslims. Initially, the anti-foreigner movement started by the AASU and AAGSP was peaceful but later it turned out to be violent when the administration neglected to some of their particular demands. The leaders applied peaceful methods of agitation to large extent for fulfilling their grievances and the agitation was organised more or less with the help of local press, organized intimidation and jingoist wall writings. The movement turned into a mass hysteria after September 1979 and a well organized anti-Bengali riots took place across the state taking thousands of lives (Guha 1980: 1705-1707).

4. IV.v Scale of Violence

According to official estimates, no less than 4,000 men - women and children-mostly of the religious and linguistic minority communities were killed as a result of the organised armed attacks and arson triggered by the agitation. More than 0.3 million people of both majority and minority communities were turned homeless and had to be given temporary shelter in government relief camps (Dasgupta & Guha 1985: 843-844). There are two stages of violence – first, occurred during the period 1979-1983 and second the post February 1983, election related and till the signed of Assam Accord. The post February 1983 violence occurred mainly due to the decision of the government to held election without revising the voter list. In a discussion on the issue “Assam”, Bheravadan K. Gadhavi commented, “What is happening in Assam is not a post-election declaration issue (1983), the violence started much before. Altogether 150 lives of not only the people who are opposed to either the foreigners issue or this issue of election, but of our top technocrats, our top officers, have been lost. They were blown up in their offices with bombs, 150 lives were lost even prior to the declaration of elections when nobody was thinking whether we are going for polls or not” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 463-464).
During the first phase the level of violence was low and peaceful agitation methods were applied but a number of cases of violence was reported during this period. The then Home Minister, P. C. Sethi in a statement on ‘Assam’ issue comments, “Frequent claims have been made about the ‘non-violent’ nature of the agitation right from 1979 till December 1982, just prior to the calling of elections 272 murders, 1404 assaults, 425 cases of arson, 346 cases of intimidation, 228 cases of mischief and 147 cases of kidnapping, wrongful confinement and restraint besides 330 cases of explosion and 146 cases of recovery of explosives like bombs, grenades etc. can be attributed to this agitation” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 14: 425-426).

In a query of Chitta Basu regarding the issue of ‘Students Agitation in Assam’, about the violence triggered by agitation the then Minister in Charge of State in Home Affairs P Venkatasubbaiah replied, “Between August and December, 1976, 26 persons lost their lives; there were about 120 incidents of arson and about 327 cases of assault. In January 1980, 41 persons lost their lives and over 3200 houses set ablaze rendering over 15000 people homeless in the Kamrup district. In Cachar district, 6 persons lost their lives in communal clashes. On January 18, 1980, 5 persons including a senior technology officer of Oil India was killed at Duliajan” (Parliament of India Debate 1980, Lok Sabha January 30: 76). Again, in a query of Samar Mukherjee about the casualties in Assam during October 1, 1979-January 20 1980, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, P Venkatasubbaiah replied, “201 incidents of violence and arson have taken place in Assam and 69 persons have lost their lives during that period and over 15000 people rendered homeless in the Kamrup district” (Parliament of India Debate 1980, Lok Sabha, January 30: 26).

Meanwhile P. C. Sethi, in the parliament categorically makes references to some important instances of violence occurred during the agitation. He views, “Human memory is short but let me remind the Honourable members of some important incidents in which physical violence were executed by the agitationist: 

284
1. In April 1980, an attempt was made on the life of Hiteswar Saikia, the then MLA by throwing a hand grenade on his car.
2. A senior technical officer of Oil India was beaten to death in January, 1980.
3. The Commissioner, Upper Assam division was killed in April, 1981, by explosive devices planted on his chair.
4. Explosive devices were planted in the house of T. M. Baruah, MLA at Guwahati in which his brother and wife were injured and maid servant killed.
5. In June, 1982, a Joint Director, Sericulture was fatally assaulted on the eve of 'Janata Curfew' called by agitators.
6. In January, 1980, 70 people lost their life in a communal flare up on north bank of Kamrup district, and Nalbari which also rendered 2400 families homeless.
7. In May, 1980, 22 persons had lost their lives when AASU had vehemently opposed a 'demand day' demonstration of submitting memorandum to district authorities by All Assam Minorities Students Union (AAMSU).
8. Terror tactics were resorted to in March-April 1981 when explosive devices were planted on railway tracts resulting in derailment of some goods trains and 3 UP Assam Mail resulting in death of one person and injuries to 12 other.
9. On June 9, 1982, there was a series of explosions in Fatasil Ambari market in Guwahati resulting in death of 20 persons and injuries to 24 others.
10. A similar explosion occurred in Nagaon on August 4, 1982, resulting in death of six persons and injuries to 18 others.

However, the AASU and AAGSP have denied their association with such activities” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 14: 426-427).

During the second phase, the immediate cause of provocation for violence was the government decision to hold election in February 1983 without revising the voter list. After 1979, the Election Commission has not updated the voter list and according to the law an updated voter list is must before holding election otherwise election can not be held (Das 1985: 8-10). Even stressing on updating the voter list, Indrajit Gupta, in a discussion on the issue ‘Assam’ commented, "The central government should have anticipated much earlier that if the talks do not reach settlement then either the
constitutional amendment has to be done – for which some parties were willing to support – or they had to go in for election. If they have kept both the options open in their mind then as far administrative arrangements for election are concerned it should have begun much earlier. Why could they not revise electoral rolls earlier? They declared holding of election in January and then there was not time to do anything after that. Then, of course, I am glad everybody has corroborated that this large scale violence which is in the form of communal clashes in which a huge number of people are involved did not begin upto 13 January. It was only two days before the election date that this feature appeared on the scene” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 478).

The then CEC, K. Ganeshan revealed that the list couldn’t be updated due to prolonged disturbances, lawlessness and frequent flood prevailed in Assam since 1979 and decided to held the election on the basis of 1979 voter list. It is already mentioned that the agitationist leaders objected the inclusion of names of foreigners in many of the LAC’s, that too in lakhs. So the assumption was that during 1979-83, a large number of foreigners/migrants must have managed to enrol their names in the voter list. It does indicates those foreigners who do not have voting rights will vote in the election and will work as vote bank for a large number of candidates (Bezbarua 1983: 12-14).

Arun Shourie viewed that election was more important for the government rather than defending the lives of the people and for that reason thousands of people were killed. When the local people were unwilling to cooperate in conducting polls the election commission hired 8000 personnel from outside the state (Shourie 1983: 7-8). Despite repeated intelligence warning of possible violence in 1983 election made no sense in changing the decision of holding election in 1983. Some of the intelligence report published in Arun Shourie’s article can be mentioned. The Dibrugarh district Superintendent of Police in a report (July 3, 1983) to the Special Branch, Inspector General writes, “After a solution to the foreigner’s problem with mutual understanding in Assam, holding election would not be a problem, otherwise it would be a difficult task. The agitationist would definitely prevent this process and may be successful in creating lawlessness situation. Election without support of the people is a myth. So, I suggest not
to hold election unless there is a mutual solution to the foreigner’s problem” (Memo. No. DSBXIV/1/82/129 Dibrugarh, 3 July 1982) (Shourie 1983a: 14).

On 20 November, 1982 the special branch gave a report to CEC Subramanium mentioning the chances of possible violence in various constituencies in Assam. They even suggested for specific strategies; deployment of army - high alert, banning the All Assam Employees Association and security to government employees etc. It was also reported that in 78 LAC 30-60% vote will be caste. In others there are chances of violence and the voting will be around 1-30%. Showing that despite such chances of violence, election can be held ((No.SBXI(A)/SPC/20/82/Pt.IV/94) (Shourie 1983: 15).

Some other reports of the intelligence and high officials of administration suggested not to hold election. Some intelligence report quoted, “it is repeated already that the election is possible only in 79 seats out of 126 seats and in other constituencies there are chances of large scale violence. The same condition still persists. Even after such resistance and violence with proper planning and preparation election can be held” however, the government ignores the report” (PRANTIK Report 1983c: 7-8). According to Intelligence Bureau report of June 7, 1983, 19172 cases of violence were reported and the causes of such violence as cited by the report are as such:

2. It spread anger among the people and felt insulted and depressed by not listening to their demand.
3. This decision of the CEC and government to hold that’s too without cooperation from local Assamese people paralysed the administration - even local police official decided not to cooperate with the administration. Tactically the administration removed them from their position.
4. The decision of the Election Commission and government to hire 8000 personnel from outside the state to hold election spread tremendous anxiety among the people (Shourie 1983: 16).
In a discussion on the issue of ‘Situation in Assam’, P. C. Sethi, Home Minister commented, “The prolonged agitation has generated an atmosphere of bitterness and distrust and disturbed harmony amongst different sections. It is unfortunate that ethnic and communal passions have been unleashed in the wake of the controversies which were triggered off since the agitation. One immediate provocation for this holocaust is reported to be the resentment of some sections of the people against those who wish to exercise their democratic right of franchise. It is well known that certain elements have opposed the holding of elections and resorted to all means to disturb the process. I deeply regret that large number of lives have been lost though all of them not directly connected with the elections” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 345-346).

