CHAPTER - III

Migration of Farm Cultivators from East Bengal

Amount of Waste Lands and Population Growth in the Brahmaputra Valley and
certain districts of Eastern Bengal during the early decades of the 20th Century

The question of settling the enormous waste lands of Assam, a potential source of revenue, had always preoccupied the minds of the colonial authorities. William Robinson, a colonial official in his book ‘A Descriptive Account of Assam’ stated

“The amount of waste lands in Assam may be estimated at considerably more than one half the extent of its area. These wastes are fully as rich as any of the lands now under cultivation. The scantiness of the population, combined with political causes, among which the ancient feudal customs, and the consequent minute division of land among the peasantry, were probably the most important, have alone prevented them from being turned to profitable account.”1

In 1853–54, A. J. M. Mills, in his report on the province of Assam wrote that Assam had superabundance of waste lands but scarce labour to develop them; but he was strongly against the idea of settling these waste lands with the natives as according to him they did not possess the capital and the only recourse “is to seduce others to settle into these grants so that as much or even more become waste in one place than is reclaimed in other.”2

1 Robinson, William. A Descriptive Account of Assam (Reprinted), Sanskaran Prakashak, New Delhi, 1975, p. 217.
Although Assam was endowed with great amount of waste lands, ironically it was depended on importation of food for its support from nearby Bengal and Burma during the last decades of 19th century: in 1897 – 98, the net import of rice from Bengal into the Brahmaputra valley was 694, 725 maunds. Sir Charles Elliot in his report on the administration of Assam for 1880 – 81, referred to the large area of waste lands in Assam – good flat alluvial land – waiting for the sickle and plough to produce large crops. Sir Edward Gait in the Census Report of Assam, 1891, stated that Assam with good amount of cultivable lands, fertility of the soil, and the low rates, had failed to attract some portions of the overcrowded cultivators of Bengal because there was no inducements to attract ryots to come to Assam to take up land for cultivation, unlike the tea industry where indigent labourers were recruited and brought to the province at the expense of the person for whom they were to labour. In 1898, Sir Henry Cotton suggested that aboriginal tribes particularly the Santhals could be employed to clear the jungles and reclaim the waste lands of Assam as these aboriginal were good at jungle clearing; but at the same time as these cultivators were bad as agriculturists and also to retain the land under cultivation, it was necessary to import a colony of cultivators and to replace woodcutters by agriculturists. In 1901 a slight falling off in the in the number of immigrants from Bengal in the district of Goalpara was noticed by B. C. Allen, the then Census Superintendent, and it made him to remark that Goalpara was a purely agricultural district and it had nothing to attract immigrants.

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1911, J. Mc Swiney, the Census Superintendent, said that it was only because of the tea industry that there was an inflow of immigration into Assam.\(^8\)

The massive opposition to immigration and the assertion of the rights of ‘the sons of soil’ by the local Assamese elite witnessed during the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) Century, stands in stark contrast to the welcoming attitude of the nascent Assamese middle class of the 19\(^{th}\) century who were notable votaries of the view that the province of Assam cannot be developed unless immigrant cultivators and labourers were roped in from mainland India to develop the vast untapped fertile waste lands of Assam.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, one of the earliest luminary of the Assamese middle class subscribed to the idea that that in order to provide against famine and similar other misfortunes as well as to improve the agriculture of the country, the government could bring out from Europe and Upper India, a sufficient number of men well versed in the art of agriculture, to teach the people the better management of their farms, and to instruct them to cultivate every variety of valuable products and improved methods of drainage, irrigation, embankments, and every necessary means connected with agriculture.\(^9\)

Gunaviram Barua, a noted public intellectual of Assam of the late 19\(^{th}\) century and an associate of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, too favoured immigration into Assam to utilize its waste lands, and he cited 3 important factors which would work as incentives for the immigrants like cheap yet fertile lands, attractive earnings for skilled labourer and

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craftsmen in view of local man power shortage, and the prevailing condition of easy matrimony.\textsuperscript{10}

But there were certain reasons which acted as hindrances towards the free flow of immigration into Assam till the early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. The major hindrances identified by the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Henry Cotton, and other British officials like Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick, were the obstacle of climate and language, and the risk to health coupled with initial morality to be expected in clearing these waste lands.\textsuperscript{11} Lack of effective communication links between Assam and Bengal was another major problem and Henry Cotton pointed out that

“What is really necessary for the facilitation of immigration into Assam is the connection of Gauhati with the Eastern Bengal Railway system, and until that is done, the great majority of the immigrant coolies will undoubtedly follow the Goalundu steamer route, as they do at present. It will be impossible to work out any large scheme of immigration into Assam, and so supply the inextinguishable need of a province in which five – sixth of the culturable land is still uncultivated, unless the extension of the Assam - Bengal Railway is carried out.”\textsuperscript{12}

In the decade from 1891 to 1901 the Nowgong district was devastated by the ‘Kala Azar’ fever which carried off over one quarter of its indigenous population and as result there was a great demand for the ex tea garden labourers to take up the cultivation of the

\textsuperscript{10} Chakravorty, Gorki. \textit{Assam’s Hinterland, Society and Economy in the Char areas}, Akansha Publication House, New Delhi, 2009, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{ibid}, p. 16.
derelict lands. In fact all had pinned their hope on these ex tea garden labourers to reclaim the waste lands of Assam but Chief Commissioner Henry Cotton was against the idea as it would be against the interest of the tea industry. Colonization by the ex tea garden labourers was slow, and Cotton remarked

“we must wait for the Greek Calends if we are prepared to sit still until the time when the waste lands of Assam shall be cleared and cultivated to any material extent by the labour of the time expired tea garden coolies.”

If this was the state of affairs in the province of Assam, in the neighbouring province of Bengal, more particularly in the three Eastern divisions of Bengal (Rajshahi, Dacca, Mymensingh) the situation was radically different as in these parts of Bengal, there was an enormous scarcity of waste lands for settlement and an ever booming population. The tables below will illustrate the point.

Table 3.1: Population of some of the districts of Eastern Bengal in 1901, from where immigration took place into Assam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts of Eastern Bengal</th>
<th>Area (square mile)</th>
<th>Number of Towns</th>
<th>Number of villages</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Population/square mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>6332</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9770</td>
<td>3,915,068</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3720</td>
<td>1,420,461</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 Ibid.
Table 3.2: Population of Assam Proper, Census of Assam, 1901.\textsuperscript{17}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population per square mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>462,052</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>589,187</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>337,313</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>261,160</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>597,969</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>371,396</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: The main Agricultural statistics of 3 districts of Eastern Bengal for the year 1903 – 04, are shown below.\textsuperscript{18}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Districts</th>
<th>Area (square mile)</th>
<th>Cultivated (square mile)</th>
<th>Cultivable Waste (square mile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>6332</td>
<td>3758</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>3493</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{17} ibid, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{18} Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Eastern Bengal and Assam, For the district of Mymensingh see page. 326, for Rangpur see page. 266, for Pabna, see page. 286.
Table 3.4: The main agricultural statistics for the Kamrup district for the year 1903 – 04, are shown below.\(^{19}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdivisions of the Kamrup district</th>
<th>Settled (Square mile)</th>
<th>Unsettled (Square mile)</th>
<th>Cultivated (Square mile)</th>
<th>Forests (Square mile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1075</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauhati</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1024</td>
<td>2834</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: The main agricultural statistics for the Darrang district for the year 1903 – 04, are shown below.\(^{20}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdivisions of the Darrang district</th>
<th>Settled (Square mile)</th>
<th>Unsettled (Square mile)</th>
<th>Cultivated (Square mile)</th>
<th>Forests (Square mile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mangaldai</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tezpur</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>2743</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6: The main agricultural statistics for the Nowgong district for the year 1903 – 04, are shown below.\(^{21}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Settled Area (Square mile)</th>
<th>Unsettled (Square mile)</th>
<th>Cultivated (Square mile)</th>
<th>Forests (Square mile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>3417</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>3417</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{19}\) *ibid*, p. 535.
\(^{20}\) *ibid*, p. 552.
\(^{21}\) *ibid*, p. 565.
In 1905, the province of Bengal was partitioned and a new province of Assam and Eastern Bengal was formed by transferring 15 districts from the three divisions of East Bengal to Assam.\(^{22}\)

A revenue official P.G. Melitius, explained in the Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam, in 1908, the value of the Brahmaputra valley to the transferred districts of East Bengal by concluding that it will provide home in the future for the surplus population of Bengal when the population which in many of them was increasing very rapidly outgrows the means of subsistence.\(^{23}\)

Towards the last part of the 19th century, and the early decades of the 20th century, the colonial authorities made massive investments in developing the railway network within and outside the province of Assam. From 1901 – 1911, Rs 28 million were spent for an additional 166 miles of tracks in Assam proper and another 33.1 million, for 85 miles of tracks in Goalpara and another 100 miles in other parts of the province.\(^{24}\) By 1911, railways through transportation became possible between Assam proper and the rest of India and as remarked by Amalendu Guha “all this (expansion of Assam – Bengal Railways) brought forward a qualitative change in the situation in two ways.\(^{25}\)

First, the land hungry jute oriented peasants of East Bengal could now come by thousands to colonize the waste lands along the river Brahmaputra on which the production potential of tea or wet rice was almost nil.

\(^{22}\) ibid, p. 13.
\(^{23}\) Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1908, Government Gazette, Published by Authority, Shillong, pp. 78, 79.
\(^{25}\) ibid, p. 199.
Secondly, the usury and the trading capital which had accumulated in the past decades in the hands of the Marwari Banias, could now be more productively used and speedily turned over as a result of increased commodity circulation.

**Initial phase of the Migration**

In the Census Report of Assam, 1911, it was stated that settlers representing three neighbouring divisions of Bengal – Rajshahi, Chittagong, Dacca - had been censused in different parts of Assam: most of the people of the Chittagong hailed from Tippera and had been settled in the neighbouring district of Sylhet; while the majority of those born in the Rajshahi division were censused in Goalpara and represented settlers from Rangpur and Pabna district, at the same time over 75% of the immigrants from the Dacca division were enumerated in Sylhet and Goalpara and more than two third of them came from the district of Mymensingh.\(^{26}\) The Census of 1911 was the first of the census reports of Assam where comment was made on the extraordinary in course of settlers to the char lands of Goalpara from the Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, and Rangpur.\(^{27}\)

Table 3.7: Immigration from contiguous districts of Bengal into Assam, according to the Census of Assam, 1911.\(^{28}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts of East Bengal</th>
<th>Goalpara</th>
<th>Kamrup</th>
<th>Darrang</th>
<th>Nowgong</th>
<th>Sibsagar</th>
<th>Lakhimpur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>1,818</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>15,304</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{28}\) McSwiney, J. *Census of India*, 1911, Volume - III, Assam, Part - 2, Tables, (Table XI) pp. 64, 65.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts of East Bengal</th>
<th>Goalpara</th>
<th>Kamrup</th>
<th>Darrang</th>
<th>Nowgong</th>
<th>Lakhimpur</th>
<th>Sibsagar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>6,931.</td>
<td>128.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu: 6,821</td>
<td>Hindu: 106</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hindu: 41</td>
<td>Hindu: 14</td>
<td>Hindu: 12</td>
<td>Hindu: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim: 110</td>
<td>Muslim: 22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims: 5</td>
<td>Muslims: X</td>
<td>Muslims: X</td>
<td>Muslims: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>14,329.</td>
<td>1427.</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu: 3,461</td>
<td>Hindu: 428</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hindu: 10</td>
<td>Hindu: 39</td>
<td>Hindu: 62</td>
<td>Hindu: 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim: 10,868</td>
<td>Muslim: 999</td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims: 486</td>
<td>Muslims: 3</td>
<td>Muslims: 3</td>
<td>Muslims: 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8: showing the number of immigrants from the districts of East Bengal into the districts of Assam proper, according to the Census of Assam, 1921.\(^{29}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>31,443</td>
<td>3,192</td>
<td>29,621</td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>142</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29,621</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3013</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogra</td>
<td>3088</td>
<td>2,835</td>
<td>2,812</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>194</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2894</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca</td>
<td>7851</td>
<td>4483</td>
<td>3,458</td>
<td>1,754</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>2,917</td>
<td>2,213</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>1,692</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2190</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td></td>
<td>911</td>
<td></td>
<td>704</td>
<td></td>
<td>1410</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5661</td>
<td>3,458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,213</td>
<td></td>
<td>1016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>77,753</td>
<td>29,575</td>
<td>74,841</td>
<td>12,460</td>
<td>12,286</td>
<td>52,193</td>
<td>46,952</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,912</td>
<td>382</td>
<td></td>
<td>174</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,241</td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74,841</td>
<td>193</td>
<td></td>
<td>12,286</td>
<td></td>
<td>46,952</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table it is evident that the Eastern Bengali settlers had increased more than four fold from 1911 to 1921 [from nearly 54,000 to around 2,58,000] in the Brahmaputra valley.\textsuperscript{30} Nearly 80\% of these immigrants from Eastern Bengal were Muhammadan cultivators, and only 30,000 are non agriculturists: they are traders, shopkeepers, timber merchants, clerks, professional men.\textsuperscript{31} The few censused in the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur are nearly all engaged in trade, less than 300 cultivators of the class in question having settled in either district.\textsuperscript{32}

There were two main factors which made them leave their districts in East Bengal and immigrate into Assam:\textsuperscript{33}

1) Pressure on the soil at home and sometime actual loss of their land and even homestead by diluvium.