The decision to hold the 1983 February election was an unmitigated disaster. The conflict between the migrants and the local inhabitants became intense and ethnic-sectarian tensions added to the bitterness of tribal groups over land-grabs by the migrants, and the scent of violence in the Assamese resistance movement created an explosive brew and violence spread across various parts of Assam. The incidence of violence occurred especially in eight district of Assam (Lok Sabha Debate, March 30, 1983: 415-416). When asked about the ‘Places in Assam Declared Disturbed’ by Amar Roypradhan, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihár Ranjan Laskar replied, “The government of Assam have declared the following areas as disturbed: - Nagaon district police station: Dhing, Hajoj, Jagiroad, Jamupamukh, Kaliabor, Kimpur – Lahorighat, Lanka, Lumding, Mikirhata, Morigaon, Mursjjar, Nowgaon, Raha, Rupohihat and Samaguri. In the Darrang district Police Stations: Behali, Dalgaon, Dhekiajuli, Gohpur, Kalaigaon, Mangaldoi, Mazbat, Paneri, Rangapara, Sootea, Tezpur and Udalguri. In the Lakhimpur district police stations: Bihpuria, Dhakuakhana, Dhemaji, Jonai and North Lakhimpur. In the Kamrup district police stations: Carpeta, Bharalumukh, Chamaria, Chaygaon, Jalukbari, Hajo, Kamalpur, Khetri, Nalbari, Noonmati, Paltan Bazzar, Pan Bazzar, Patakarkuchi, Rangiya, Sarbhog and Tamulpur. In the Goalpara district police stations: - Abhayapuri, Bijni, Bongaigaon and Lakhipur. In the Sivasagar district police stations: - Amuri, Borhat, Borholla, Borpathar, Demow, Jorhat, Majuli, Mariani, Moranhat, Nazira,, Sarupathar, Sonari, Teok and Titabor. In the Dibrugarh district police

The gruesome killing of migrants took place in Nellie, Gohpur, Goreswar, Khoirabari, Silapathar, Chamaria, Chaulkhoa Chapori and Dhula are too well known and thousands of migrants were massacred. The Nellie incident occurred on February 18, 1983; according to the report of the Special Branch, IGP, Sameer Das to the Chief Minister, 1383 people were killed (Shourie 1983a: 16-17 & Deuri and Pator 1984: 29-30). The Nellie massacre is worst organised killing ever occurred since the Independence. The massacre took place in 14 villages—Alisingha, Khulapathar, Basundhari, Bugduba Beel, Bugduba Habi, Borjola, Butuni, Indurmari, Mati Parbat, Muladhari, Mati Parbat no. 8, Silbheta, Borburi and Nellie—of Nagaon district. Around 12000 villagers, belonging to the Lalung tribe gathered and butchered, they came from a number of villages even with a distance of 18-20 k.m. (Shourie 1983: 17-18).

Hazarkia estimated the number of people killed is around 1700 men, women and children – all of them were migrants belonging to the minority group (Hazari 1993: 50-51). The reasons for the massacre were rooted in land alienation-the settlers had bought and taken over land of the native Lalung/Tiwa community in an area where selling of land to a non-tribal was illegal. Bitterness there and elsewhere continue to simmer (Hazari 2001b: 191-207). During 7 January – 21 February, 1983, police fired on 202 incidents where 126 people were killed and 162 were injured (Shourie 1983a: 18). A discussion published in the PRANTIK reports that the February, 1983 violence, “80% of the total people killed belongs to the migrant community. But at present, since March beginning, 1983, the number of attack on the Assamese speaking people are on rise, especially in Nagaon, Darrang and Kamrup district. These numbers of such incidents are increasing and administration surprisingly not taking adequate steps to control such violence. The police even not ready to take action even after getting adequate information” (PRANTIK Report 1983c: 7-8).
The Nellie massacre was followed by another massacre at Chaulkhowa Chaporí in the Darrang district where the victims were Bangladeshi descendents. The Assamese Hindus and Muslims together attacked the Bengali Muslims (Shourie 1983b: 9-10). Benoy Kumar Basumotary in a discussion in the ALA viewed, “In Mangaldoi sub-division, it is estimated that 500 people were murdered in Chowlkhoa Chaporí. This could happen because the district authority was not rendered any help by the junior officers, the EAC’s or the 1st class magistrate who were located at Mangaldoi in SDO’s office and they sided with the agitator” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 98-99).

At Gohpur (Sonitpur district) and Darrang district several people died and many were displaced in the attacks and counter attacks. Here the victims were the Bodos and Assamese. During 12-14 February, 1983, violence occurred with Bodo and Kachari vs. Assamese people at Gohpur. Around 43 Assamese 30 Bodo-Kachari villages were burnt. An estimated 30 people were killed in which 19 were Assamese, 5 Kacharis, 1 Nepali and 5 people were couldn’t be identified. An estimated 30 and 19 people belonging to Bodo and Assamese community went missing. Three people were also killed in police firing incident (Shourie 1983b: 12-13).

In a discussion on the issue “Assam”, Samar Mukherjee commented, “If the agitators and their friends insist on this type of agitation going on, there is every danger that Assam may be divided into various autonomous states. Already the Udayachal demand is there where the clashes have taken place. At Gohpur village, the conflict between the Bodos vs. Assamese occurred as the Bodo tribal wanted Udayachal and the Assamese people have bitterly opposed and behind that there is the question of land problem” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, February 21: 386). For a long time Bodo and Assamese people were fighting over land occupied by the Bodos and landless tribal people belonging to Mangaldoi, Kamrup and Kokrajhar area. The PTCA was helping them to grab land in these areas. However, the forest department tried to evacuate them from there time to time. The politics also influenced for aggressiveness with government support PTCA has been demanding for Udayachal – a separate state for the Bodos and demanding land for the Bodo people to have permanent homeland for them so that other
linguistic group does not come under Udayachal. Imposing election was the issue while Bodos were in support of voting – the Assamese refrained for voting and prevented Bodo's to support the election finally leading to clashes (Shourie 1983b: 13-14 & Das 1983: 15-16).

In Kamrup district violence broke out in Boko and Saigaon area during 10-13 February, 1983 migrants reportedly attacked the Assamese people and their villages, set ablaze their houses, vandalizing, killing etc. In Chamaria, attack took place in more than 20 villages, 300 houses were burnt (Khakhrali 1983: 19-20). Violence also occurred at Silapathar in the Lakhimpur district and the victims were the Bengali Hindus, ex refugees/displaced persons from East Pakistan. Similar kind of violence were also reported from Barpeta road and Howli in Barpeta district, Nagarbera and Goreswar in Kamrup district, Gosaigaon in the Kokrajhar, Salma in the Dhubri, Owguri, Thilamara, Rupahi, Dhing, Tinsukia, etc. A large number of people belonging to the Hindu and Muslim Bengali descent (migrants) were killed and displaced (Hussein 2000: 4519-23).

P. C. Sethi, in a discussion on the ‘Situation in Assam’ comments, “According to the information available on the night of March 1-2, 1983, a mob of about 1000 people in Hathikuli area of Teok police station in the Sivasagar district set ablaze about 30 houses and killed 24 fisherman and injured 32 others including women and children. The Superintendent of Police including some high officials on the receipt of information rushed to the spot but while returning they were attacked by a mob of 500 people with lethal weapons near Dumia village. Two persons were killed when police resorted to firing and also arrested 13 miscreants. In another incident of mob attack, one Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police was killed at Madhavapura police outpost under the Kamrup police station in Nagaon district on March 2, 1983. Police opened fire where three persons were killed. The same mob went to another village nearby and set ablaze some houses” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 3: 314-315).

The number of people killed in Assam agitation during 1983 varies. Some of the estimation can be cited through analyzing the ALA and Lok Sabha debate. For instance, Hiteswar Saikia in a discussion regarding the Assam Movement viewed, “During 1982-
83, more than 3 thousand people were killed; police registered more than 16000 cases in charges of murder, setting ablaze houses, theft, dacoity, vandalizing etc." (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate 1983, 21 September, Vol. III, No.2: 43-45). During the 1983 there have been 1344 deaths, 611 assaults, 564 arsons, 11 cases of mischief, 12 intimidation and 5 cases of kidnapping through wrongful confinement in January and February reported. Besides this, there have been 111 cases of explosions, 73 cases of recovery of explosives. And even now the state government is registering the names of certain persons who are found missing. The number is round about 1500” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 14: 429).

In a query of Chitta Basu and Krishan Pratap Singh, and also by Pramila Dandavate on the issue of ‘losses in Assam during riots’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, “According to the state government, 1637 people lost their lives during the disturbances in Assam since January 1983 till 21.3.83. There was also extensive damage to public and private property. There are about 40000 houses will require to be reconstructed/repaired and 1598 road bridges have been destroyed” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 23: 112 & April 6: 189). In another question of Sudhir Kumar Giri, the Minister-in-Charge of Home Affairs Shri Nihar Ranjan Lascar replied, “According to the information furnished by the state of Assam government, 1774 persons lost their lives due to the violence and 207 persons died in police firing. The government had sanctioned Rs. 5000/- as ex-gratia grant to each of the bereaved families for every person killed” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 27: 264).

Some groups were directly threatened by the demands of the Assam Movement started opposing the movement accusing the demands as invalid. In May 1980, the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) attempted to include both Hindus and Muslim of Bengali descent, appeared on the scene to rival AASU. The group didn’t dispute over the issue of Bangladeshi migration but started demanding for providing citizenship to all the pre-1971 migrants and the harassment meted out to the minorities should be stopped. The AASU opposed the demand and a clash of interest further seen. For e.g. in certain strongholds of the migrant communities, strike called by the AAMSU opposed by the
AASU led to the clashes between the supporters of these two organization. Finally the ground for communal feelings spread further with the indigenous Assamese people (Baruah 1986).

4. IV.vi Mode of Conflict

The violence that occurred during the Assam Movement can be termed sometime as ethnic and communal. The government termed it as communal and accused the Hindu communal forces like the RSS, responsible for spreading communal hatred and violence against Muslims. However, after studying the violence and group involved in it shows that it’s not communal rather it’s an ethnic violence. Shourie views the conflict in Assam as ethnic rather than communal. For instances, Shourie views that the Nellie massacre is perpetrated by the Lalung community; even intelligence agencies didn’t report the involvement of the RSS in it. The massacre in Nellie occurred as a reaction of the kidnapping of 6 child and 4 women belonging to the Lalung community by the migrants. To take revenge and rescue theses kids and women, Lalung community gathered and attacked the villagers. In Kokrajhar the violence occurred between the Bodo-Kachari vs. Hindu and Muslim Bengali speaking people. At Goreswar and Khoirabari, violence occurred between the Sarania, Bodo-Kachari vs. Bengali Hindu. In Dhemaji and Jonai violence occurred between Missing tribe vs. Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims. At Samuguri, Dhula and Thekerabari violence occurred between the Muslims vs. Hindu Bengalis. At Chawlkhoa Chaporri, Assamese Hindu and Muslims jointly attacked the Bengali Muslims proving the massacre as ethnic rather than communal (Shourie 1983b: 15-16).