2) Cheap, plentiful fertile land, with the freedom of a ‘\textit{ryotwari}’ settlement in Assam in place of the expensive and uncomfortable holdings as tenants or under tenants in Bengal.

In the Census report of 1931, P. G. Mukherjee, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, remarked on the reasons of the migration of the East Bengalis into the Nowgong district when he stated

“Not having sufficient land of their own in their home districts, and leading a life of difficulty with the drawbacks peculiar to under tenants of Bengal \textit{zamindars} in overcrowded villages, it was quite natural for these industrious

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{ibid}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{ibid}.
agriculturists to be attracted in large numbers to this districts (Nowgong) where they could occupy as much virgin soil as they could reasonably expect to bring under cultivation, and live an independent life with no overlord above them except the government...."34

The early migrants among the East Bengalis generally came first to secure the land, build houses, and then their families followed.35 On first taking up their new land, they cleared the jungle and dug it up by the Nuniya labourers.36 This and their railway and steamer fares, some house building materials, and possibly some land price paid to local people, or unauthorized fees to subordinate revenue officers constituted their only expense in opening up their new life.37 They erected their own characteristic type of house and their villages could be distinguished at once from the Assamese.38

The Census Report of Assam, 1921, stated

"The two Upper districts and the frontier tracts are scarcely touched as yet. In Goalpara nearly 20% of the population is made up of these settlers. The next favourite destination is the district of Nowgong where the immigrants constituted nearly 14% of the whole population. In the Kamrup district, lands are being taken up rapidly especially in the Barpeta sub-division. In Darrang, exploration and settlement by the colonists are in an earlier stage; they have not yet penetrated far from the banks of the Brahmaputra. Almost every train and

36 ibid.
37 ibid.
38 ibid.
steamers bring parties of these settlers and it seems likely that their march will extend further up the valley and away from the river before long.”

In the Census Report of Assam, 1931, it was reported that settlers from East Bengal could be noticed in the Khathowel, Juria, Laokhowa, Dhing, Bokoni, Lahorighat, mauza in the Nowgong district. Settlement of these migrants in the Darrang district took place in the Mangaldoi subdivision as there was little room for expansion in the Tezpur subdivision as most of the Brahmaputra’s ‘Char’ lands were reserved for the professional graziers. In the district of Kamrup, the Deputy Commissioner reported the immigration of Eastern Bengal Muhammadans continued throughout the decade in the Barpeta subdivision and parts of the Sadr subdivision. The char lands along the Brahmaputra had nearly been filled up and all available waste lands were gradually being occupied by them. The increase of 69% in the population of Barpeta was solely due to Eastern Bengali immigrants. In Goalpara, there was not much increase as all the available land in the riparian tracts suitable for settlement were already being taken up and there was not much room left for further expansion. Some of the settlers migrated from Dhubri thana to Sarbhog in Barpeta subdivision and from Lakhipur thana to the Chamoria side of the Kamrup district – probably with the idea of taking up settlement directly under the government. This led C.S. Mullan to point out that since most of the waste lands in Goalpara and Nowgong district had been taken up for cultivation, in the future the trend of the immigrants should

\[39\] ibid.  
\[41\] ibid.  
\[42\] ibid.  
\[43\] ibid.
therefore be more towards Mangaldoi, North Lakhimpur, and Kamrup as there were large areas of waste lands in these parts of Assam.  

C. S. Mullan remarked

“It is sad but by no means improbable that in another 30 years Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home.”

Table 3.9: Immigration from contiguous districts of Bengal in the Assam valley as shown in the Census report of Assam, 1931.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigration from contiguous districts of Bengal</th>
<th>Goalpara</th>
<th>Kamrup</th>
<th>Darrang</th>
<th>Nowgong</th>
<th>Sibsagar</th>
<th>Lakhimpur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri.</td>
<td>13,665</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur.</td>
<td>17,870</td>
<td>3168</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh.</td>
<td>79,890</td>
<td>90,774</td>
<td>30,264</td>
<td>108,453</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>2431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tippera</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1224</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>1012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111,849</td>
<td>94,944</td>
<td>32,002</td>
<td>109,755</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>3511</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The migration of Bengali cultivators from the districts of East Bengal particularly the Mymensingh region were to a certain extent financed by the Marwari and the Assamese money lenders so that the migrants could re-claim lands and expand the cultivation of jute,

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44 *ibid.*
45 *ibid.*
ahu rice, pulses and vegetables. The immigrants were financed by their own headmen (‘matabars’) even the ‘hati’- indigenous co-operative bank funds - of Barpeta were involved in this financing to a small extent. P. G. Mukherjee, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong remarked that the Marwari Mahajans were ready to accommodate them with loans at usurious interest as long as crop prospects were good. H.K. Barpujari narrates that the erstwhile Assam - Bengal Railways had two reserved bogies. ‘Mairabari’, Mymensingh’ attached to it which bought fresh land hungry immigrants from East Bengal to Assam.

The East Bengali immigrants did not settle singly but by families and it was reported in the 1921 census, that the men generally came first to secure the land and build houses and the family followed. In fact there was a good proportion of women aged between 15 to 40, and the total number of immigrants along with their children who were born after arrival in Assam was approximately around 300,000. C. S. Mullan pointed out in the 1931 Census that out of 338,000 persons born in Mymensingh and censused in Assam, over 1, 52, 000, were women. The following table will show the number of men and women who immigrated into Assam from East Bengal as was given in the Census Report of 1921:

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48 ibid.
52 ibid, p. 41.
Table 3.10: Hindu migrants from certain districts of East Bengal (Census of Assam, 1921).\textsuperscript{54}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>6995</td>
<td>3904</td>
<td>3091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>4100</td>
<td>2410</td>
<td>1690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>2540</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogra</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca</td>
<td>7124</td>
<td>4993</td>
<td>2131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>9892</td>
<td>6176</td>
<td>3716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30,835</td>
<td>19,609</td>
<td>11,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.11: Muslim migrants from certain districts of East Bengal (Census of Assam 1921).\textsuperscript{55}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>12,294</td>
<td>7064</td>
<td>5230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>32,728</td>
<td>18,766</td>
<td>13,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogra</td>
<td>5814</td>
<td>3117</td>
<td>2697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca</td>
<td>13,999</td>
<td>9302</td>
<td>4697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>162,378</td>
<td>89,067</td>
<td>73,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227,356</td>
<td>127,407</td>
<td>99,949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{55} ibid.
**Increase in the Muslim Population**

One of the important consequences of the migration of the East Bengali Muslims into Assam was the striking increase in the population of the Muslims in Assam, and the increase was more visible in the district of Nowgong, and also in the district of Kamrup and Darrang. Table 3.12: would illustrate the point.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1941</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>211,562</td>
<td>316,490</td>
<td>387,709</td>
<td>468,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>64,627</td>
<td>111,546</td>
<td>240,422</td>
<td>367,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>20,305</td>
<td>36,535</td>
<td>67,503</td>
<td>120,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>15,689</td>
<td>70,582</td>
<td>177,762</td>
<td>250,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>29,718</td>
<td>34,994</td>
<td>43,907</td>
<td>51,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>13,419</td>
<td>15,446</td>
<td>25,949</td>
<td>44,579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A close analysis of the table will show that there was a stupendous increase in the population of the Muslims in the Lower and Central districts of the Assam Valley but the figures from Nowgong were more startling as in 1911, out of a total population of 303,596, Muslims constituted only 15,689 but in 1941, the Muslim population had increased to an astounding 250,113 out of a total population of 710,800 and surely immigration was responsible for this massive increase.  

(For details see Appendix ‘D’)

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56 Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943, Appendix. 1, Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File No. RD23/43, Shillong, 1943.
57 *ibid.*
In 1915, a consolidated set of rules for the grant of lease and settlement of revenue in
respect of lands held for ordinary cultivation outside the limits of the town lands were
published. A remarkable feature of these new rules was that the Deputy Commissioner,
and the Sub divisional officers, in some respect but under the control of the Deputy
Commissioner was empowered to settle waste lands through lease, grant or otherwise.
The most important aspect in these rules was that lease for waste lands could be obtained
either by squatting, or application to the Deputy Commissioner. Furthermore, Deputy
Commissioner had the power to grant permanent lease to the squatters if he satisfied two
conditions – if it appears that land had been taken for permanent dwelling house, or
permanent cultivation. It seemed that these rules were tailor-made to suit the interest of
the Eastern Bengali Muslims, particularly their early settlers as most of them occupied land
by squatting and continued to do so. By 1926 – 27, considerable amount of wastelands
were settled with the immigrants and it was in the district of Nowgong that the increase was
more remarkable.

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58 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Revenue - A, February, 1915, Nos. 124 -143, [Revision of Rules
under section 12, 29, 34, 40, of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1885], p. 11.
59 ibid.
60 ibid.
61 ibid.
Table 3.13: contains figure of land settled from 1916–17 to 1925–26 in the districts of the Assam valley (Figures furnished by A. W. Botham in reply to a question by Kameswar Das on the issue of land settled with the indigenous and immigrants during the session of the Assam Legislative Council in 1927.)\(^{62}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts or Subdivisions</th>
<th>Amount of land settled with the immigrants (in acres) for the last ten years</th>
<th>Amount of land settled with the indigenous inhabitants (in acres) for the last ten years</th>
<th>Total area now available for settlement (in acres)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>15,382</td>
<td>46,131</td>
<td>46,303</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>42,088</td>
<td>68,084</td>
<td>135,877</td>
<td>From 1916 – 17 to 1926 – 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauhati</td>
<td>12,878</td>
<td>52,012</td>
<td>272,731</td>
<td>- do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangaldai</td>
<td>15,260</td>
<td>160,061</td>
<td>427,580</td>
<td>From 1917 – 18 to 1926 – 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tezpur</td>
<td>5936</td>
<td>154,944</td>
<td>64,657</td>
<td>- do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lakhimpur</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>16,980</td>
<td>478,470</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>79,057</td>
<td>68,904</td>
<td>1,756,338</td>
<td>From 1916 – 17 to 1925 - 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1928, the colonization scheme was started in the district of Nowgong and a colonization officer was appointed and two ‘mauzas’ Lahorighat with four villages and Bokoni with 25 villages and an area of 28,000 bighas of land were opened up for settlement with the immigrants and included within the colonization scheme. In 1929, 16 villages in a compact block in Mayang, in the Nowgong district was included in the colonization scheme and by 31\textsuperscript{st} March, 1931, 16,647 bighas of land were settled with the immigrants on payment of the first installment of premium (Rs 33,294 were realized from the first premium). The colonization scheme was then extended to 23 villages in the Dolgaon and Orang mauza in the Darrang district from April, 1930. (For details about the Colonization scheme in Nowgong district, see Appendix ‘C’)

\textit{C. S. Mullan’s view on immigration from East Bengal and Governor Micheal Keane’s remarks.}

In the Census Report of Assam, 1931, C. S. Mullan, the Census Superintendent, described the immigration of the East Bengali Muslims as the most important event in the province during the period from 1911 to 1931, an event which he thought was likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam, and to destroy more surely than did the Burmese invasion of 1820’s the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization. He described the East Bengali migrants as a vast horde of land hungry invaders, and stated in military terms that

\begin{itemize}
  \item[63] Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Rev - A, September, 1929, \textit{Colonization Scheme in the district of Nowgong}, p. 10.
  \item[64] Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Revenue - A, December, 1931, Nos. 220 – 224, \textit{(Proposal for the extension of the principle of charging Premium for Settlement of Government Lands for ordinary cultivation to areas outside the colonization scheme)}, pp. 10, 11.
  \item[65] \textit{ibid}, p. 12.
\end{itemize}
“their invasion began sometime before 1911, and by 1921, the first army corps had passed into Assam and had practically conquered the district of Goalpara, and from 1921 – 1931, the second army corps of the invaders had consolidated their position in that district and had also completed the conquest of Nowgong; the Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup, had fallen to their attack and Darrang was being invaded, Sibsagar had escaped completely so far but the few thousand Mymensinghias in North Lakhimpur were acting as an outpost which might during the next decade proved to be a valuable basis of major operation.”

C. S. Mullan then went on to compare the emigrants of the Mymensinghias to vultures by stating “wheresoever’s the Caracas there will the vultures be gathered together – where there is a waste land thither flock the Mymensinghias.” He observed

“The way these Mymensinghias seized upon the vacant area in the Assam Valley was uncanny as without fuss, without tumult, without undue trouble, to the district revenue staff, a population which might be around half a million had transplanted itself from Bengal to the Assam Valley during the last 25 years, and their movement could be compared to the mass movement of a large body of ants.”

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67 ibid, pp, 49, 50, 51.
68 ibid, p. 51.
69 ibid.
Sir Laurie Hammond, who was the governor of Assam, at the time of the publication of the 1931 Census, remarked in one of his speeches that it would be easier to build a dam across the Brahmaputtra than to keep out the *Mymensinghias*.\(^{70}\)

Mullan remarks went on to add further fear among the Assamese and its leadership who were already concerned with the issue of unabated immigration from East Bengal. Mullan’s views were however challenged by none other than the Governor of Assam, Michael Keane, while he was addressing the Assam Legislative Council in March, 1933.\(^{71}\) He said that the issue of immigration had been exercising the mind of the Assam Valley people along two lines: economic - in that the immigrants were encroaching on the lands of the people of the Assam Valley, and general - in that it threatened to destroy the culture and language of the Assamese.\(^{72}\) He pointed out that it was indeed startling to find that at the opening of the 20\(^{th}\) Century, the population of Assam was 6, 200, 000 people which had jumped to 9, 200, 000 in the year 1931 – 32, an increase of 3 million or nearly 50% in the period of little more than one generation.\(^{73}\) At the same time the number of immigrants from Bengal with their descendants had been estimated to be 550, 000 in the census of 1931, and these were the immigrants about whom apprehension were made but according to the governor they made up a comparatively small portion of that increase of 3 million that had taken place from 1901 to 1931.\(^{74}\)

Secondly, the governor assured the natives of Assam that the government would take all necessary steps so that the indigenous population of Assam were not squeezed out, but

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\(^{70}\) *Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy*, 1943.

\(^{71}\) *Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council*, 1933, *The Assam Gazette*, Part VI, March – April, 1933, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1933, p. 4.

\(^{72}\) *ibid*.

\(^{73}\) *ibid*.

\(^{74}\) *ibid*. 
the government was also committed to develop this province by bringing under cultivation huge swathes of land which for many generations had remained as the haunt of the tigers, the wild elephant, and the rhinoceros.\textsuperscript{75} However the situation had changed drastically as these areas had at present settled homestead and field of corns and during the last decade the area brought under lease for cultivation was about 800,000 acres which had only added to the strength, resource, and wealth of the province.\textsuperscript{76}

Thirdly, the governor observed that so far there had been no indications that the immigrants would submerge and destroy the language, civilization, and culture of the Assamese.\textsuperscript{77} On the contrary the speakers of Assamese were increasing.\textsuperscript{78} To prove his point he quoted C. S. Mullan remarks on the language issue in the Census of Assam, 1931, where he observed that in spite of large increase in the population of Assam, at every census since 1901, the percentage of speakers of Assamese to the total population had remained steady and in fact the “language is at present in no danger of supersession.”\textsuperscript{79}

Lastly, the governor reminded that it was necessary to bear in mind the distinction between immigration and armed invasion.\textsuperscript{80} He concluded his view on this issue by pointing out that he could recall no incidence where the peaceful infiltration of industrious tillers of the soil had ousted the language and culture of their adopted country.\textsuperscript{81} He remarked “It betrays a strange lack of confidence in your language and culture to think that

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{75} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{76} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{77} ibid, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{78} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{80} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} ibid.}
they can be so easily submerged or destroyed.”\textsuperscript{82} At the end, he stated that the policy of the government would be to continue with the development of the resources of the country consistently with the safeguarding of the interest of the people of this country.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Demand for Restrictions on immigration}

\textbf{The Line System}

Immigration of farm cultivators from East Bengal went sufficiently well as long as these cultivators were engaged in filling up the vacant space in the swampy areas along the Brahmaputra.\textsuperscript{84} But as they drew nearer to the areas held by the indigenous people, signs soon become visible of the apparent clash of interest between the indigenous people and the immigrants and of the danger to the internal life and habits of the former.\textsuperscript{85} More particularly in the submontane areas, which was peopled predominantly by the tribal and backward classes, apprehensions started that the introduction of a foreign, advanced, and pushing element would spell disaster for the local population.\textsuperscript{86} In the absence of a clear cut direction from the government, district officers adopted such measures as would check the ever increasing influx and spread of these immigrants to areas inhabited by the tribals and backward classes.\textsuperscript{87} In fact in 1916, the Director of Land Records proposed that a special colonization officer be appointed to assist the settlement of incoming immigrants and coordinate the work of all districts in which immigration had taken place.\textsuperscript{88} The proposal

\textsuperscript{82} ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} ibid.
was supported by the Deputy Commissioner of all the districts of Assam valley but ultimately it failed to materialize.\textsuperscript{89}

On February 26, 1920, a letter written by the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, to the Commissioner, Assam Valley, informed that lines had been drawn in the Barpeta subdivision across which immigrants could not settle and on March 5, 1920, the Deputy Commissioner, Nowgong also informed of lines being laid down in villages to restrict indiscriminate settlement by immigrants.\textsuperscript{90}

In Nowgong district, villages were divided into different categories like Assamese villages, immigrant villages, mixed villages, unsettled villages reserved for the Assamese, and unsettled villages reserved for the immigrants.\textsuperscript{91}

The Line System “is a short title for the system by which immigrants from Bengal are required to settle in certain definite areas and are not allowed to take settlement of land under government in other areas.”\textsuperscript{92} The expression Line System arose from the fact that in the early day’s lands in the villages of Nowgong district were divided into 3 classes\textsuperscript{93}

a) Those in which immigrants might settle freely.

b) Those in which they might not be given land at all.

c) Those in which lines were drawn either on the map, or on the ground, on the one side of which immigrants might settle and on the other side of which they might not settle.

\textsuperscript{89} ibid, pp. 2, 3.
\textsuperscript{90} ibid, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{91} ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council, 1936, The Assam Gazette, Part VI, 1936, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1936, p. 1526.
\textsuperscript{93} ibid, pp. 1526, 1527.
There were three reasons for this system of control.\footnote{Report of the Line System Committee, Shillong, February, 1938, Volume - I, Chapter I, p. 1.}

(A) To help the immigrants – All sorts of people whether they were Assamese, foreigners, land record staff, sold lands to the immigrants, though often the land was not theirs and it was to stop such fraud, settlement powers were given to the Colonization Officers or the Deputy Collector who could tell the immigrant where to settle.

(B) To help the indigenous Assamese especially people from the Kachari tribe as they were offered prices for their lands which they could not resist. This may lead to a situation “in which the easy going Assamese could not put up a fight against the virile Mymensinghis and the play of natural forces would drive them from their homes.”

(C) To give government the benefit of premium money which prior to this control system went into the hands of speculators.

G. M. Prichard, Revenue Secretary to the Government of Assam in 1929, while explaining the advantage of the colonization scheme in Nowgong, highlighted these points: the colonization scheme would increase the revenue of the province which was badly needed. He stressed that the immigrants were accustomed to pay salami to the landlord in their native district in Bengal and the government in this case (in Assam) was a landlord and landlord all over the country were accustomed to levy Salami on first settlement of land; a systemic scheme of colonization instead of the haphazard of squatting would settle the immigrants in compact areas and would make it clear to the immigrants where to settle and
where not to; some of the money realized from the premium amount would be spent for the development of the colonization area.95

B) *Restriction on transfer of Periodic Pattas*

Inter related with the issue of influx of these immigrants, was another important matter, that was the question of transfer of periodic *pattas* to the immigrants by the indigenous people and hence opinions were sought in 1926, by the Government of Assam through the Deputy Commissioners of the district of Kamrup, Nowgong, Lakhimpur, and Darrang to ascertain whether public opinion was in favour of legislation to prevent alienation of land to immigrants from Bengal?

In his letter, dated 8th July, 1926, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, J. A. Dawson, informed the Commissioner, Assam valley division, that in his correspondence with Mahidhar Bhuyan, who represented Assamese *rayats*, it was suggested by the latter that a clause needs to be inserted into the periodic *pattas*, existing as well as future, prohibiting transfer of land without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner to any one coming from East Bengal.96 Similarly a letter written by F. A. S. Thomas, Deputy Commissioner, North Lakhimpur, to the Commissioner, Assam valley division, dated 5th July 1926, informed that in his consultation with Faiznur Ali, Member of the Assam Legislative Council, and others, the general opinion was that they were not opposed to the

95 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Rev - A, September, 1929, *Colonization Scheme in the district of Nowgong*, p. 13.
96 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Rev – A, December, 1926, Nos. 94 – 130, *[Control of the settlement and Transfer of lands to the Mymensinghias immigrants in the Assam valley division]*, p. 19.
idea of allowing the East Bengali immigrants into the province provided that they assimilate with the Assamese culture, custom, language, and mode of life.\(^97\)

Rai Bahadur P. G. Mukherjee, the Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara, in his letter to the Commissioner Assam valley division, dated 8\(^{th}\) July, 1926, stated that public opinion in general but not unanimous was in favour of some legislation to prohibit transfer of periodic pattas to the Mymensinghias.\(^98\) Local people usually hate them but the lure of money tempts them to sell their land to the East Bengali migrants.\(^99\) The Deputy Commissioner was of the opinion that any restriction on transfer of land would be repugnant to the interests of the immigrants and would devalue the price of land.\(^100\) G. M. Prichard, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong district, was of the opinion that all but the chairman of the local Board was in favour of a clause prohibiting transfer of land to the immigrant although many are lukewarm that this will lower the value of lands.\(^101\) The Settlement officer S. P. Desai, informed the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, in a letter dated 1\(^{st}\) July, 1926, that except among the educated Muhammadans, land speculators, money lenders and shopkeepers, all were in favour of legislation prohibiting transfer of periodic pattas to the immigrants.\(^102\)

On 19\(^{th}\) August, 1926, G.T. Lloyd, Second Secretary to the Government of Assam, informed the Commissioner, Assam Valley, that the governor in council has decided that the government had no intention of initiating legislation on this issue unless a more decided

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\(^{97}\) ibid, p. 25.
\(^{98}\) ibid, p. 14, 15.
\(^{99}\) ibid.
\(^{100}\) ibid.
\(^{101}\) ibid, p. 18, 19.
\(^{102}\) ibid, p. 16.
demand for it was manifested than so far had been displayed. Till then the Deputy Commissioner should control new settlement with immigrants (Mymensinghias) either by ‘Lines’ within villages or by the exclusion of the Mymensinghias from the whole village or the Mauza as may be required by the circumstance of a particular locality. Annual pattas purchased by the Mymensingias from the Assamese must be cancelled in areas where settlements are allowed only with the Assamese. In 1928, a Conference of District officers was held in Shillong, to discuss various questions concerning the immigration problems. The general opinion of the conference was that the Line System had been reasonably successful in Nowgong district but a failure in certain parts of Kamrup; the number of lines must be reduced, simplified, and straightened; the colonization scheme was discussed and a colonization officer was appointed in Nowgong; to protect the indigenous Kacharis in north Kamrup it was proposed that they should be given coloured pattas (blue) where a provision had to be inserted that prohibits them to transfer lands to the immigrants from East Bengal. The Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943, pointed out that for the last 30 years, Assam had never really closed its gates for immigrants from Bengal, and in fact there was no ban on immigrant cultivators purchasing periodic pattas land in Assam from indigenous settlers, as these pattas convey a heritable and transferable rights which the government could not abrogate.