Most of the victim was the Bengali Muslim migrants added a sense of disillusionment among the Assamese Muslims. There are also some instances where Assamese Muslims joined Assamese Hindu villagers in resisting attacks from the migrant Muslims. Although the stated aim of the movement was to drive out the foreign nationals (both Hindu and Bengali Muslims) from the region, yet the communal flare ups in different parts of the state made the Assamese Muslims feel increasingly insecure (Mishra 1999: 1265-67). Many of the minority organizations suspected that the violence was the handiwork of the
AASU and its affiliated organization. As the Bangladeshi Muslims were targeted in the riot, the national and international newspapers coverage contained as a case of Muslims were being targeted. The attitude of the Assamese Muslims towards the movement also strained. But the AASU and its allied organizations sharply reacted to this accusation (Sarmah 1999: 52-53).

4. IV.vii Police Atrocities

During the prolonged disturbances and lawlessness, the Government of India deployed military and Para military forces to control law and order. During 1983, 400 companies of central paramilitary forces and 11 brigades of Army were deployed. The government continued to call the movement as violent and the army and Para military to control law and order resorted to severe atrocities occurred throughout the state. Several organisations have sent letters to the President and the Prime Minister writing about the atrocities. The police atrocities was severe in areas like Guwahati, Nalbari, Belsor, Aamguri, North Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Nitaipukhuri, Kakojan, Bhabani, Bajali, Dergaon, Nazira, Titabor, Jazi, Sivasagar, Tiyok. The atrocities of the police and CRPF have broken all previous records (PRANTIK Report 1983c: 6).

There are several documents and reports about the atrocities of security forces in Assam during the period of Assam agitation. The then Governor of Assam, L P Singh, declared North Kamrup as a disturbed area on January 7, 1980. On 8 January, 1980 army and the Para military forces were called to aid the civilian police and restore law and order. But without consulting the civilian police, the forces entered in 29 villages and tortured the villagers on 10th and 11th of January. In a 23 pages Report of the relief team from Guwahati Medical College, reveals that the team treated more than 200 rape victims, fractures, dislocation of joints, sprains and minor cuts caused mostly by boots and rifle butts. More than 25 cases of rape victims were received from this medical team. The AASU leaders wisely declared these rape victims as the martyrs (Das 1982: 106-107).

As per the High Court Bar Association, eight cases of rape were reported and all of them were Assamese - five of them were Hindus, two were Muslims and other was a tribal girl. In the Nalbari district 2000 displaced people took refuge at Gordon High School. S. K.
Saxena, public relation officer, Ministry Of Defence in a report mentions that seventeen girls and thirty women were raped by the army personal. There was also report that Saxena was forced to retire for writing this report. Another massacre occurred by the CRPF in the oil installation at Duliajan. The CRPF personnel opened fire on a gathering of 12000 people, but the government did not admit such kind of deaths in the firing. It is also reported that the CRPF personnel loaded these dead bodies in the trucks and disposed of. The Dibrugarh University Students Union reported that the bodies with picketer's badges were seen floating in the Buridihing River, while two other bodies were seen burning near Tippling Thermal Power Station (Das 1982: 109-114).

4. IV.viii Nepalis during Assam Movement

The presence of Nepali community throughout the centuries adopted Assamese culture and assimilated with the local Assamese people. However, things worsen during the Assam agitation. Along with Bangladeshis migrants, Nepalis were also targeted. The Assamese nationalism over the Nepali migrants was soon lifted on and that too with a junk for which the later was not prepared. The AASU and the AAGSP through their memorandum suggested that a 'monstrous problem' has been created by the infiltration of migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal' (Hussein 2001: 15 & Dasgupta 2003: 239-240 & Mandal 2009: 38).

It was earlier suggested that those who came after 1951 were ‘foreigners’ in Assam. The target was Bangladeshis but the Nepalis were too included deliberately ignoring the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950. The treaty however ensured the free movement of population without any required Visa and Passport. This treaty also led to massive migration of Nepalis population at large scale and the Nepalis population showed a 2.38% growth in 1971 as against 1.26% in 1951. The migration is still continuing as it is tied up with the Nepali search for sustenance and survival. By the time a large number of Nepalis who had migrated before 1931, had by birth or residence became natural citizens (Nath 2003a: 210-211).

To legitimise the agitation against the migrants, the AASU and the AAGSP started manipulating the masses and argued that it was necessary to include Nepalis within the
definition of foreigners. According to the AASU memorandum (1980), “The number of foreign nationals in Assam has already become explosive. The problem must be tackled with utmost speed. Foreign nationals, whose presence is of grave concern to the people of Assam, are mainly from Bangladesh and Nepal. In addition of Bangladeshis, Nepalis who have entered Assam without Restricted Area Permits either from Nepal or from Bhutan account for a sizeable number of foreigners. The increase of Nepali immigrants in the last two decades cannot be ignored. The percentage of increase of the Nepali population is higher by about 13% than the percentage of increase in the general population during the period 1951-1971.”

Despite their long stay and historical linkages, matrimonial alliances, the Nepalis in Assam are a serious case of conflict-afflicted population. As discussed earlier, large scale migration of Nepalis occurred during colonial and post-colonial period, constituting a good number of migrants in Assam. This made some Assamese middle class apprehensive of their identity in the state. But their numbers didn’t constitute a threat to the aspirations of Assamese middle class. The Assamese middle class have no real interest in detecting and deporting Nepali migrants from Assam. The middle class Assamese people perceived the Nepali migrants as a socio-economically depressed community (Dasgupta 2003: 240-242)

Adhikary in a discussion agreed and viewed that the Nepalis were not the direct target of the movement but were displaced due to fear of being attacked. He further commented, “During the Assam conflict, the concentrations of Nepali population where small, were not targeted but some others targeted where their concentration was high. I have also observed the displaced people migrating from Assam to Nepal.”15 Dixit in a discussion also agreed that the Nepalis are being targeted in the name of foreigners violating the Indo-Nepal Treat of Peace and Friendship 1950, he commented, “The concentration of Nepalis in Assam is very low and secondly, they assimilated with the Assamese society and their political association is little weaker. In comparison with Bengali, Nepalis are small in numbers. The Nepali settlers who are now Indian citizens are excessively

15 In a discussion with Keshab Adhikary, Central Department of Population Studies, Tribhuvan University, on 27/04/09, during field trip to Kathmandu.
targeted by the Assamese people branding them as foreigners. They are still regarded as aliens when there is so much assimilation and there is no challenge to the system from this group.”

Throughout Assam the Nepalis were apprehensive of the movement as the demand for deletion of their names from the voter and deportation created furore among the Nepalis in Assam. As a result the existing cordial relations between the two communities affected sharply. The well organized massacres of Bangladeshis across various districts also created a sense of fear among the Nepali population. The Nepalis particularly leaving in the Darrang and the Lakhimpur districts left their home abandoned and took shelter in the border areas like Kakaribhita, Biratnagar, Dholabari, Dhannagar, Surya Nagar Tezpur and Sontipur. As a result of the fear to their life and property a sense of traditional Nepali identity started blooming. They started identifying themselves with the Gorkha past, Hindu tradition and pan Nepalese solidarity movement. With the help of other leaders from Sikkim and Darjeeling, the Nepalis started mobilizing themselves in Assam and under the banner of various right wings political parties started opposing the Assam Movement (Nath 2005a: 66).

4. IV.ix Enquiry of the Massacre

Alltogether 688 criminal cases were filed against miscreants in connection with Nellie violence and out of these 310 cases were charge-sheeted. The remaining 378 cases were closed due to the police claim of ‘lack of evidence’. Again when the Assam Gana Parishad came to power in 1985, all the 310 charge-sheeted cases were dropped and not single person prosecuted. B K Gohain, Home Commissioner, Assam said “All the Nellie cases were dropped during Prafulla Kumar Mahanta’s time. The chapter is closed” (Rahman 2005). The Central government was not interested in appointing a judicial commission to investigate the violence and hence agreed to appoint a one man commission. Santosh Mohan Dev in a discussion in Lok Sabha on the ‘situation in Assam’ comments, “I personally view that the idea of asking for inquiry in Assam is to create another situation against the government and the police there and to create

---

16 In a discussion with Kanak Mani Dixit, Editor, Himal South Asia, Kathmandu, on 1/05/09, during field trip to Kathmandu.

297
There is no denial of the fact that there was a time in Assam when the government employees totally supported this movement. But that support was taken away because of the merciless killings. And if you ask for judicial inquiry, this will be chaos in Assam. Let there be a magisterial inquiry and if the inquiry proves that there are certain elements in the force, certain officials, government will not feel shy to take action against them” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 381-382).

In a query of Vasant Kumar Pandit on the issue of 'Inquiry Commission in Assam', the then Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, “The government of Assam has appointed a one man commission of inquiry under the section 3 or the commissions of Enquiry Act, 1952 with T. P. Tiwari, IAS retired as its chairman and member. The commission has the following terms - firstly, to look into the circumstances leading to the disturbances which took place in Assam during January to April 1983. Secondly, to examine the measures taken by the concerned authorities to anticipate, prevent and deal with these disturbances and to assess the adequacy thereof and indicate whether there were any deficiencies or failures on the part of any authority or individual. Thirdly, to suggest measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents in future and finally, to make such other recommendations as deemed fit. The commission will make enquiry and submit its report within six months. The government of Assam may, on sufficient grounds, extend the time for submission of the report of the commission” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, July 27: 32-33). The Tiwari commission submits its 600 pages report to the Assam Government in May 1984 but the Congress Government, led by Hiteswar Saikia, decided not to make it public. Both the Congress and the AGP have suppressed information about the massacre during the movement period (Rahman 2005).