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103 ibid, p. 25.
104 ibid.
105 ibid.
107 ibid.
Problem of Landlessness among the East Bengali migrants:

The problem of landlessness among the East Bengali migrants was one of the major issues taken up by the Muslim League leadership in Assam and they even tried to communalize the matter. There were a number of reasons cited for this persistent problem. The Line System Committee Report of 1938, cited two reasons for the problem of landlessness among the immigrants: Extraordinary rapid growth of population among the immigrants on the one hand, and rigid restriction of settlement of land on the other, had combined to create a large landless class which was annually growing in number, “the immigrant as was well known a prolific race.”¹⁰⁹ To emphasize the point, the report cited the Settlement Report of 1932, of Nowgong district and according to the report the immigrant groups were located in the following mauzas of, Lakhowa, Dhing, Bokoni, Lahorighat, Juria.¹¹⁰ Table 3.14: shown the increase of population in these mauzas from 1921 to 1931.¹¹¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mauza</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>Increase in Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lakhowa</td>
<td>14,827</td>
<td>35,693</td>
<td>140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dhing</td>
<td>17,864</td>
<td>40,456</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bokoni</td>
<td>4543</td>
<td>17,940</td>
<td>294</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lahorighat</td>
<td>11,834</td>
<td>31,173</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juria</td>
<td>18,327</td>
<td>37,781</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹⁰ ibid, p. 27.
¹¹¹ ibid.
Percentage of increase in non immigrant thanas was as follows; Roha, 10.2%, Koliabor, 17%, Lumding, 12%. The number of Bengali immigrants in Kamrup districts rose from 44,000 in 1921 to 134,000 in 1931, the highest percentage of increase of immigrants in any districts of the Assam Valley. In the immigrant mauza of Baguribari in Barpeta subdivision, population increased from 12,325 in 1921 to 30,792, an increase of 149.8% while the predominantly immigrant mauzas of Pub and Paschim Chamarias in Gauhati subdivision registered an increase of 142 and 168 per cent respectively.

Another reason as was pointed out by the Line System committee was that since the advent of the immigrants into Assam who generally settled in the ‘Char’ (tracts near the Brahmaputra river), many of such ‘Chars’ had disappeared completely due to the vagaries of the Brahmaputra river, and many of the immigrant villages in those area were completely wiped off the map.

This problem was recognized by both the Gopinath Bardoloi and the Saadulla ministry and even in the Governor’s resolution of 6th March, 1942, and an assurance was given to all those who lost their land to erosion, that they would be provided land elsewhere in the province. However there was another angle to this problem and this aspect was cited in the preceding paragraphs of the Governor resolution of 6th March, 1942, and it stated that the early immigrants who prospered and formed a small and wealthy class of land owners with large areas under their control, naturally employed labourers to cultivate for them or let out some of their lands to tenants, and these labourers were imported from their own

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112 Ibid.
113 Ibid, p. 28.
114 Ibid.
native districts, and formed the nucleus of that large class of landless immigrants.\textsuperscript{116} The resolution also warned that even if all these ‘kamlas’ could be provided with land, those who employed them would again start bringing labourers from their native districts to substitute those who had been provided with land, and the problem of providing land to the landless would never be solved.\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{Friction between the Immigrants and the indigenous population, the issue of encroachment:}

The issue of encroachment that had often baffled the district administration of Assam was of two kinds –

A) Encroachments on grazing reserves – since the immigrants were unaccustomed to grazing reserves in the native districts, they always cast their envious eyes on this areas and had tried to encroach on them.\textsuperscript{118}

B) The immigrants had also encroached on the areas which were in actual possession of the backward tribal classes of Assam, who in this deserted area pursued the ancestral custom of squatting on land for occasional cultivation and relinquishing it after a year or two.\textsuperscript{119} These tribal people had always dreaded the approach of the more virile and turbulent immigrants, and in many case had left their old villages and sought fresh lands elsewhere far removed from the \textit{Mymensinghias}.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943, p.1.
\textsuperscript{117} ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid.
**Dysfunctional Line System:** The Line System which was put in place to check the indiscriminate settlement of immigrants had been violated time and again by the immigrants through occasional encroachment on the Assamese side of the lines.\(^{121}\) This was due to the fact that while the immigrants rapidly opened up the land on their side of the lines, this was not the case in the areas included in the indigenous lines.\(^{122}\) The result was that after the immigrant settlements had become established, the indigenous villages adjoining it still contained much waste lands, on which the immigrants often proceeded to encroach.\(^{123}\)

**Legislative Attempt to Control the influx of Immigrants from East Bengal.**

On 17\(^{th}\) August, 1927, in the Assam Legislative Council, a resolution was moved by Mahadeb Sarma. The resolution briefly read

“This Council recommends to the Government of Assam, with a view to prevent or restrict, the settlement of waste lands in the province with the immigrants from the other provinces and foreigners, a committee with an unofficial majority be appointed to enquire and report from every district.

(a) Available waste lands at present for settlement.

(b) The desirability of reserving adequate areas of waste lands for further development separately in every district in view of the population.

\(^{121}\) *ibid.*  
\(^{122}\) *ibid.*  
\(^{123}\) *ibid.*
(c) Whether the existing areas of game reserves, fuel reserves, and grazing reserves should be increased or decreased in view of people’s demand in every district.”

Mahadeb Sarma pointed out that his resolution was a moderate demand in comparison with the demands of the general public of the Assam valley who were opposed to any further immigration. He stated that the bitter experience which had driven the people of the valley to such extremes was known to all including the members of the council and it was a duty of the government to protect the vital interest of its bona fide inhabitants. Settlement of lands had taken place with all the groups be it the tea garden labourers or the Nepalis, the Bengali, – Hindus and the Muslims - whose number were increasing every year. He therefore asked the question as to how far such influx could be allowed and whether there should not be any restriction on immigration. He was not opposed to any particular group getting settlement of land or against the development of the province, but he thought that it would be justifiable to reserve some land for the future expansion of the indigenous people as well as those immigrant who had formed a part of the Assamese population. He said that the resolution might not sound well but in view of the peculiar economic situation of the province of Assam, he was forced to take such a step as the people of Assam were basically agriculturists and a piece of land was the only source

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
of wealth to them. The reason for such persistent cry all over the valley against immigration was mainly due to two reasons – 1) The great influx of the immigrant East Bengalis within a span of 10 years whose number had crossed 2, 58, 000 and 2) The nature of this particular immigrant group was quite opposite to the ‘meek and submissive’ nature of the indigenous Assamese. He cited Inspector General of Police, W.C. Dundas observations, that the large influx of immigrants from East Bengal had bought with them lots of vices and criminal elements hitherto unknown to the Assamese like thieves, burglars, forgers of currency notes, etc. The local people had suffered a lot at the hands of these oppressive immigrants who in many cases were forced to leave their homelands. He claimed that a bigger section of the indigenous people had strong sentiments against the East Bengali immigrants and therefore concluded that through his resolution he only wanted to restrict settlement of immigrants in certain congested areas for their own good and to prevent their clash with the indigenous people.

Supporting the resolution, Bishnu Charan Bora informed the house that in the district of Nowgong, the immigrant population had increased manifold within the last 10 years and at present their population was around a lakh. He alleged that the immigrants invariably occupied the land of the indigenous Assamese by either force or sometime after occupying a land on ‘adhi’ basis never vacated it after the ‘adhi’ term was over. He also pointed out that the revenue officials along with the higher authorities in Shillong deprived the local

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\(^{130}\) ibid.
\(^{131}\) ibid.
\(^{132}\) ibid.
\(^{133}\) ibid, pp. 1085, 1086.
\(^{134}\) ibid.
\(^{135}\) ibid, pp. 1089, 1090.
\(^{136}\) ibid, pp. 1090, 1091.
people of their land by engaging in various manipulations of the Line System, in fact these lines dividing the Assamese and the immigrant villages were generally drawn by pencils on the maps and in many cases these were tempered with the active connivance of the higher authorities.\textsuperscript{137} He stated that in many cases, the Deputy Commissioner, instead of evicting the immigrant encroachers from closed areas allowed them to settle there and instead cancelled the ‘pattas’ of the local people.\textsuperscript{138}

The resolution was supported by other Assamese members like Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri who thought that the resolution was meant for the protection of the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{139} Sadananda Dowarah observed that the government should take some measures to protect the vital interest of the indigenous people who were no match to the Mymensinghias\textsuperscript{140} and K. N. Saikia felt that the immigrants had bought with them not only improved method of cultivation but also other subterfuge methods of chicanery and other vices that the immigrant uses on a helpless and unsophisticated people like the Assamese.\textsuperscript{141} Even the caste Hindu Bengali members came in support of the resolution, like Mr. Brajendra Narayan Chaudhury, who viewed the immigration issues as mainly a Hindu-Muslim question.\textsuperscript{142}

Khan Bahadur Saiydar Rahman said that he opposed the resolution not with any communal bias but on the broad principles of equity and justice.\textsuperscript{143} He stated that no spot in the globe could possibly be claimed as one’s own by any particular race and community,
and as a matter of fact, he implied that Assam was a land of immigrants and even the Ahoms were immigrants of Shan origin who in due course had become Assamese. He viewed that the above resolution was being unfair and discriminatory towards the Mymensinghias (both Namasudra Hindus and the Muslims) who in due course of time would become assimilated with the Assamese. He was of the opinion that the tea garden labourer numbering around a million had been given more land for settlement and since there was no issue regarding this group of migrants, there should not be any unjustified paranoia regarding the ‘Mymensinghias’. He also asked the mover of the resolution if he had seriously considered steps about saving the already settled lands from the grasp and domination of the Marwari traders and whether he had devised any measure to oust the already settled Nepalis, the upcountry ex-‘coolie’ and Dacca tradesman from Assam? He noted that it is impossible to stop immigration which was only a natural course of thing and stressed that Assam for the Assamese sounds better but a healthy Assam for stronger Assamese even sounds better.

Munawar Ali of Sylhet, who later become Revenue Minister in the Saadulla Cabinet in the 1940’s, noted it should be the policy of the government to encourage immigration in the interest of the country, and to stop settlement with immigrants would be an economic suicide since the immigrants bought with them improved methods of cultivation adding to the prosperity of the province rather than leaving unutilized waste lands and jungles to

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144 ibid.
145 ibid.
146 ibid.
147 ibid.
148 ibid, p. 1095.
elephants, buffalos and wolves.\textsuperscript{149} He pointed out that Assam with a population of 79 lakhs had an area of 80,000 square miles where as Bengal with 75,000 square miles had a population of 5 crores and then asked “if this be the state of things now, is it not our duty to help the immigrants rather than retard it?”\textsuperscript{150}

Keramat Ali, opposing the resolution, stated that there could not be any artificial restriction on natural immigration and asked the house to have a sympathetic view on the immigrants as they were forced by their poverty and misery to emigrate into Assam.\textsuperscript{151} He also said that the immigrants within a span of 15 years had converted howling jungles into smiling fields in the district of Nowgong.\textsuperscript{152} He agreed that in the settlement of land preference should always be given to the bona fide Assamese but he was opposed to any restriction on immigration.\textsuperscript{153}

Nabin Chandra Bardoloi supporting the resolution, observed that though the resolution was not happily worded and instead of using the term ‘restriction’ it would have been useful if the mover had said “we want a little more land to be reserved for the coming ‘generation’ but he also wanted the house to look at the resolution from a broader perspective.\textsuperscript{154} He was not in support of any restriction on immigration but he also pointed out that it was the duty of the government to reserve some land for the future expansion of the indigenous population.\textsuperscript{155} Comparison between Assam and Bengal regarding existence of vast amount of vast lands and sparse population in Assam in sharp contrast to Bengal

\textsuperscript{149} ibid, p. 1088.  
\textsuperscript{150} ibid, p. 1089.  
\textsuperscript{151} ibid, p. 1097.  
\textsuperscript{152} ibid, p. 1098.  
\textsuperscript{153} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{154} ibid, pp. 1092, 1093.  
\textsuperscript{155} ibid, p. 1093.
was unfair, as in Assam the acreage consisted of many Hills which would take 200 years to make it proper for cultivation and it was the plains of Assam which mattered the most and no body would object to the immigrants coming to the hills and cultivating them.\footnote{ibid, p. 1093.}

European member Lieutenant Colonel W. D. Smiles came in support of the Muslim leadership and pointed that while Indians were fighting for justice in Africa they were parochial in respect of immigrants to Assam.\footnote{ibid, p. 1088.}

A.W. Botham, representing the government in the council, gave three reasons in opposing the resolution by stating that the proposed restriction on immigration and reservation of land for settlement with the ‘children of the soil’ was useless without legislation which would prohibit transfer of land by the Assamese (to the immigrants) after land had been settled with them.\footnote{ibid.} Also he noted that there was no wisdom in foregoing present revenue and thereby holding up the development of the province to provide for future demands.\footnote{ibid, pp. 1088, 1089.} He was of the opinion that a considerable amount of land had been settled with the indigenous population over the last 10 years.\footnote{ibid, p. 1089.} He was therefore of the view that the question of increasing or decreasing the game reserves, fuel reserves, and grazing reserves had nothing to do with the main objects of the resolution.\footnote{ibid, p. 1089.}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{ibid, p. 1093.}
\item \footnote{ibid, p. 1088.}
\item \footnote{ibid.}
\item \footnote{ibid, pp. 1088, 1089.}
\item \footnote{ibid, p. 1089.}
\item \footnote{ibid, p. 1089.}
\end{itemize}
The resolution was lost by 18 votes to 21 votes. All eighteen supporters were Hindus and out of the 21 opponents 12 were Muslims and the rest were European Planters and government representatives.¹⁶²

Communalization of the Line System. (Demands for its Abolition)

Resolution of November, 1936.

With the ushering in of provincial autonomy measures with the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935, the issue of the Line System began to be measured by political and communal standards, and it was assailed as being unfair and perhaps an illegal method of control, and the eviction which were an inevitable concomitant of it were subjected to a facile and one sided criticism.¹⁶³ On November 25, 1936, Khan Bahadur Nuruddin Ahmed moved a resolution in the Assam Legislative Council which recommended to the Government of Assam, that the Line System which was being maintained in some districts of the Assam Valley in order to confine settlement of immigrants in certain areas only, be forthwith abolished.¹⁶⁴ He stated that the Line System which was being rigidly maintained had created a lot of disadvantages and hardships for the immigrants and he mentioned a few of them.¹⁶⁵

1) They could not be engaged even as adhidhars and bhagidars by owner of the annual lease lands outside the lines because of the fear that their lease might get cancelled.

¹⁶² ibid, p. 1105.
¹⁶³ Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943, Appendix, IV.
¹⁶⁵ ibid, p. 1525.
2) Due to restrictions on both the immigrant and the local people in taking up land other than in their respective areas, the price of land in either area, remained appreciably low.

3) The Line System effectively obstructed and hindered the process of assimilation of the immigrants with the Assamese people. Although the local non Muslim leaders had often expressed their earnest solitude for the rapid conversion of the immigrants into Assamese people, but this could not be realized until the Line System continue to prevail.

4) It gave the immigrants a feeling of segregation and inferiority which they did not relish.

5) The Line System generated a feeling of isolation and degradation among the immigrants as a result of which a sense of animosity and rivalry is created between the immigrants and the local people.

6) For want of close cooperation between the two classes of people, which the Line System inevitably fosters, the progress of the people of the different districts or of the Assam Valley as a whole was greatly hampered.

7) The system facilitated to a great extent the exploitation of the immigrants by the non immigrant Bengalis and even interested local people by inciting them to remain separate from and not merge themselves into the Assamese people which the leader of the latter did not like.

The strict enforcement of the Line System, he pointed out, had led to a situation when in many instances the houses of the immigrants were burnt down who by mistake or
being misled settled in areas outside the Lines.\textsuperscript{166} There were also instances when areas included within the immigrant lines were subsequently included within the Assamese lines and the immigrants who had settled down in those areas were turned out forcibly.\textsuperscript{167} This was not the case with the tea garden labourers who were free to settle anywhere and their number had grown much more than the immigrants and yet their ‘invasion’ was not objected to as they were mostly Hindus or could be easily turned into Hindus and could be merged with the Assamese people.\textsuperscript{168} Thus because of all these reasons mentioned above, Nuruddin Ahmed viewed the Line System as unjust and unfair which should be abolished for the greater interest of the people of the province of Assam, as these Bengali immigrants were great cultivators who had greatly improved and enriched the valley and contribute more revenue to the country than the local cultivators.\textsuperscript{169}

Another legislator from Goalpara, Abual Majid Ziaoshshms, while supporting the resolution stated that while all Indians were fighting for the rights of their fellow Indians in South Africa by raising an agitation against the inhuman and unequal treatment that Indians and Black Africans met with, Assam itself had turned into another South Africa where the Bengalis were subjected to the same kind of inhuman treatment.\textsuperscript{170} The so called Bengali immigrants who adopted the Assamese language, and had taken to Assamese schools, and adopted Assam as their own homeland should be considered as a part and parcel, Keith and kin of the Assamese population and should be given equal treatment.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{166} ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} ibid., pp. 1525, 1526.
\textsuperscript{169} ibid., p. 1526.
\textsuperscript{170} ibid., p. 1529.
\textsuperscript{171} ibid.
Abdul Khaleque Chaudhury of Sylhet, observed that the Line System not only blocked the expansion of the immigrants, but also kept alive the racial distinction among different communities which was not good for the process of assimilation. He concluded that the Line System was meant to treat a certain section of mankind as animals to be confined in certain areas.

L.A. Roffey, who had been deputed by the planting group, supported the resolution and he argued that the East Bengali migrants were not criminal tribes whom it was necessary to confine within certain areas, but were genuine bona fide cultivators who were crying out for more land to cultivate to earn their livelihood and it would be unfair to deny them this fundamental right. He pointed out that the density of population in Assam was so low and there were vast tracts of lands to be cultivated, that the government should do everything to encourage immigration rather discourage them by confining them to certain settlements. These settlers would not only benefit and enrich Assam but would also increase the revenue of the government which was so badly needed. He expressed his fullest sympathy for the indigenous Assamese who may be swamped but eventually the weaker is bound to go to the wall in favour of the stronger, and they must work out their own salvation, the welfare and advancement of the province of Assam as a whole must be the ever present thought of all those who have its best interest at heart.

Khan Sahib Maulvi Mizanar Rahman of Sylhet supported the resolution and he argued that the Line System was both undesirable and prejudicial to the interest of the

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172 ibid, p. 1532.
173 ibid.
174 ibid, p. 1530.
175 ibid, pp. 1530, 1531.
176 ibid, p. 1531.
177 ibid.
He was of the opinion that the retention of this system of segregation could not be continued for ever as it had created a gulf between the immigrant and the indigenous population and stood in the way of unity and development of the province of Assam. 

Again he stated that when the government of Assam was running the administration by borrowing, they were foregoing a substantial income to its coffer on account of this invidious distinction perpetuated through the Line System. 

He pointed out that although the indigenous Assamese demanded that the immigrants should adopt Assam as their mother land but this artificial restriction stood in the way of gradual progress to assimilation.

Opposing the resolution Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri pointed out that the issue pertaining to the Line System was a serious issue which ought to be discussed very carefully and in all its bearings outside the house and all the stakeholders should come to a sort of amicable settlement before any such resolution was brought to the house for consideration. The views of the district officers of the district of Nowgong, Kamrup, and Darrang on this resolution should be taken into account before arriving at a decision. 

He also stated that in the recent Assam Muhammadan Conference, the present immigrant settlers were also not in favour of removal of all restriction on settlement of land with the new immigrants. 

He concluded that the Line System and the payment of a small premium were the only restrictions in settlement of land with the immigrants and if these
restrictions were removed the position of all would be in danger whether it be the indigenous or the present immigrant settlers.\textsuperscript{185}

J. J. M. Nichols Roy, while opposing the resolution warned that if this resolution was accepted and the Line System was forthwith abolished, then immigrants from Bengal would come by millions and spread over the whole of Assam to the extinction of the indigenous people of Assam, and the most to be seriously affected would be the Lalung and the Kachari, tribes if immigrants were allowed to settle everywhere.\textsuperscript{186} He pointed out the fact that since the Lalungs and Kacharis did not have anyone to represent them in the Legislative Council it would be unfair to pass a resolution that would affect them particularly without giving them a chance to speak.\textsuperscript{187} He appealed to Mr Roffey and the planting group he represented, to carefully consider their support for the resolution as the said resolution was quite dangerous for the weak and the minority people of Assam.\textsuperscript{188}

Opposing the resolution, Jogendranath Gohain stated that the proposal to abolish the Line System which was meant for restricting and confining land settlement with the immigrants could not be accepted at the moment as it was not known whether sufficient land would be available for the future generations of both the indigenous as well as the ‘present’ immigrant settlers.\textsuperscript{189} He appealed to the immigrant that they should try to assimilate with the indigenous people before all restrictions could be removed.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{185} ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} ibid, p. 1538.
\textsuperscript{187} ibid, p. 1539.
\textsuperscript{188} ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} ibid, p. 1538.
\textsuperscript{190} ibid.
Brindaban Chandra Goswami, while opposing the resolution criticized Mr. Roffey for his views that ‘eventually the weaker must go to the wall in favour of the stronger….’ as it would inevitably lead to a situation where the weak tribes of Assam like the Kacharis as well as the Lalungs would be driven away from their lands and ultimately would be completely wiped out from the map of Nowgong or any districts of Assam.191 He pointed out that while Mr. Roffey in support of his view cited the census report of Assam, 1931, where P. G. Mukherjee the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, praised the immigrants for bringing in wealth, industry and prosperity to the district by their improved method of cultivation, he should also remember that the same P. G. Mukherjee, in the same report called the Mymensinghias as ‘land hungry’ who infrequently encroached on land located in the reserves as well on land belonging to the local people and that they could be evicted only with great difficulty.192

Mahendranath Gohain, while severely criticizing the resolution as well as the views of Mr. Roffey, warned that yielding to both the resolution and Mr Roffey’s view would lead to a situation where the weak Kacharis and the Lalungs would be driven out of their homestead lands and would have no options but to take shelter on the sands of the Brahmaputra or the caves of the Naga or the Aka Hills.193

Kasinath Saikia opposed the resolution on the ground that removing the Line System would jeopardize the interest of the Assamese as the immigrants would come and occupy all available land, and he viewed that the time for the removal of the Line System had not arrived as the immigrants must assimilate with the Assamese in a greater degree which

191 ibid, pp. 1536, 1537.
192 ibid, p. 1537.
193 ibid, pp. 1534, 1535.
would take generations and generation before they completely imbibe all the habits and manners of the Assamese.\textsuperscript{194}

Dismissing the resolution as a mere electioneering campaign of Nuruddin Ahmed, Nilambar Dutta stated that the object of this resolution was no doubt a laudable one from the Muhammadan point of view but it was detrimental to the interest of the Hindus and he warned that if the mover persist with the resolution and if he succeed in carrying it out, it would do incalculable harm to the both the Assamese Muslims and the Hindus.\textsuperscript{195}

Mr. W. L. Scott, representing the government, defended the Line System which he described as a system of control to confine settlement of the immigrants in certain definite areas.\textsuperscript{196} The Line System was introduced to protect immigrants from unscrupulous speculators, and prevent clash between the indigenous and the immigrants and also to benefit the government in the form of premium money which “was being stolen from them (immigrants), shall we say, taken from them by various classes of Assamese speculators in the towns and the villages who along with the land record staff were making money by selling land to the immigrants.”\textsuperscript{197} He also pointed out the fact that Mymensingh district alone had a population of 5 million which was greater than the population of the Assam Valley, and the districts of Pabna, Rangpur, Bogra which also supplied immigrants to Assam had a combined population of 5 million.\textsuperscript{198} So if the Line System was abolished, a situation might arise where all lands would be readily taken by the immigrants and “their economic and racial advantage are such that without some control they are very likely to

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{ibid}, p. 1533.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{ibid}, p. 1541.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{ibid}, p. 1526.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{ibid}, pp. 1526, 1527.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{ibid}, p. 1528.
drive away the indigenous inhabitants completely off the map.” He remarked that the maintenance of artificial barrier between the population of such diverse economic level for a prolonged period was impossible. “Either one people must rise to the level of another or be submerged.” He therefore invited the opinions of the members of the council whether the system of control could be relaxed or withdrawn and to what extent.

Nuruddin Ahmed then modified his position as he stated that along with the abolition of the Line System “just make a rule not to allow anybody to settle on government land without permission.” Scott viewed this modified position as ambiguous and he could not understand how the mover could support his own resolution by taking such a position. He said that the question of restricting or controlling or stopping inter provincial migration can not be dealt by a provincial government like Assam and the provincial government can only control the settlement of land which the government of Assam was doing.

The resolution was put to vote and it was lost as only 7 members voted for it and 20 members voted against it. Members of the Planting lobby did not participate in the voting.