4. V Local and National Security Threat

The continuing large-scale agitation in Assam has serious security implications. The Northeastern region as a whole has been highly unstable due to presence of insurgent groups demanding separate statehood and independent nations, particularly in Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland. The region is also close China, Burma and Bangladesh
and thus persistence of socio-political unrest in this sensitive region endangers the nation's territorial integrity. The region in terms of resources such as oil, gas, tea, timber, hydro-electric etc. is rich and in the event of hostility with China, the political unrest in the region may seriously affect the nation's military effort (Rastogi 1986: 91-92). The threat to local and national security is evident when the movement spread across the Northeastern states completely engaging the ethnic tribal groups against the migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal.

The well known organised campaign led by the AASU known as 'Bongal Kheda,' (throw out Bengalis) aimed at ethnic cleansing in Assam, not restricted to Assam only, it spread to neighbouring states like Meghalaya and Tripura. A large scale displacement of Bengali speaking people occurred in Tripura and Meghalaya. Tribal local inhabitants attacked Bengali speaking people irrespective of their religion, resenting their growing numbers and dominance in jobs and in business or in both states. In Meghalaya, the mayhem took a serious turn in 1979 and was restricted to Shillong, where the Bengali dominated bureaucracy and a number of professions working in that area. During the 1990s Bengali remained the prime target of tribal violence but other non tribal communities like the Biharis (people from Bihar) and the Marwaris (from Rajasthan) also came under such attack in the state. The riot took a heavy toll over thirty lives compelling the migrants and outsiders to close their establishments (Barbhuyan 1994: 5). Since the early 1980s an estimated 25-30 thousand Bengalis have left Shillong and from some other parts of Meghalaya and settled down in West Bengal and other states in India (Bhaumik 2005: 157-158).

In Tripura, the attack on the Bengalis is widespread and intense and occurred since Bengalis took over land from the tribal reducing them to the ethnic minority. Land alienation and loss of political power and becoming minority, ethnic tribal group started attacking the Bengalis. The fierce ethnic riots took place in June-July 1980 where about 1076 Bengalis and 278 tribal people were killed. Around 327 Bengali speaking people were butchered in the village of Mandai. During the June 1980 riots, a total number of 189919 people, 80 percent Bengalis and 20 percent tribal among the total displaced people took shelter in the 186 camps in Tripura. Bengalis were sheltered in 141 camps.
while the tribal people took refuge in 45 camps (Dinesh Singh Committee Report 1980 as cited in Bhaumik 2005: 157).

Most of the displaced went back to their villages but after a while, the Bengalis relocated their villages closer to police outstation, semi-urban areas and roadsides position. Mandai is a classic example – the old Bengali part of the settlement has now been largely taken over by the tribal and the Bengalis have moved away from to ‘New Mandai’, a new fledgling semi-urban location guarded by the paramilitary forces. In fact, most new Bengali settlements came up near the camps set up by the security forces where they had taken their shelter. The villages they had lived in earlier were abandoned and in most case taken over the tribal people (Bhaumik 2005: 158).

In Meghalaya, sectarian violence again erupted in 1987, this time the prime targets were the Nepalis (150000) living in Shillong, Jowai and other parts of Meghalaya. The tensions in Meghalaya existed since 1931 between the Nepalis and the Khasis because of the damage done by the farmer’s buffaloes and the indiscriminate cutting down of forests by them to make room for their increasing herds (Mandal 2009: 39-40). The Nepali labourers in the coal mines in Jowai were the first target later spread to other parts. Dozens of innocent children of Nepalese working in Jowai coal-mines died of hunger because their parents did not return to their home even weeks after the incident. Violence involved killings, burning of Nepali villages and schools and finally their deportation by the state government. The worst affected were the Nepali dairy farmers who gave up their occupation left Meghalaya (Nath 2005a: 57-58, 66-67).

In the agitation against the foreigners, the Khasi students and the Government of Meghalaya were in agreement on the deportation of the Nepalis. About 12,000 Nepalis were detected as foreigners of who 7,000 to 10,000 were expelled in February – March 1987. Thereafter as a result of an understanding between the governments of Meghalaya and Assam, these evicted persons were jointly escorted to the Assam-Bengal Border from where the exodus was guided up to the Indo-Nepal border (Nath 2005a: 72).
Conflict also occurred in Arunachal Pradesh against the presence of the large number of Chakmas, Hajongs, Tibetians, Nepalis and Bangladeshis. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) forwarding the movement viewed that due to presence of migrants and refugees is a deliberate attempt to dilute the native identity and a threat to the demographic balance of the state. The AAPSU was spearheading anti-foreigner campaigning with the support of Gegong A pang – the Chief Minister, issued a quit notice to all the foreigners to leave Arunachal Pradesh by 30 November, 1994 and withdrawn the facilities enjoyed by them one after another. The registration certificate issued by the centre became a mere scrap of paper and the locals occupied the lands developed by refugees. Employment opportunities to the Chakmas were banned and trade licenses stopped and those given earlier were cancelled. Allegations were made that a section of the Chakmas were undergoing arms training and manufacturing weapons (Barpujari 1998: 51-52).

The AAPSU created panic, as the deadline was drawing near forced about 2000 Chalmas from Papumpare district to take shelter in the Gohpur reserve forests in Assam. The Government of Assam clamped night curfew and issued shoot at sight order along the border in Tinsukia district, opposite to Changlang district – home of large number of Chakmas. However, AAPSU put new deadlines following which CRPF was deployed to maintain law and order and according to the intelligence report the situation remained ‘fluid and explosive’ that might lead to insurgency and counter-insurgency unless effective steps are taken to diffuse tensions in that quarter (Barpujari 1998: 52).

In Manipur, the sentiment took the form of a movement, manifesting itself in direct attacks on the Nepalis in 1980 compelling many of them (who were made the domicile community in 1947) to shift houses and flee to safer areas (Mandal 2009: 40-41). Most of the displaced from Meghalaya and Manipur are settled in Rupandehi, Jhapa, Banke and other parts of Nepal's Terai region, besides Kathmandu and Pokhara. In Mizoram, the migration of Nepalis from Nepal since the 1980s to work as labourers, cow-herds or lumber-jacks created problems for the domiciled Gurkhas. There was no criterion to distinguish permanent settlers from newcomers; the Government of Mizoram categorized all Nepalis as foreigners and withdrawn certain benefits extended to the Gurkhas of pre-
1950, a number of Nepali families left Mizoram. In Nagaland during 1980s, extortion was used as a means to terrorise the Nepalis, who were pre-1940 settlers and treated as indigenous non-Naga local residents. These settlers, who had substantial landed property, were forced to resort to distress sale. In the Marapani region located on the border of Wokha (Nagaland) and Sivasagar (Assam) clashes occurred in which about 200 Nepalis lost their lives (Nath 2005a: 67).

4. VI Government Responses

The government responses have mainly been to reach a political settlement with the agitators and the rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict in Assam and other states. The state and the central government were anxiously trying to find out a proper solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. Both the state and the central government engaged in complicated task to rehabilitate the displaced people due to large scale violence in the Assam. Many of the IDP’s took shelter in the neighbouring states including West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh and complaints were made by these states that Assam is pushing migrants and asked for proper action to rehabilitate them, as they don’t want to take the burden of IDPs. Showing anxiety to find out a proper solution of Assam Movement, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar, in a query of Madhu Dandavate and Madhav Rao Scindia on the issue of ‘foreign nationals in Assam’, commented, “The government have made its stand clear that its doors are open for further talks on the foreigners issue and the government is anxious to find a just satisfactory solution in consultation with the state government and all other interests concerned. Both the state and the central governments are making efforts to restore normalcy and to create conditions congenial and conducive to a fruitful dialogue” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, August 9: 275-276).

During the six year long anti-foreigners agitation violence caused widespread displacement of both Hindus and Muslims of Bengali Descent. Most of the victim took shelter in the neighbouring states; West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh (Bhaumik 2005: 144-173). According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation (1983-84: 40-42), “Following the disturbances in Assam in February-March 1983, a large
number of persons were affected. The number of such affected persons during the peak period in March, 1983 was 310732. On April 10, 1983, further disturbances in the Goalpara district caused displacement of 16717 persons bringing the total number of affected persons to 327449. The affected persons numbering 34367 had taken shelter in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Assam government to rehabilitate the victims of Assam conflict organised camps for their relief and rehabilitation. In a query of Chitta Basu regarding the 'relief' and rehabilitation of the people' displaced during the Assam Violence, the Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation, Veerendra Patil commented, "250 relief camps were opened in Assam alone to provide relief and rehabilitation assistance and 118 camps were closed and the remaining 132 camps still exist. The number of displaced persons – 34367, who left for Arunachal Pradesh, has also returned to Assam. At least 112170 persons are still left in the relief camps in Assam left to be rehabilitated except those who leave the relief camps and decide to live on their own" (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 10).

The state government along with other NGO’s tried rehabilitate the displaced people through organizing camps etc. In a query by Santosh Mohan Dev, on the issue of 'rehabilitation of victims in Assam conflict', the Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Shri Dharamvir replied, “46849 affected families have been given admissible package of rehabilitation assistance and the remaining families are at various stages of grant of such assistance. Special provision for welfare of orphans and destitute women is being made under the existing new schemes. Meanwhile, two SOS villages, in the districts of Nagaon and Darrang (at Mangaldoi) for 300 and 200 children have been completed. The Indian council of child welfare (ICCW) running institute for about 100 children at Tezpur. Some destitute women were also provided jobs as foster mothers in the SOS villages and as Anganwadi workers under the integrated child development services scheme. Apart from the above mentioned two NGO's; Assam Carbon Products Ltd. Guwahati, Indian Red Cross Society, Assam Sahayak Samiti, Bharat Sewashram Sangha, Sisters of Charity and some other local organizations also helped displaced people for rehabilitation. The Central government also provided a sum
of Rs. 497.1 million for relief and rehabilitation schemes to the government of Assam” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, August 9: 302-304).

Forced displacement of people occurred due to Assam conflict and a number of displaced people took shelter in West Bengal and it was an arduous task for the government to provide rehabilitation facilities to them. The West Bengal government termed the migration of displaced people as burden for them and repeatedly asked the Assam government to take them back. In a discussion regarding the issue ‘situation in Assam’ Satyasadhan Chakraborty in the Lok Sabha commented, “Already 17000 refugees are the victims of 1982 disturbances and 22000 new refugees have crossed over to West Bengal, it is an enormous burden on the state” (Parliament of India Debate, 1983, Lok Sabha, March 3: 316). Amar Roypradhan in a discussion on the issue of ‘migration of persons from Assam to West Bengal after recent Elections’, estimating the number commented, “In West Bengal alone, during 18 February – 28 March, 1983, 27600 are staying in different camps. Since 1980 January alone – 11444 Assam refugees are staying in Dangi, Jasodanga and Jorai camps in West Bengal. Moreover, about 15000 people are staying in their relatives houses. It is heavy burden to borne by the West Bengal government. I would also like to know very clearly and categorically from the Home Minister whether the central government is ready to bear the entire expenditure such as for construction of camps, clothing’s, milk, baby food, medicines and Rs. 5 in cash and 2 and half kg of wheat or rice per week per adult” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 30: 14-16).

However the movement leaders denied such migration of displaced people to West Bengal. Amar Roypradhan on the issue of ‘migration of persons from Assam to West Bengal after recent elections’ views, “The displaced people from Assam who are staying in West Bengal, there are Hindus, Muslims SC/ST and not only the Bengali origin but they also of Gorkha and Bihar origin. Among them, there were government employees, school teachers and land-holders who are staying there for last hundred years. But in a statement issue by the conveners of AAGSP Atul Bora and Biraj Sharma ‘while none from Assam had sneaked into West Bengal…..the West Bengal government is making all efforts to push vagabonds and foreign nationals into Assam’. This allegation is not
acceptable and the Assam government must take back tem and set up tribunals to detect
and determine foreign nationals” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 30:
13-14).

In a query by Pius Tirkey on the issue of ‘rehabilitation of evacuees from Assam who are
camped at Alipurduwar in West Bengal’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home
Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, “Around 23305 evacuees, who had come from
Assam since February, 1983 onwards were reportedly in camps in Alipurduwar sub-
divisions on 11-7-1983. A team of senior officers and ministers of Assam Government
have visited the relief camps in West Bengal to persuade the refugees to return to their
original places in Assam and held discussion with the west government official. It has
been reported by government of west Bengal that 5589 evacuees in west Bengal have
returned recently to Assam voluntarily” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha,
August 3: 281-282)

In a query of B. D. Singh and Jaspal Singh on the issue of ‘rehabilitation of persons
displaced as a result of Assam riots’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour and
Rehabilitation, Shri Dharamvir replied, “The peak population in relief camps in West
Bengal 28460. Out of these 26217 remain in camps as on 20 July, 1983. About 890
persons in camps in Assam and 26217 persons in camps in West Bengal are yet to be
rehabilitated as on 20 July, 1983. The affected persons have been given assistance for
reconstruction of houses, purchase of lost milch cattle, grant for purchase of books so
school going children and maintenance assistance. Agriculturalist families have been
given, in addition, assistance for purchase of seeds, fertilizers, tractorisation of land and
replacement of lost bullocks. Non-agriculturalist families including petty traders have
been given financial assistance for their self-employment. In addition, assistance has been
given to the state government for repair of bridges and school buildings, water supply
arrangements and health and medical care. A sum of Rs. 445.8 million has been released
to the government of Assam for relief and rehabilitation measures. Assistance has also
been given to the voluntary organisations for looking after women and children in need of
care and protection” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, July 26: 661-662).
The Assam government agreed to take back the displaced people from West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh and some Assam government officials also requested the people to come back to Assam and assured full rehabilitation for them. In a query of Amar Roypradhan and Chitta Pradhan on the issue of 'migration of persons from Assam to West Bengal after recent Elections', the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, "The government of Assam have been requested to take necessary steps to facilitate their early return to Assam. The central government has agreed to provide financial assistance in respect of expenditure incurred by the WB government for running relief camps for a period of one month to begin with" (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 30: 13-18). In a query of Indrajit Gupta on the issue 'request from West Bengal for return of Assam refugee', the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, "The central government requested the Assam government to take all possible measures to stop further flow of refugees to West Bengal and to make arrangement for the return of refugees to Assam who have crossed over to West Bengal. The request of the government of West Bengal for sanction of financial assistance of Rs. 2.392 million as expenditure incurred since February, 1983, for establishing and running relief camps is under consideration" (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 6: 210-211).

In a query by Indrajit Gupta on the issue of 'riot victim of Assam', the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, "According to the West Bengal government, about 25000 persons crossed over to West Bengal from Assam as a result of recent disturbances. Out of them 17130 persons are reported to be staying in the camps set up by the West Bengal government as on 23-3-1983. Another about 4000 persons presently camping at Alipurduwar Railway Station are also being shifted shortly to a new camp. Government of Arunachal Pradesh has reported that 34367 persons arrived in Arunachal Pradesh from Assam. Out of them only 400 persons are still staying in relief camps set up by Arunachal Pradesh government and the rest have returned to Assam. According to government of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh expenditure of Rs. 2346195/- and Rs. 79525/-, respectively have been incurred till 23-3-83. The government of Assam have deputed their officers to Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal
to persuade refugees to return to their original place. Rehabilitation assistance is being extended and 164 police pickets have been set up to provide security to the people” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 30: 460-461).

In a query by A.U. Azmi and Laxman Mallick on the issue of ‘Rehabilitation of victims of Assam Violence’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Shri Dharamvir replied, “Assam government has sought 570.8 million as relief assistance to rehabilitate displaced people. A sum of Rs. 200 million has been released by the central government to the government of Assam to meet the expenditure on relief and rehabilitation of affected persons. The affected persons are being given relief assistance in the form of food supplies, cash doles, utensils, blankets and clothing’s. The children and nursing expectant mothers are provided baby food/milk powder and 30 tonnes of baby food/milk powder have been supplied for this purpose. For medical care, medicines worth Rs. 7.617 million have been sent. On return to homes affected persons are being provided assistance for reconstruction of houses, purchase of seeds, replacement of lost bullocks, & milch cattle and maintenance help for a short period” (Parliament of India Debate (1983), Lok Sabha, April 19: 202-203; Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 12: 112-113).

The Assam government also paid compensation to the people killed in the agitation and also to the victims of the conflict. In a query by A. F. Golam Osmani on the issue of ‘amount paid to the martyrs of Assam Movement’, about their numbers district wise and the compensation paid to the victims of riot, the then Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation, Thaneswar Boro replied, “A sum of Rs. 30000/- each paid to the next kin of the martyr’s who sacrificed, suffered or died for the cause and the principle of the Assam Movement. A sum of Rs. 5000/- each paid as ex-gratia to the next kin of the victims of 1983 disturbances. The budget head of account ‘288-social security and welfare-E other Social Security Programme (d) rehabilitation for disturbances General-Non-Plan’ and the revised head of which is ‘2235-social security and’ welfare 60-other Social Security Programme-200 other schemes (f) relief and rehabilitation for disturbances General Non-Plan’ 1987-88. In accordance with the provision made under para 14(b) of the Assam Accord, the relief & rehabilitation department has drawn up”
Table 4. IV

Number of District wise Martyr’s (Assam Movement) in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sivasagar</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi-Anglong</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4. VII__International Dimensions and Responses

The Assam agitation and the subsequent violent conflict attracted world wide attention. Subramanium Swamy in a discussion in the parliament regarding the ‘Situation in Assam’ viewed, “some people or countries outside India want to tarnish the reputation of India” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 363). The UN Secretary General also reacted sharply on Assam Violence; hence he viewed the conflict as India’s internal matter. In a discussion and query by Amar Roypradhan on the issue of ‘United Nations Secretary General’s Reaction to Assam Situation’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, A. A. Rahim viewed, “In the wake of the reports regarding Assam violence, appearing in the western press in February 1983, the spokesman of the UN Secretary General told the press briefing that the Secretary General is felt sorry at the loss of lives in Assam and he hopes that harmony will prevail soon. The spokesman also viewed that the UN does not intended to give any assistance to alleviate the situation in Assam as it an internal matter of India. The Secretary General also had the occasion to visit India during the Conference of the Non-Aligned heads of Government held in March, 1983 but during his stay, he didn’t refer the Assam situation” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 28: 189).

Again, in a query of Subhash Yadav and M. Ramgopal on ‘Raising Assam issue at U.N Committee’, the Minister of state in the Ministry of External Affairs, A. A. Rahim replied,
"The representatives of Pakistan and Egypt, who serve on the 18 member UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination in their personal capacity, raised the Assam issue during consideration by the Committee of India’s 7th periodic report. The Indian representative refuted the arguments and viewed that India does not see the developments in Assam as a matter of non-implementation of any article of the convention on elimination of all forms of racial discrimination nor its relevance to the work of the committee. The representative informed the committee regarding the constitutional obligations for holding elections in Assam and also added that the government had strained every resource and made elaborate law and other arrangements to ensure free and fair conduct of poll. The representative indicated about the measures undertaken by the government to provide relief and rehabilitation assistance to the affected persons. Provisions in the Indian constitution which guaranteed maintenance of harmony between different groups and made racial discrimination an offence punishable by law were also referred to. It is pertinent to note that India’s report was condemned by most of the members of UN committee who also acknowledged the contribution made by Indian both at national and international level, in the elimination of racial discrimination” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 7: 251-252 & PRANTIK Report 1983b: 9).