 Resolution of 1937 for the Abolition of the Line System

After the election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, under the Government of India Act 1935, in 1937, a coalition headed by Muhammad Saadulla came to power and it had an

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199 ibid.
200 ibid, p. 1527.
201 ibid.
202 ibid.
203 ibid, p. 1545.
204 ibid, p. 1547.
205 ibid.
206 ibid, p. 1548.
uneasy existence as there were contradictions within his ministry, as Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri - a caste Hindu Assamese who was the Revenue Minister in the Saadulla cabinet in 1937 - 38, completely supported the Line System whereas the Sylhet block (consisting of the provincial Muslim League leadership) along with certain immigrant leaders from the Assam valley wanted its complete abolition. Hence the next attempt for the abolition of the Line System was made by a member from Sylhet, Munawar Ali in 1937. The Resolution read as follows

“This assembly recommends to the Government of Assam, that the Line System which is being maintained in some districts of the Assam Valley, in order to confine settlement of land to immigrants in certain areas be forthwith abolished.”

In support of his resolution, Munawar Ali said that the Line System drawn arbitrarily in the Brahmaputra Valley prevented not only Indians from East Bengal but also people from the Sylhet district from crossing the lines i.e it restricts their settlement in certain areas and hence the Line System was against all principles of nation building. He stated that that it was unfortunate that Sylethias were treated as foreigners in their own province. He also brought to the notice of the house that a bigha of land in a non immigrant area was sold at Rs 10, whereas in the immigrant area it was sold at Rs 30, because the competition was stiff in the latter. He was of the view that if the Line System was abolished it would bring immense economic benefits to Assam and the Assamese, the
indigenous Assamese would learn the art of superior cultivation and active habits from the immigrants which would not be the case if the immigrants were kept in isolation.  

Abdul Matin Chaudhury, another member from Sylhet, pointed out that the Line System was against Section 298 of the Government of India Act, 1935. According to the provisions of this section “No subject of his majesty is ineligible for acquiring, holding, or disposing of property in India either on grounds of religion, place of birth, decent, or colour.” He stated that those who claim themselves to be the real descendants of the Assamese race or called themselves as indigenous whether Hindus or Muslims must take note of the fact that their ancestors came to Assam as invaders, despoiled the population, usurped the land, and settled here but they would still be called as indigenous Assamese, treated as the pet child, and would be shown all the favours that the benign government can bestow.

“If your ancestor came as pioneer, if they developed the country, if they cleared the jungles and made prosperous villages and habitable tracts, if they contributed to the development of the province, you will be treated as a Pariah in your land and you will be saddled with all difficulties and all the disadvantages that human ingenuity could invent.”

He described the Line System as unjust, illogical, absurd, and condemned the system as one of segregation of communities by means of race and racial prerogatives. He said

\[212\] ibid.
\[213\] ibid, p. 237.
\[214\] ibid.
\[215\] ibid, p. 235.
\[216\] ibid.
\[217\] ibid.
that there was an attempt to make an unjust and arbitrary distinction between the
indigenous Muslims and the newly arrived Bengali Muslim immigrants based on their early
or late arrivals. 218 He complained that in the areas meant for the Assamese there was more
land than the population can develop whereas the situation was opposite in case of areas
meant for the settlement of the immigrants Bengali Muslim. 219 Like their brethren from
Bengal, Muslim Bengalis from Sylhet and Cacher suffered the same humiliation. 220
However there was no objection if immigrants from C.P. Madras, Chottanagpur, Ganjam,
Ranchi, referring indirectly to the tea garden labourers, settled as tenants in the Assamese
lines but there was objection to the settlement of Bengali Muslim immigrants. 221

Malvi Dewan Ahbab Chaudhury, another member of Sylhet was of the view that the
Line System was based on the wrong principles of provincial patriotism which separated
one brother from another and this could be termed as the caste system of Indian politics. 222

Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, the Revenue Minister, in reply pointed out that he had
received a deputation from Sylhet which stated that if the Line System was abolished their
position in Nowgong district would be made more difficult. 223 He said that even Khan
Bahadur Maulvi Nuruddin Ahmed who bought a resolution earlier for the abolition of the
Line System, later moderated his position and was not in favour of its complete abolition. 224

As for the issue that the Line System was against Section 298 of the Government of India

218 ibid.
219 ibid, p. 236.
220 ibid, p. 237.
221 ibid.
222 ibid, pp. 237, 238.
223 ibid, p. 240.
224 ibid.
Act 1935, it was for the Court to review and interpret the whole question. He declared that in order to protect the indigenous population, the permanently settled immigrants, and to ascertain the exact legal position on the whole issue of the Line System, the government of Assam had decided to appoint a representative committee in order to review the whole question and therefore he asked the mover of the resolution to withdraw the same.

Rabi Chandra Kachari, representing the backward Kachari tribes, while opposing the resolution for the abolition of the Line System pointed out that the Line System was extremely necessary to protect the backward and the tribal people of Assam who were in minority, and if the Line System was abolished ‘crores and crores’ of immigrants would come in and the original ruling people of Assam would have to leave the plains and moved to the jungles and hills and this invasion would be more serious than the Burmese invasion. Rupnath Brahma, another member representing the tribal community, observed that doing away with the Line System would directly affect the interest of the backward tribal people of the plains and he cited the example of Goalpara where most of the tribal people were compelled to leave their homes and settle elsewhere. Naba Kumar Dutta, while opposing the resolution pointed out that that the demands for the abolition of the Line System was nothing but a demand for ousting with the government help and protection the Assamese from their lands, and for driving away the Kacharis and the Lalungs to the hills. He stated that it was ridiculous to talk about increasing the revenue

\[\text{225} \text{ ibid.} \]
\[\text{226} \text{ ibid.} \]
\[\text{227} \text{ ibid, pp. 246, 247.} \]
\[\text{228} \text{ ibid, p. 250.} \]
\[\text{229} \text{ ibid, pp. 250, 251.} \]
of the province at the cost of the national existence of the Assamese. Kameswar Das, was of the view that doing away with the Line System would provide greater facilities to the immigrants from the districts of Bengal, and other provinces of India to swell into Assam and he observed that sufficient land must be reserved for the future generations and the Line System served this purpose well.

Kedarmal Brahmin, representing the Marwari community pointed out that the immigrants must learn to live peacefully with the Assamese in a friendly way. He said “We cannot force them - the Assamese- to allow us to break their houses and live there. If we can prove that we are friendly, we are here permanently, and will live peacefully with the indigenous population then a situation might arise where the indigenous Assamese people would act for the removal of the Line System.”

Mahi Chandra Bora, was of the opinion that the abolition of the Line System would affect the interests of the plain tribes of Assam like the Kacharis and the Lalungs, some of them had already fled and had taken shelter into the forests and also warned that doing away with the Line System would also affect the Sylhetis of Nowgong too who were afraid of the Mmensinghias and had formed their own block, and if the Line System was abolished every inch of land available in the block would be occupied by the Mymensinghias. Mahendra Nath Saikia, was of the view that sufficient land must be reserved for the expansion of the future generation of the indigenous population and he

\[\text{\textsuperscript{230}}\textit{ibid}, \text{p. 251.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{231}}\textit{ibid}, \text{pp. 256, 257.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{232}}\textit{ibid}, \text{p. 255.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{233}}\textit{ibid}.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{234}}\textit{ibid}, \text{pp. 262, 263.}\]
cited the example of the **Koibarta** community whose income from fishing was steadily dwindling and in future would need lands for their subsistence.\(^{235}\)

Omeo Kumar Das, stated that the Line System was important for the protection of the indigenous tribals like the Kacharis and the Lalungs and also bought to the notice of the house the fact that a considerable amount of land was still available in the immigrant block under the colonization scheme.\(^{236}\) He cited figures from the Land Revenue Administration report of 1935 – 36, that in the Mangaldoi subdivision, 80, 940 *bighas*, of land were thrown open to the immigrants and out of this only about 40, 000 *bighas* had been taken up for cultivation.\(^{237}\) Similar was the case in the Nowgong district where in 1931 – 32, 1, 10, 498 *bighas* of land were thrown open to immigrants and only about 52, 266 *bighas* of lands were taken up for cultivation in 1936.\(^{238}\) He also pointed out the fact that with the increase in the indigenous population, partition of joint family property had taken place in parts of Assam which had resulted in fragmentation of holdings, and therefore sufficient land must be reserved for the expansion of the indigenous population.\(^{239}\) He cited the examples of the **Uparbag mauza** in Kamrup district where density of population had reached 1000 and **Bahjani** where it was more than 800.\(^{240}\)

Abdur Rouf, an immigrant leader from Barpeta, supported the resolution for the abolition of the Line System and he stated that the authorities and leading sections of the Assamese community remained silent when the immigrants invested huge amount of money and effort in clearing the lands which were beyond the Lines as well as in closed

\(^{235}\) *ibid*, p. 268.\(^{236}\) *ibid*.\(^{237}\) *ibid*.\(^{238}\) *ibid*.\(^{239}\) *ibid*, p. 269.\(^{240}\) *ibid*. 
areas and once these lands were cleared, all of a sudden notices were served to these immigrants under section 18(5) of the Settlement Rules to vacate those lands, and fines were imposed on them varying from Rs 30 to Rs 40 and some of them were even sent to jail and all these cleared lands were instead settled with the Assamese.\footnote{ibid, p. 260.} He declared that the immigrant East Bengalis had come to settle permanently in the province of Assam and if allowed permanently to live here “we will live for and die for Assam.”\footnote{ibid, p. 261.}

Maulvi Muhammad Amiruddin, admitted that there were instances of friction between the indigenous and the immigrants but they were few and far between and there were laws to deal with those cases rather than relying on the Line System.\footnote{ibid, p. 251.}

He pointed out that the principles underlying the Line System had been departed from in the district of Nowgong as a number of Assamese people themselves tempted by money, sold their lands to the immigrants in contravention of the rules and regulations and when the revenue authorities find that bona fide sale deeds had been executed by the Assamese and possession of land had taken place, they had no options but to covert the Assamese lines into a mixed lines or to abolish the lines altogether.\footnote{ibid, p. 252.}

Maulvi Abdur Rahman, pointed out that the present agitation between the immigrants from Bengal and the original people of Assam was mainly due to the horrible remarks made by the Census superintendent of 1931, C. S. Mullan.\footnote{ibid, pp. 706, 707.} He said that these immigrants...
had come to settle permanently in Assam and if they return to their native province they
would not find any land there.\footnote{ibid, p. 707.}

Munawar Ali pointed out that if Sylhet with 51\% of its land sown could afford room
for the settlement of new settlers, why Nowgong, Kamrup, Darrang, Sibsagar, and
Lakhimpur (where only 15\%, 35\%, 25\%, 22\%, 16\% of the land respectively sown) could
not offer land for settlement to the landless immigrant?\footnote{ibid, pp. 711, 712.} He was amazed to find the
contradiction among the members of the Congress party who supports the Line System yet
was opposed to communal electorate.\footnote{ibid, p. 712.} He stated that the Line System was a line of
dishonor and may lead to communal discord since it segregates one Indian from another
Indian.\footnote{ibid.} He also observed that the indigenous people were getting lucrative sums of
money for selling their lands to the immigrants.\footnote{ibid, p. 713.} These people and not the immigrants, he
stated, were responsible for allowing the Lines to be broken.\footnote{ibid.}

Maulvi Muddabir Hussain Chaudhury, stated that it was the indigenous section of the
population who were tempting the immigrants to trespass the Lines since the former wanted
their labour and enjoyed the fruits of their labour.\footnote{ibid, pp. 709, 710.} He was of the opinion that the
indigenous population was not in need of any protection since they had ample land and
lived in plenty.\footnote{ibid, 710.} By protecting them, the authorities wanted them to remain idle and
prevent them from healthy competition.\footnote{ibid.} He was of the opinion that C.S. Mullan, by his
defamatory remarks against the East Bengali immigrants had made himself liable for criminal prosecution and it was not East Bengalis who were land hungry but Mr. Mullan and his white comrades who had travelled 7000 miles by land and sea at great personal discomfort to settle in the jungles of Assam where wild beasts and birds roam about.\textsuperscript{255}

Another member Mubarak Ali pointed out that the Line System was against section 298 of the Government of India Act, 1935 and offended not only the public policy and the Rule against Perpetuity but also acted against the natural law of Demand and Supply.\textsuperscript{256} It created artificial scarcity by reserving land for future generations.\textsuperscript{257} Settlement of lands with the immigrants would increase the revenue of the province which the government could use for various nation building activities.\textsuperscript{258}

Revenue Minister, R. K. Chaudhuri pointed out that the Line System was meant for the benefit of the indigenous as well as those immigrants who had permanently settled in Assam and had adopted Assamese as their mother tongue.\textsuperscript{259} They as well as the indigenous population deserved special protection of their vital interests against the influx of the newcomers.\textsuperscript{260} He also pointed out that it cannot be assumed that with the abolition of the Line System all immigrants would get thousands of acres of land.\textsuperscript{261} Therefore he requested the house to agree to the appointment of a committee to enquire into the whole question

\begin{itemize}
\item[255] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[256] \textit{Ibid}, p. 707.
\item[257] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[258] \textit{Ibid}, p. 708.
\item[259] \textit{Ibid}, p. 714.
\item[260] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[261] \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
of the Line System. The House, he said, had the liberty to accept or reject the recommendations of the committee.