Many other countries including United Kingdom (UK), the Kuwait National Assembly and the Non-Aligned Movement condemned the violence in Assam and raised the issue. Subramanium Swamy in a discussion on ‘Situation in Assam’, in Lok Sabha, commented, “Some Member of Parliament (MP) of the House of Commons in UK want to debate a motion about the ‘Government Organised Killing’ in India. Now, this proposed motion was signed by 100 MPs belonging to the left wing of the Labour Party. I got hold of some names and I struck that these MPs are those persons who have signed a memorandum during the state emergency in India supporting the state of emergency. I remember this very government gave support and a great deal of publicity to these MPs of course, now the left wing MPs of the Labour party have tries to bring a motion condemning this government for organised killings. I think in both the cases they were wrong. They were wrong to have supported the emergency and they were wrong to have tries to bring such a motion” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 363-364).
Subramaniam Swamy while discussing the Assam Situation in the Parliament viewed that the Nellie massacre has lowered the prestige of India in the world. He further views, “The Kuwait National Assembly has passed a resolution condemning the government of India for what happened in Nellie. Kuwait is a country which this government cultivates with a great deal of concern. In fact, the Arab opinion is something about which the government is very sensitive. Despite the long history of friendship, the Kuwait national Assembly passed a resolution condemning the government” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 364).

Subramaniam Swamy also informed that some leaders of the NAM privately raised this issue and even he condemned the Indian Ambassador to the US for his unusual step of informing the violence to the Senators. In the Parliament of India he further commented, “During the Non-Aligned meet, I am informed that many of the leaders privately raised this question with the Prime Minister of India. The Indian Ambassador to the US takes an unusual step of going all the way to the Capitol Hill where the Senate building is and meeting with the Committee, about informally, to answer questions on what happened to Nellie. They were all members of the committee and it was an informal meeting with the committee members. A copy of letter circulated by the Chairman to all members of that committee has already been published in the overseas Indian magazine called *India Abroad*. The question, whether he met some MPs or few MPs is not relevant. What is relevant is that the Ambassador of Indian went all the way to the Capitol Hill to answer questions of some MPs or a few senators of the committee” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 364-365).

Some Arab countries also sharply reacted on the killing of people in Nellie and they were very much concern about the international prestige. Subramaniam Swamy is a discussion on the ‘Situation in Assam’ further commenting on the Arab countries reaction viewed, “The government has decided to send Nurul Islam to some Arab countries to explain what happened in Nellie. This obviously means that they are very much concerned about the loss of International prestige and therefore, they are doing all this. I happened to be abroad when the Non-Aligned meet was on here. The TV in America and Britain was
nothing but full of pictures of Nellie. There was a big propaganda organised on this. If we compare this incident to that of what happened in Shatila and Sabra in Lebanon, they viewed that in Lebanon only 380 people were killed but here thousands of people were killed. We do not accept the comparison. This is what they propagated” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, May 5: 364-365).

4. VIII. Impact of Conflict in Assam

There has been a heavy toll for all the parties involved in the conflict. Both the government incurred heavy expenditure in its large scale induction of armed personnel and administrative staff from other states. Economic development, trade and industry of Assam suffered most. Thousands of people lost their lives and thousands of people became homeless. Faced with such heavy cost, the AASU and AAGSP suspended their agitation by April, 1983 ostensibly to promote relief and rehabilitation (Rastogi 1986: 91).

4. VIII.i Economic Impact

The Assam conflict has adversely affected the socio-economic fabric of the society. Millions of rupees have been spent on rebuilding the destructed bridges and roads of Assam. The year long agitation and conflict has adverse impact on the economy of the state. Shortages of essential commodities occurred through the entire North-eastern states affecting the region as a whole. In a query of P K Kodiyan regarding the issue of 'disturbances in Assam and its adjoining area', the Minister of State in Home Affairs and in the Department Of Parliamentary affairs P Venkatasubbaiah viewed, “Shortages of essential commodities like petroleum products, food items; salts, sugar, edible oils, etc. has been reported from the entire North-Eastern region. Steps have been taken to move supplies to the affected areas. Government is taking all necessary steps to maintain peace and order and restore peace and security among all sections of the people. Steps are also being taken for creating conducive atmosphere with the students and allied organizations engaged in the agitation to find a proper solution” (Parliament of India Debate 1980, Lok Sabha, 30 January: 34-35).
In a query by G. Y. Krishnan on the issue of ‘effect of Assam agitation on industry’, the then Minister of Industry, Narayan Datt Tiwari commented, “The Assam agitation has adversely affected the economic and financial well being and is difficult to quantify precisely the overall loss due to conflict. It is however, estimated that in the case of petroleum, fertilizers etc. the loss would come to Rs. 127.2 million. Moreover, due to the disruption of rail movement, the railways suffered a financial loss of Rs. 320 million and several projects have been delayed, thereby resulting in considerable cost escalation” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 6: 31). In a query of Chitta Basu and Krishan Pratap Singh on the issue of ‘losses in Assam during ‘riots’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar replied, “There was also extensive damage to public and private property. There are about 40000 houses will require to be reconstructed/repaired and 1598 road bridges have been destroyed” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, April 6: 189).

In a query of M.S.K. Sathiyendran on the issue of ‘request by Government of Assam for central assistance’, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Shri Dharamvir replied, “The central team visited Assam towards the end of February 1983 and after detailed discussions with the officials of the state government assessed the requirements of funds for relief and rehabilitation of persons affected by recent disturbances (including repairs of bridges on national highways, state roads and PWD assets) at Rs. 231.6 million. This assessment was based on presumption that about 0.166 million affected people would require relief and rehabilitation assistance. The figure of affected persons as on 11 March, 1983 reported by the Government of Assam is about 0.311 million and the state government have estimated that requirement of funds at Rs. 446.4 million” (Parliament of India Debate 1983, Lok Sabha, March 22: 77-78).

According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation (1983-84: 40-42), “The government of Assam were provided financial assistance for reconstruction of schools, repairs of bridges, roads and drinking water supply arrangements. The state government had projected total requirement of funds for relief and rehabilitation measures as Rs. 614 million. The total financial ceilings approved by the government of India so far works out Rs. 599.8 million. Against this, a sum of Rs. 497.1 million has so
far been released to the state government. The question of release of additional funds to the Assam Government will be considered on receipt of item-wise details of the expenditure incurred on relief and rehabilitation. Almost all the 1595 bridges damaged have been repaired."

4. VIII.ii. Social and Political Impact

The Assam Movement radically transformed the existing cordial relations among the various ethnic groups in Assam. The communal harmony is shattered and mistrust prevailed among all the ethnic groups. The Bodos started their own movement and ignore the Assamese identity and viewed their culture as distinct from the Assamese and other groups. Similarly, the Karbis also demanded the autonomous separate state for the Karbis raised immediately after the end of the Assam Movement. Simultaneously, the Autonomous State Demand Committee was formed and started demanding autonomous state under article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution and further intensified the movement (Singh 1990: 312-14). The Assam movement by providing national and ethnic identity prepared the ground for the rise of insurgency in Assam. The Assam Movement also spread fear among the tribal community of losing their own identity again. The demand for a separate Bodoland can also be cited as consequence of the Assam Movement. The growth of ULFA, a major terrorist group emerged as a result of the movement (Kotwal 2000: 138-140).

4. VIII.ii.a. The Rise of ULFA

The ULFA is one of the most powerful militant organizations operating in the Northeast region is essentially an offshoot of the Assam agitation, many of its top ranked members were once belonged to the AASU and AAGSP. The ULFA was formed under the leadership of Paresh Baruah along with other associates on 7 April 1979, at the Rang Ghar pavilion of the Ahom King located in Sivasagar to establish a Sovereign, Socialist Assam through an armed struggle. The front remained dormant till 1986, except recruiting its cadres between late 1983 to early 1984. Since 1986, the extremist outfit indulged in all sorts of terrorist activities viz. bombing, shooting, extortion, robbery etc. (George 1990: 241-243).
The ULFA aims at forming an independent Assam through armed struggle against so-called the colonial rulers in Delhi. It aims at the formation of the United Front jointly with other insurgent outfits with the following objectives:

1. To obtain Assam’s sovereignty by armed revolution.
2. To save guard the people and interest of Assam and those of its neighbouring land, that is Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.
3. To have full control over the revenue resources of Assam like oil and natural gas, forest, etc.
4. To gain public support against Indian and non Indian exploitation

The group has established ties with the other militants group operating in the Northeastern region and also with the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) with whose active support and helped it raised small guerrilla army and procured their ‘tools’ of so-called revolution. During the time of AGP government in Assam (1986-90) the ULFA had a virtually free reign to let loose its subversive activities. The ULFA by then fairly well equipped with trained cadres and weapons unleashed a reign of terror in a spate of selective assassination (Dasgupta 2001: 59-65). ULFA maintained close links with the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), which was in power from 1985-90. Its influence was visible in all the state government departments and even the state police department was full of ULFA sympathizers. In view of the growing nexus between AGP government and ULFA and the latter’s increasing militant activities in the state, the Union Government imposed President’s Rule on November 7 1990 and the state was declared a “disturbed area”. ULFA was banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and Indian army launched Operation Bajrang. The group has total strength of around 3,000, while various other sources put the figure ranging from 4,000 to 6,000. A military wing of the ULFA, the Sanjukta Mukti Fouj (SMF) was formed on 16 March 1996. SMF has three full-fledged battalions: the 7th, 8th and the 709th (Sarangthem 2008).
And by the time insurgent groups like ULFA also came into being and apart from the ethnic and communal violence, a growing number of terrorist attacks on the state official took place. One high ranking officer of the Indian civil service, E.S. Parthasarathy, who took tough measures against the movement, was killed in the terrorist bomb attack. Thus the nature of violence during that period was too a kind of terrorist violence due to the birth of insurgents groups (Chabbra 1992: 134). The ULFA movement, which was rooted in ethnic chauvinism, set a pattern for a number of ethnic groups in Assam to demand secession from Assam or from India. Prominent among such insurgent groups include, Bodo Security Force (BSF), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), Dima Halim Daoga (DHD), Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO), United Tribal Nationalist's Liberation Front (UTNLF), Hhar People's Council (HPC) Rabha National Security Force (RNSF), Tiwa National Revolutionary Force (TNRF), Bengali Tiger Force (BLT), Adivasi Security Force (ASF), People's United Liberation Front (PULF), Gorkha Tiger Force etc. (Upadhay 2005: 3002-04). The ULFA started its movement on an anti immigrant plank but later, it changed its course in midway. The hostility against Bangladeshi migrants vanished once the ULFA sought sanctuary in Bangladesh and put all the money that they exhorted into Bangladesh banks. ULFA established initial contact with the Kachin independent army in 1986. It was the Kachins who provided initial training to ULFA cadres (Kotwal 2001: 2224-25).

Contrary to its initial ideological stand, it revised its concept of Assamese identity to accommodate the Bangladeshi migrants that constituted the largest number in Assam. The ULFA, which came to its existence to stop migration from Bangladesh gradually, abdicated this ideology and helped Islamic militancy as collaborator to Bangladesh and Pakistan. “A militant movement that came into existence to protect the rights of an indigenous people has done a complete about-face in order to endanger its original parish - and ULFA members are allying themselves with the same people they want to oust from Assam” (Saikia 2003: 17). Apart from running training camps, ULFA launched several income generating projects in Bangladesh. It has set up a number of firms in
Dhaka, including media consultancies and soft drink manufacturing units. Besides it is reported to own three hotels, a private clinic, and two motor driving schools in Dhaka. Paresh Barua is reported to personally own or has controlling interests in several businesses in Bangladesh, including a tannery, a chain of departmental stores, garment factories, travel agencies, shrimp trawlers and transport and investment companies (Vasudev 2001).

ULFA’s camps in Bangladesh have been functioning since 1989, at which time there were 13 to 14 such camps. Commencing initially with using Bangladesh as a safe haven and training location, ULFA gradually expanded its network to include operational control of activities and the receipt and shipment of arms in transit before they finally entered India (Saikia 2003). Several rounds of negotiations with the ULFA’s Peoples Consultative Group (PCG) and central government started during 2005 but halted the process due to violence unleashed by the group. Recently, some of the top leaders of ULFA were arrested in Bangladesh brought back to Assam and they are in the process of holding peace talks with the central government. However, the Paresh Barua faction continued their activities from outside the country. The president of ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa was arrested and handed over to Indian authority by the Bangladesh government. Some other top leaders are; Raju Barua, Sasa Choudhury, Chitraban Hazarika, Pradip Gogoi etc. (MOHA 2007& Goswami 2010).

4. VIII.ii.b_Bodo Movement

One of the important falls out of the AASU’s agitation on the foreigners issue was the resurgence of ethnic identity in the state. The Assamese ethnic identity has been challenged often within Assam particularly from the tribal groups of the hill or the plain areas. Whenever Assamese leaders equated the territorial identity with the ethno-linguistic identity of Assamese speakers of the Brahmaputra valley, they pushed the other ethnic groups to seek security through their autonomous structures. The Bodos along with other groups joined the Assam Movement to expel all foreigners from Assam. The result: fresh agitations, often sliding into violent insurgencies, spearheaded by smaller ethnicities.
demanding separate homelands (Bhaumik 1998: 221). The Bodo movement is positively interested in Indian national cohesion. Though the Bodo movement in Assam started much before the Assam Movement, it has direct impact on the Bodo ethnic groups and the demand for a separate Bodo homeland got momentum after the Assam agitation. The Bodo constituting 6 percent of the total population is the largest plain tribal population. The group has been sharing a common homeland with the Assamese people and other tribal ethnic groups (Chabbra 1992: 148-151).

The Bodo’s asserted that the Assamese people are in fact outsiders who have unleashed a deadly anti-tribal policy to arbitrarily cleanse Assam of its genuinely original inhabitants. They accused the Assam government of conducting a deliberate policy of Assamisation through an imposition of the Assamese language and culture upon the tribal undemocratically and violating the constitution of India. The Bodos accused that the Assamese language has similarities with other language like Bengali and Oriya and other northern Hindi language. Given such perception on the part of the Bodos, it is understandable why they want a division of Assam and a separate homeland free from Assamese political influence and domination connected with land, education, culture and job opportunities (Nath 2003: 533-535). Since the early sixties, the Bodos have been trying to revive their distinct ethnic identity and culture on the plank of ethnic ground. Earlier, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha were the premier organization representing the Bodo ethnicity. However, since 1986, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendra Brahma stole the thunder from these bodies and the group virtually became the ethnic voice of the Bodos. It would be important to state here that the Assam Movement became a reference group/movement for the Bodo identity Movement. The AASU which led the Assām Movement became the reference group for the ABSU (Hussein 2000: 4519-23).

17 The term Bodo refers to a group of closely related tribe including the pure Bodo language speakers who are called the Bodo-Kachari people. The entire group often referred to as the Bodo-Kachari community by others. The Bodo community is claim to be the earliest inhabitants of Assam and also the earliest as well as the longest chains of rulers. They are quick to point out that when Assamese leaders trace their heritage from the Ahom era, they actually glorify invaders from an alien culture.
The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) Students Union launched their agitation in March, 1987 on the basis of 92-point charter of demands submitted to the Assam government. The original charter of demands can be reduced to three major political demands. These are (a) the creation of a separate state of ‘Bodoland’ (b) the setting up of district councils in the tribal areas on the south bank of Brahmaputra; and (c) the inclusion of the Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. But the ABSU (UB)’s claim to represent the entire Bodo population was contested by PTCA and also by the faction of the ABSU led by Gangadhar Ramchiary. The ABSU (UB)’s demand for a separate ‘Bodoland’ gradually alienated the Bodos from the Assamese mainstream (Nath 2003: 535).

Basically, these demands came from the Bodo as they felt exploited, alienated and discriminated for decades. According to the ABSU, the Bodo-inhabited areas have been neglected by the successive Congress and the AGP Government (Mishra 1989: 1149). They accused the government by arguing that the successive government did not even try to address the problems of the Bodo people and the areas. After the signing of Assam Accord, the Bodos were not happy and the leaders strongly objected Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which promised safeguards to protect the cultural identity of ‘the Assamese people’. The Bodos felt that they are not part of the Assamese people, though the movement leader’s meant for conglomeration of all composite indigenous population. They feared that the clause might give legitimacy to the imposition of Assamese language and culture on the Bodo community (Baruah 1999: 124). Though the movement for a separate Bodo homeland began in a democratic manner with the slogan, ‘Divide Assam 50-50’, later it turned out to be violent. The Bodos started their violent movement with their insurgent activities through the groups like the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF). The ABSU opted violent methods started targeting the non-Bodo population and government officials. The Bodo’s started their ethnic cleansing campaigning by issuing ‘quit notices’ to the non-Bodos living in the Bodo dominated areas, extortion, kidnapping was also a part of the tactics. Thousands of civilians from other ethnic groups including the Nepalis were killed by the militants (Nath 2003: 536-37).
The level of violence sharply came down with the signing of the Bodo Accord on 20 February, 1993 between the ABSU and the state-central government. Bodo Autonomous council (BAC) was created comprising the 'contiguous geographical areas between river Sankosh and Mazbat/river Pansoi'. However, due to continuous disagreement over the territorial jurisdiction, elections couldn't be held. The provisions of autonomy according to the accord couldn't be implemented due to lack of finance and the state government unilaterally demarcated and declared the boundary of the BAC in the later part of 1993. The ABSU rejected it and a large scale violence in different parts of Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and gruesome massacre occurred in Barpeta in 1994 (Sarmah 2002: 87).

In July 1994, ABSU launched an agitation against the non-implementation of the accord and revived its demand for a separate state in 1996. The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) came into being for an armed struggle to create a separate state of Bodoland. Again, some Bodo youth formed another groups called National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) to create a sovereign Bodoland through an armed struggle. Killings, extortion of civilians occurred in the Bodo dominated lower Assam districts. These ethnic conflicts further created internal displacement of tribal and Nepali communities in that area. The BLT gradually become a de facto guardian organisation of the Bodos and then declares unilateral ceasefire in July, 1999 in response to Central government's appeal for parleys (Nath 2003: 538).

The Bodoland movement came to an end after the signing of a new Bodo Accord on February 10, 2003 that created ‘Bodoland Territorial Council’ (BTC) under modified provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. However, the problem continued to persists because of the demand for a separate independent Bodoland by the NDFB. According to the Memorandum of Settlement on BTC (2003) reads, “The basic objectives of the agreement are basically to create an Autonomous self governing body to be known as BTC within Assam and to provide constitutional protection under Sixth Schedule to the BTC; to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area. The area of proposed BTC comprises all the 3082 villages and areas, the areas are divided into four contiguous districts after
reorganization of the existing districts of Assam within a period of 6 months of the signing of the agreement on the lines of the proposal given by BLT subject to clearance of the Delimitation Commission. A committee comprising one representative each from Governments of India & Assam and BLT will decide by consensus on the inclusion of additional villages and areas in the BTC from out of 95 villages and areas on the basis of the criteria of tribal population being not less than 50%, contiguity or any other agreed relevant criteria within a period of three months of signing of this MOU." The area under the BTC jurisdiction is called the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) consists of four contiguous districts; Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang, curved out respectively from eight existing districts; Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur with an area of 27,100 km² (35% of Assam) (Encyclopaedia 2009 & Memorandum of Settlement on BTC 2003).