Abdul Matin Chowdhury, was of the opinion that since the Line System dealt with the issue pertaining to the immigrants, there should be more members representing the immigrants in the committee meant to examine the Line System.

The resolution was ultimately withdrawn and the Line System Committee was appointed to examine the whole question of abolishing or retaining the Line System.

*Report of the Line System Committee, February, 1938. (Official and Non Official view)*

The Line System Committee had 9 members - F. W. Hockenbull, as the chairman, Abdul Matin Chaudhury, Syed Abdur Rouf, Saiydur Rahman, Rabi Chandra Kachari, Sarveswar Barua, Dr. Mahendra Nath Saikia, Kameswar Das, and A.G. Patton and the Committee started its work from November, 1937, and it ascertained the views of both officials as well as non official members (prominent citizens) on the vexed issue of whether to retain or abolish the Line System and submitted its report on February, 1938. It needs to be mentioned here that almost all the officials favoured the retention of the Line System though for different reasons. For instance, the colonization officer in Nowgong district, Muhibuddin Ahmed, wanted the retention of the Line System since the immigrants had a separate culture and a habit of life, and were generally land hungry people, and the Line System was the best means to protect the natural rights and interests of the indigenous

\[262 \text{ibid.} \]
\[263 \text{ibid.} \]
\[264 \text{ibid, p. 716.} \]
people and maintain peace and amity.\textsuperscript{265} Abdul Quddus, Sub Deputy Collector, Kampur, (Nowgong) also favoured the retention of the Line System as the immigrants were more laborious than the Assamese people and they will grasp all the available land in no time.\textsuperscript{266} In addition, they were litigant people and there would not be an end to litigation and again lured by money, the Assamese cultivator would transfer his pattas both periodic and annual, to the immigrants if the Line System was done away with.\textsuperscript{267} The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang district wanted the Line System to be retained for the maintenance of peace and order.\textsuperscript{268} The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup district, C. B. C. Paine, favoured the retention of the Line System for protecting the long term interests of the indigenous who were timid and less able cultivators and also the Line System helped in preventing friction between the two classes of people.\textsuperscript{269} G. C. Bardoloi, the Sub Divisional Officer, Barpeta, cited the following reasons for the retention of the Line System\textsuperscript{270} –

Firstly, the immigrants were violent in nature and murder for land was a common occurrence among them.

Secondly, they created nuisance by forcibly taking each other’s crop and in some cases damaged crops by letting loose cows and other cattle.

Lastly, in the indigenous villages close to the immigrant villages, there were numerous instances where immigrant sexually assaulted indigenous women and for the fear of the immigrants, most of the indigenous people had vacated their villages.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Ibid}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ibid}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Ibid}, p. 11.
The only exception among these officials was S. Gohain, the Sub Divisional officer, Mangaldoi who felt that the Line System was too rigid and therefore facility should be given to the immigrants to mix with the indigenous people and respect their habits, manners, and customs.\footnote{Ibid, p. 8.}

Even individuals representing Muslim organizations in Assam like Khabiruddin Ahmed, Secretary, \textit{Anjuman Islami}, Barpeta, was of the opinion that the Line System must be retained in its entirety as according to him the immigrant East Bengalis were turbulent, oppressive, and resort to violence on flimsy grounds.\footnote{Report of the Line System Committee, Volume - III, \textit{(Non officials view)} p. 9.} The Joint Secretary of the \textit{Anjuman Islami}, M.N. Haque, said that the \textit{Anjuman} was in favour of immediate reservation of surplus arable waste lands for the purpose of settlement with the ‘Sons of the Soil’ including immigrants who had acquired the following qualifications – Complete 15 years of permanent residence in Assam, and recognize and adopt the Assamese language as the medium of instruction and court language.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 9, 10.} Same opinions were shared by the Secretary \textit{Anjuman Islami}, Nowgong, Abdul Hamid, and a pleader Abdul Kadir who too wanted the Line System to be retained.\footnote{Ibid.}

The main opposition to the Line System came from those who represented the Muslim League in Assam like Muhammad Amiruddin, member of the Assam Legislative Assembly, and leaders like Abdul Sammad and Master Sirajuddin. Muhammad Amiruddin pointed out that the lands allotted to the immigrants within the colonization schemes were mostly low lying swamps, and flood stricken areas where not even the indigenous

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p. 8.}
\item \footnote{\textit{Report of the Line System Committee, Volume - III, \textit{(Non officials view)} p. 9.}}
\item \footnote{Ibid, pp. 9, 10.}
\item \footnote{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
Assamese, the Nepali cultivators, or the ex tea garden labourers would settle. Abdus Sammad and Master Sirajuddin observed that the retention of the Line System devalued the price of land in the areas within the Assamese lines and the main beneficiary were the rich Assamese landlords who purchased lands from the Assamese at a meager price, and by getting special orders from the Deputy Commissioners got the land cultivated by immigrant labourers, and thus both the Assamese and the immigrant cultivators were exploited for the benefit of the rich Assamese middlemen and speculators.

*Notes of Dissent.*

A note of dissent as submitted by Rabi Chandra Kachari, Kameswar Das, Sarveswar Barua, stressed that the condition which necessitated the institution of the Line System still exists in a large measure and in some places rather in an aggravated form as these immigrants applied oppressive methods to compel the Assamese to sell their lands and any relaxation or modification of the Line System would result in heavier influx of newcomers, and pressure on the indigenous population with the concomitant acts of oppression would increase manifold.

They argued that in settling waste lands in Assam, the government should not be guided by considerations of the needs of the present population only but should think of posterity as well. Hence they demanded adequate reservation of suitable land for the expansion of the future population, and also a halt to further immigration, since there was

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hardly sufficient land for the satisfaction of even the present population let alone their future expansion.\textsuperscript{279}

This note of dissent was countered by another note of dissent submitted by those members of the committee who either represented the immigrants or espoused their cause like Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Abdur Rouf. They were of the view that the argument advocated by the Assamese Hindus for the retention of the Line system – they were oppressed by the immigrants to sell their lands - was nothing more than a ‘fantastic theory’ and considerably exaggerated.\textsuperscript{280} They pointed out that K. C. Marar, Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, observed that “the immigrants gets into the Assamese lines by means of sale, subletting, and in some cases by gift – for instance immigrants marrying an Assamese girl.”\textsuperscript{281} The immigrants sometime lend money to the Assamese and the latter unable to pay it back gave their land to the immigrant.\textsuperscript{282} The whole argument of immigrant being an undesirable neighbor, the note of dissent pointed, falls on the ground as there were many immigrants inside the Assamese lines who were employed by the Assamese as sub tenants, adhiars, living in close proximity to the Assamese, cultivating their land, harvesting their paddy, and thereby implying the fact that immigrants were welcomed as serfs by the Assamese middle classes but they were debarred from acquiring independent status, and the Line System served as a convenient instrument for this purpose.\textsuperscript{283}

The retention of the Line System had exacerbated the problems of the landless people among the immigrants in Assam and their numbers were ever increasing leading them to

\textsuperscript{279} ibid, p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{280} ibid, p. 25.  
\textsuperscript{281} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{282} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{283} ibid.
encroach on government lands like grazing reserves. The immigrant landless people had migrated permanently to the province and were ‘bona fide natives of the province’ but they lived a life of grinding poverty and were regarded as scums of the society to which they were a danger and a menace, the note of dissent stated.

The note also observed that the issue of the Line System was made more complicated by the introduction of a more extraneous and irrelevant consideration which was the persistent urge from the Assamese socio-cultural organization like the ‘Assam Samrakshini Sabha’ to the East Bengali migrants to assimilate with the Assamese by ‘adopting their culture and language’. This had violated the fundamental right of the immigrants as they were coerced to give up their mother tongue and inherited culture for ‘a parch’ of land and this attempt to convert the Bengalis into Assamese under the duress of economic pressure was foredoomed to failure. The local Boards taking advantage of their numerical strengths and economic helplessness among the immigrants had forced the Assamese language as a medium of instruction in the primary schools. The dissenting note pointed out that the adoption of the Assamese language as the medium of instructions in the schools within the immigrant lines had retarded the progress of education among the immigrants as boys of tender age living in compact immigrant areas segregated from contact with the Assamese boys of similar age, never hearing of Assamese spoken in their house or outside, were made to take their lessons in Assamese.

\[284\] *ibid.*
\[285\] *ibid.*
\[286\] *ibid.*
\[287\] *ibid.*
\[288\] *ibid.*
\[289\] *ibid.*
**Recommendations of the Line System Committee**

Thus within the Line System Committee, there were conflicting views – members who supported the immigrants wanted the Line System completely abolished, while those representing the indigenous population wanted to retain it in the present form. However the committee arrived at a compromise by partaking of both the views and came out with a set of recommendations.

1) The committee was of the view that it was undesirable to relax all restrictions on the immigrants on matters where he should not take up lands, as his habits and customs, acquired under a completely different system of land tenure and economic life in Bengal was materially different from the people among whom he had come to settle and hence for the purpose of better administration and avoidance of conflict, and to protect the interests of the simple minded and peace loving people especially tribal races of Assam, it is desirable to retain a certain amount of control in indicating the areas where he could take up land.\(^{290}\)

2) A larger unit of restriction should be adopted such as the *mauza* or a block of *mauzas* involving a considerably shorter length of frontier to be protected from encroachment.\(^{291}\) Artificial restrictions imposed on the immigrants from acquiring *patta* land – keeping *pattas* annual when in the normal circumstances they should have been made periodic, and also the fact that immigrants were prohibited from acquiring land by purchase, should be abolished.\(^{292}\) Settlement of those areas which in the past had proved to be unattractive to indigenous Assamese must be

\(^{291}\) Ibid.
\(^{292}\) Ibid.
encouraged with the landless immigrants.\textsuperscript{293} The present colonization scheme should be extended and new one should be started.\textsuperscript{294} Large areas of the province must be reserved for the future expansion of the indigenous cultivators.\textsuperscript{295}

3) The haphazard method of settlement by squatting should come to an end since land in Assam was becoming scarcer, and acquiring more value, and uneconomic cultivation must be discouraged.\textsuperscript{296} The immigrants were better and hardworking cultivators, the committee noted, and it was hoped that the indigenous Assamese could learn from him before it was too late, in spite of his signal failure to do so up the present time.\textsuperscript{297}

4) The committee members were of the view that all their recommendations would come to nothing without firmness of administration and avoidance of unnecessary interference, and an adequate and a competent staff to enforce the executive orders which were passed.\textsuperscript{298} The more unruly new immigrants who disobey orders with a sense of impunity must be made to understand that he could violate rules at his own peril.\textsuperscript{299} Specially selected officers with adequate backing must be placed in charge of areas where the problem is acute like Barpeta.\textsuperscript{300} Without these measures, no protection could be ensured to the vulnerable tribals like the Kacharis.\textsuperscript{301} The immigrants must be made to realize, through these measures, that unless he acquire

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{293}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{294}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{295}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{296}{ibid, p. 19.}
\footnotetext{297}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{298}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{299}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{300}{ibid.}
\footnotetext{301}{ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
peaceful habits and qualify himself for further relaxation, he could not expect a total abolition of the Line System.\textsuperscript{302}

\textbf{The Line System Committee Report (Some Vital Observations)}

The Line System Committee in its report made a good number of observations on the vexed issue of the necessity of retaining the Line System and there were certain observations which deserve special mention.