4. IX_Internal Displacements

The violence created by the Bodo militants through the Bodo Movement generated more displacements of population that included other ethnic groups including Nepali and old settled Bangladeshi migrants too (Hussein 2000: 4520-21). The ethnic cleansing campaign by the Bodo’s started in 1985 and the migrants were asked to move out of the BAC area threatened with dire consequences, despite knowing the fact that the area they claim as Bodoland is home to many non-Bodo group. During 1993, violence occurred in the Bodo areas of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Gossaigaon and followed by the attacks in 1994 and October 1995 on a relief camp at Bansbari in the Barpeta district. Hundreds of migrants were killed and nearly 70000 rendered homeless and during May 1996, attacks continued on the Santhals that displaced 250000 persons, who included ethnic Nepalis and several thousand Bodos. Further, Bodo attacks in May 1998 displaced another 25000 though mostly Santhal, the number also included ethnic Nepalis living in that area. These attacks continued throughout 1998 increasing the number of the displaced persons to 80000 (Nath 2003a: 230-249 & Mandal 2009: 40).

In 1993, the Bodo leaders in a booklet titled, “One Predicament with Foreigners’ (A special issue on Nepalis) said, Bodos consider the Nepalis as foreigner’s inhabitating in

320
India. In the same tone, throughout the contents it refers to the Nepalis as outsiders and anti-national. The NJSP and AANSU refuting the above accusations published another booklet titles, ‘Indian Nepalis are genuine Citizens of India.’ These booklets while drawing attention to the rights and position of the Nepalis in the area has also referred to the attacks and killings of Nepalis in the villages of Maradhansiri, Kukurakata and Amjuli. Some miscreants set ablaze house of an ex-serviceman, staying since 1950, burnt alive 4 people on the ground that he was a citizen of Nepal. The miscreants also targeted the rich Nepali population in Assam. The militant organizations like the BLT and NDFB always try to pressurize them through extortion demands (Nath 2003b: 76-80 & Hussein 2000: 4520-23).

According to the reports of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the HRF (Human Rights Features, 16 March 2001), over 20000 internally displaced persons now live in 78 relief camps in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts. A considerable number of Nepalis were also displaced in the ethnic violence in the BAC areas from the villages of Amteka, Patabari, Malivita, Koila, etc. They came to live in the relief camps in Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon. The patagaon relief camp in Kokrajhar had about 134 Nepali families and a total population of 581 Nepalis. The state government offered a rehabilitation or reintegration grant of 1000 rupees aimed at helping them to re-establish themselves. The Nepalis of Patagaon camp availed the rehabilitation grant and went back to the areas from where they had come, or to areas where they could settle. Some government sources clarifies that the Nepalis, unlike the Santhals or Bengali-Hindus and Muslims, were not directly attacked, and that they came to the camps only out of fear and the fact that they had been living in the Santhal villages. Directly or indirectly affected, their condition ignored as they had similarly suffered displacement (APHRN 2001; IDMC 2006; Nath 2003b: 77).

4. X Assam Accord

After the prolonged agitation by the AASU and allied organization, the government was anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the foreigner’s problem. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the Assam the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi initiated a
dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP. Subsequently talks were held at the Prime Minister and Home Minister’s levels during the period 1980-83 and several rounds during 1984. On August 11, 1985 another round of negotiation started in New Delhi with the Rajiv Gandhi led government (Das 1986: 14-16). Meanwhile hectic negotiations continued too on an agreeable date for deportation of migrants in which AASU insisted on 1971 as cut off date for deportation of migrants and the government insisted on 1966 as cut off date. However, the leaders relented and a historic accord known as the ‘Assam Accord’ was signed on August 15, 1985, marking the culmination of the six-year agitation (Das 1985: 8-10).

As stated in the Assam Accord 1985, on the issue of foreigners government incorporated some important clauses. These are “Firstly, for purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners 1.1.1966 shall be the base date and year; secondly, all persons who came to Assam prior to 1.1.1966 including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections shall be regularized; thirdly, foreigners, who came to Assam after (inclusive) and up to 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the foreigners act, 1946 and foreigners (tribunals) order 1964; fourthly, on the expiry of the period of ten year following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored; fifthly, foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law” (Assam Accord, Memorandum of Settlement 1985).

In a discussion on the issue of ‘Assam Accord’, Sarat Chandra Sinha on the clauses of deportation of foreigners viewed, “The basic stand of the Congress party to make the base year for the determination of foreigner, March 24, 1971 – meaning those who came before that will be regularized. However, there are two categories; first category, migrants who came till 31.12.65 are all regularized and second, those who during 1.1.66 - 24.3.71, also will be regularized through certain processes. They will be detected first, and then delete their names from the existing electoral roll and finally their names will be restored after a lapse of 10 years from the date of deletion. These are the processes by which they intend to make them Indian nationals. Now the question arises what about
their rights and liabilities after detection? The government of India has amended the laws suitably to accommodate them. Otherwise, too, we may consider the questions, say, a person is holding land in the village and cultivating and earning his livelihood. Now if he is detected, what will happen to him after detection? Will his land be taken away or will he be prohibited from ploughing his field and earning his livelihood? As he will not be deported, the responsibility will fall on the state to feed him, if his means of livelihood is taken away. What I mean to say is that he will be allowed to carry on his normal ways of life, having all the benefits even if the law was not amended. But there is no denying the fact that these people will have to live in uncertainty for an unlimited period of time. So far as detection is concerned, no time limit has been fixed. He may be detected even after 10 years, or he may be detected even in 21st century. And during the period till his detection, he will live as an Indian citizen. And say, if he is detected in 21st century, after 10 years, say 2010 A.D. he will be restored in the electoral rolls. Why should we create bitterness and spread uncertainty? Therefore, I suggest, I think let them be a good citizen and let us see if we could amend these clauses, so that they are not to go through all these unnecessary procedure” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, 1986, 2 April, Vol. II, No.15: 73-83).

Apart from the provisions related to foreigners, a great deal of emphasis was given to protect the cultural and economic development of the state. The Clause 6 and 7 of the Assam Accord (1985) views, “Clause 6 – ‘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.’ Clause – 7 ‘The government takes this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people. Special emphasis will be placed on education and science and technology through establishment of national institutions.”

Most of the members belonging to linguistic minority community, especially the Bodo members of the ALA objected to the provisions incorporated under clause 6 of the Assam Accord. Binay Basumotary objecting about the clause 6 of the Accord views, “The tribal people have their different opinion regarding the clause 6 of the accord which tries to
promote the cultural, social and linguistic identity of the Assamese people. So what is wrong with this Assamese people when the tribal have different opinion for this? Our opinion is based on history and treatment meted or received by us. India became independent, but in the history of Assam, the tribal groups like Rabhas, Kacharis who had got British bullets have rarely been mentioned. We find that the tribal people are not taken into confidence in Assam and our existence today is threatened. We talk of tribal belts and blocks and constitutional provision of job reservation. Constitutional provision is there but in spite of that, we have been repeatedly denied such protections. Even today, why the Assamese speaking people occupy land in tribal areas? We have been absolutely left out. I humbly say, the definition of Assamese people is slightly ambiguous for us, because we have distinct identity, customs, traditions and habits are different to that of the Assamese and Assamese leadership has failed to embrace us totally. The Bodos are very much apprehensive that they will be very swamped by this growing Assamese culture” (Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, 1986, 2 April, Vol. II, No.15: 90-96).

Clause 9 of the Assam Accord views, “The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security arrangements, to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border.” (Assam Accord, Memorandum of settlement 1985). Quoting late implementation of fencing Assam-Bangladesh border, the Assam Governor report (1998) views, “The decision to fence the border was taken in 1985 and reflected in Assam Accord but the work on fencing started seven years later in 1992. 13 years have elapsed since this Accord and fencing has not yet been completed. Whereas in Dhubri sector of Assam it is nearly complete, in the Cachar sector only a little over half has been completed. As against this, fencing in Punjab started in 1988 and was completed in 3 years by 1991. The quality of fencing in Punjab is superior.” The accord contains provision against future infiltration by erecting physical barriers like wall and barbed wire fencing, which appears
to be totally unpractical as migration across the border is still continuing (Singh 1990: 292-93).

According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs (2010-11: 39-40), "In order to prevent illegal migration and other anti-national activities from across the Bangladesh border, Indian government has sanctioned construction of border roads and fencing in two phases. The total length of Indo-Bangladesh border to be fenced is 3436.59 km.; out of which 2735.12 km. of fencing has so far been completed. There have been some problems in construction of fencing in certain stretches on this border due to riverine/low lying areas, population within 150 yards of the border, pending land acquisition cases and protests by border population, led to delay in completion of the project. The balance work is under progress and the project is targeted to be completed by March, 2012. In addition 3580.20 km. of border patrol roads have also been constructed out of sanctioned length of about 4426.11 km." Out of total 263 km. Assam - Bangladesh border, 221.56 km. of fencing has so far been completed and another 42 km. is yet to fenced. Another 256.92 km. of border roads have so far been completed in Assam-Bangladesh border (MOHA 2010-2011: 39-40).

The information provided by the Assam Accord Minister, Bhumidhar Barman, in the state Assembly presents a sorry tale. From 1985 up to May 31, 2010, as many as 49891 foreigners were detected by the tribunals under the Foreigners Act and the erstwhile Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983. However, only 2326 foreigners have been expelled to Bangladesh in the past 25 years. From 1985 and up to December 2009, only 1428 foreigners who had re-entered the State were pushed back (Ta1ukdar 2010). For about six long years, Assam past through its most critical and troublesome juncture of history – socio-economic conditions has shattered by a variety of clashes. The signing of the Assam Accord between the government and the AASU leaders marked the end of the conflict and heralded a message of peace and tranquillity in Assam. The accord created a situation in which there was neither winner nor a looser and both the parties claimed their own victory (Singh 1990: 333). It can be observed the above discussion that the main focus of the Assam Accord was on the pivotal question of foreign nationals, and the Accord spelt out a clear policy and elaborates measures to sort it out in the best and
the most realistic manner. Apart from the well-defined steps, the Accord also stipulated wide ranging measures to prevent future infiltrations and to strengthen border security to fully seal all penetration routes.