\textbf{The issue of Premium Money:} One of the motivating factors which led the colonial government of Assam to confine settlement of the immigrant in certain designated area which came to be known as the Colonization Scheme, another version of the Line System, was the amount of premium to be realized from the immigrant settlers from such scheme. The Line System Committee however found from its examination of the Colonization officers that there was a great discrepancy in the amounts realized as premium for land and the amount allotted for the development of these areas by way of improvement of communication, for instance: a sum of Rs 4 lakhs was realized from the colonization areas in Nowgong and Darrang, since the scheme came into force and only Rs 40,000 mainly in the district of Nowgong was spend.\textsuperscript{303} The Line System did not work the way as was envisaged by its makers and this was due to different reasons; corruption among the subordinates of the land record staff, and the Sub Deputy collector’s lack of supervision not only of these official’s ordinary activities but also the heavy amount of extra work required in maintaining the Lines.\textsuperscript{304} There were also other reasons like poverty of communication,

\textsuperscript{302} \textit{ibid}.
shortage of staff, constant change of officers, and absence of a resolute desire to enforce the restrictions.\footnote{Report of the Line System Committee, February, 1938, Volume - I, Chapter V, p. 14.}

The committee was of the view that the government should not treat the money realized as premium as all clear profit and must better use it for the proper management of administration by maintaining and extending police stations and increasing the revenue staff personal.\footnote{Report of the Line System Committee, February, 1938, Volume - I, Chapter II, pp. 9, 10.} Table 3.15: shows the amount of premium realized from the Colonization area in Mangaldoi subdivision from 1930-31 to 1936-37. (Reply given by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to a question by Badaruddin Ahmed in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1939)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930 – 31</td>
<td>Rs 7,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 – 32</td>
<td>Rs 12,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 – 33</td>
<td>Rs 9,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933 – 34</td>
<td>Rs 12,241</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934 – 35</td>
<td>Rs 16,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 – 36</td>
<td>Rs 32,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 - 37</td>
<td>Rs 45,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total amount realized from the premium was Rs 1,37,045 and out of it only Rs 3,212 was spent for the improvement of communication in the colonization area.\footnote{Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1939, The Assam Gazette, Part VI, A, 1939, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1939, p. 1068.}
The issue of Squatting: The practice of taking up land without formal application to the concerned authorities known as squatting was a regular feature among the immigrants in their attempt to get settlement of land. The committee made the observation that the immigrant had often pinned his faith in the motto that possession is the nine point of law, and in many cases he has taken it to be the ten, particularly in Barpeta subdivision of the Kamrup district. The immigrants often squatted in areas which were closed for their settlement, trusting their tenacity to sit on the land long enough for it to be regarded as a hardship to turn them out, so that an order might be issued throwing open the closed area to their settlement.

Selling of lands to the immigrants by the Assamese: It was not only the colonial government, landlord or the leading men among the immigrants, who were making money by selling land to them, but many Assamese speculators who usually took land for that purpose and in many cases had not taken up land at all and sold it to the immigrant for a good sum of money. The committee observed that the objections of the local people to the immigrants as a class and their insistent request for protection against the oppression of the immigrants had been in some degree nullified by the many ‘traitors’ among their ranks who had directly invited the immigrants into their villages or into the Assamese lines of the villages by selling their ‘patta’ land and leaving their village. This had sometime been occasioned by party faction in the village and some time by the real need of money on the part of the indigenous people.

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310 Ibid.  
311 Ibid, p. 5.  
312 Ibid, p. 6.  
313 Ibid.
Assamese got a very good price for his land and the popular statement that Assamese were forced to leave their village and migrate elsewhere must be qualified by consideration of the nature of ‘force’ exerted. The Line System Committee also found Assamese engaging immigrants as ‘Adhidars’, or tenants in Nisf Khiraj lands.

In the district of Nowgong, it was found that in case of the so called ‘Mixed Villages’, where both Assamese and immigrants could take settlement of land, had completely transformed into immigrant villages as the Assamese sell their land for any reason (some members of the committee pointed out it was the lure of money which tempted them to sell their land, and some other members stressed the fact that it was due to the oppressive tactics of immigrants that the Assamese were forced to sell their land.)

The reason for treating these observations as vital was the simple fact these observations were not given the serious attention it deserved, as concerns on these issues would have went a long way in preventing the conflict between the immigrants and the indigenous people. The colonial authorities continued to encourage immigration for the purpose of increasing the revenue through premium money even when lands were not available for settlement. This made them only to de reserve the forest reserves, professional grazing reserves, and allowed settlement in tribal inhabited areas. As far as the immigrants were concerned they continued to resort to squatting on the hope that they would be allowed settlement at the end, and in fact in some cases they were allowed settlement and this only encouraged squatting in prohibited areas. The issue of transfer of periodic ‘patta’

314 ibid.
land was not dealt by the Line System and as such ‘patta’ lands were continued to be transferred to the immigrants. The utter disregard shown to these observations by the authorities only led to greater conflict between the immigrants and the indigenous not only during the colonial period but beyond it.

**Action Taken by the Gopinath Bardoloi ministry on the Line System Committee Report**

(Resolution of November, 4, 1939)

The Congress under Gopinath Bardoloi came to power in 1938, but even the government of Gopinath Bardoloi did not take any actions on the Line System Committee’s report until 4th November, 1939, when the government through Resolution Number. 5216R initiated a new policy on the issue of land settlement. The new policy was one of planned settlement in the interests of the cultivators themselves as well as protecting the interests of the indigenous people particularly those belonging to the tribal and backward classes.

Secondly, lands which had been reserved for settlement for definite purposes like village grazing grounds, professional grazing reserves, and the like would not be opened for settlement to all persons, whether immigrants or non immigrants, and all persons in occupation of land within these reserves would be evicted.

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318 Resolution on the Line System Committee’s Report, Extract from the proceedings from the Government of Assam in Revenue Department, No. 5216R, Dated, 4th November, 1939, The Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, Published by Authority, Shillong, 4th November, 1939, p. 268.

319 ibid.

320 ibid.
Thirdly, settlement of land would be strictly limited to actual cultivators and in proportion to their individual resources, provided that the total area settled with a cultivator should not exceed 30 bighas.\footnote{ibid.}

Fourthly, government agreed with the Line System Committee recommendations that the unit of restriction should be larger wherever possible, and therefore in the submontane areas, it was decided to constitute whole mauza or compact parts of mauzas inhabited primarily by tribal and backward classes into prohibited areas.\footnote{ibid.} Government would also consider a whole village or a larger compact area predominantly peopled by tribal and backward classes as a prohibited area.\footnote{ibid.} Within these prohibited areas, immigrants would not be allowed land either by settlement or by transfer of annual pattas, and any immigrant so taking up land or by squatting would be evicted.\footnote{ibid.}

Fifthly, those immigrants who had acquired or encroached on land which were hitherto prohibited areas meant for the tribal and backward classes would be evicted, but in areas which were hitherto constituted as prohibited area in the interest of the indigenous people other than tribal and backward classes, government proposed a relaxation,

A) When the number of immigrant family in a village is substantial i.e. 15 or more in number.\footnote{ibid.}

B) The occupation dated before 1\textsuperscript{st} April, 1937.\footnote{ibid.}
C) When any immigrant had been in bona fide occupation of land for 12 years prior to
1\textsuperscript{st} April, 1937, and had been paying or pay the revenue due in respect of the land
for the period of occupation, such persons would not be disturbed in their present
possession in the village provided they pay the premium fixed for the land but they
would not be allowed to extend their possession in the prohibited areas.\textsuperscript{327}

But if an immigrant did not fulfill the above mentioned conditions, he would be liable
to eviction except in regard to periodically settled land, but they would be given
preference in the settlement of land available for immigrants elsewhere in the district or
in the neighbouring district.\textsuperscript{328} If it was proved that valuable consideration had passed
from the evicted immigrant to the previous settlement holder, the Deputy Commissioner
would examine the question and recommend to the government that no premium be
charged from such immigrants for lands allotted elsewhere and the transferee should be
penalized by non renewal of his annual lease.\textsuperscript{329}

Sixthly, indigenous people would be allowed settlement of land in areas meant for
the backward and the tribal classes, but this would be limited to only bona fide
agriculturists for cultivation and the amount of land would be limited to 30 bighas/ family
and any \textit{patta} issued to such person would not be converted into periodic \textit{patta}.\textsuperscript{330} The
transfer of annual \textit{patta} in such a prohibited area to an immigrant would entail the

\textsuperscript{327} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{328} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{329} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{330} \textit{Ibid.}
cancellation or the non renewal of all the annual *pattas* held by the transferor in the village or its neighbourhood.\(^{331}\)

Seventhly, squatting would be prohibited outside the prohibited areas except when fluctuating cultivation prevail and the Deputy Commissioner consider that it should be allowed to continue. \(^{332}\) Settlement of land would be made on application and settlement would be refused to any one ‘who is not a bona fide cultivator or settlement with whom would likely to be contrary to local welfare.’\(^ {333}\)

Eighthly, for the purpose of this above orders, the term ‘immigrant’ would include any one who came from outside the province for the purpose of taking up land for cultivation and did not include inhabitants from Sylhet or Cachar migrating into Assam Valley and bona fide cultivators from the Surma Valley would be treated on the same plane as the indigenous cultivators. \(^{334}\) The term backward classes include schedule castes. \(^{335}\)

Lastly, those women who married immigrants and allowed their land to be cultivated by their husbands must be left undisturbed in the enjoyment of the property that belonged to them on the mere ground that their husbands were immigrant cultivators. \(^ {336}\)

**Land Development Scheme of the Saadulla Ministry, (Line System made Dysfunctional)**

The Congress government in Assam resigned in 1939, in response to Mahatma Gandhi’s call not to support the British war efforts against the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy and was replaced by the Saadulla ministry. The government headed by Saadulla

\(^{331}\) *ibid*, pp. 268, 269.
\(^{332}\) *ibid*, p. 269.
\(^{333}\) *ibid*.
\(^{334}\) *ibid*.
\(^{335}\) *ibid*.
\(^{336}\) *ibid*. 
which remained in power for the next 6 years (between December, 1941, to August, 1942, the Governor rule was in force) framed a number of policies to protect and promote the immigrant interests. The resolution of the Bardoloi ministry on the Line System report was not acceptable to the new ministry of Saadulla and therefore an All Party Conference was called at Shillong resulting in the resolution of June 21, 1940.\footnote{ibid.}

The main feature of this new land settlement policy was the Land Development Scheme which the government proposed to start in as many areas of the province as possible.\footnote{Assam Secretariat, Revenue - B, June, 1941, Land Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, Nos. 254 – 258, \textit{Extract from the proceedings from the Government of Assam in the Revenue Department, No. 3252R, Dated, 21\textsuperscript{st} June, 1940.}} In the proposed scheme, small blocks of unopened land suitable for settlement would be created after reserving 30\% for the future expansion of the existing population, with all squatting prohibited, and would be allotted for settlement to members of different communities who were in need of land, \textit{viz} - the indigenous Assamese - both Hindus and Muslims, tribal people, schedule caste, immigrants.\footnote{ibid.} Speculation would be rigidly discouraged and with this objective in view, settlement of land with any family of five persons would be limited to a maximum of 30 \textit{bighas}.\footnote{ibid.} In these development areas, a premium at the rate of Rs 5 per \textit{bigha} would be charged on the settlers, that is Rs 2 at the time of allotment and the balance within the next five years.\footnote{ibid.} For the first two years settlers would be exempted from payment of revenue, and at the end of the fifth year the opinion of the settlers in each block would be taken and if 75\% of them wanted periodic \textit{pattas} then this would be issued to them, otherwise \textit{pattas} would remain annual and would

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\footnote{337 ibid.}
\footnote{338 Assam Secretariat, Revenue - B, June, 1941, Land Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, Nos. 254 – 258, \textit{Extract from the proceedings from the Government of Assam in the Revenue Department, No. 3252R, Dated, 21\textsuperscript{st} June, 1940.}}
\footnote{339 ibid.}
\footnote{340 ibid.}
\footnote{341 ibid.}
carry no right of transfer. Restriction would not cease on the allotment of land in areas inhabited by the tribals as well as by the schedule castes and would continue as long as the government deemed it necessary for the protection of their interests. For the purpose of this scheme certain terms were given precise definitions:

Immigrants – For the purpose of this orders, the term immigrants means any one coming from outside Assam before 1st January, 1938, for the purpose of taking up lands for cultivation and would include Muslims and Hindus from Bengal commonly known as Mymensinghias, people from Upper India, Nepal. The people from Cachar and Sylhet settling in the Assam valley would be treated on the same footing as the indigenous.

Actual Cultivators: One whose real and principal source of income is from ordinary cultivation.

Landless: Any one who in his own name or in the name of his family, or any of its members had less than five bighas of land.

The resolution did not by itself laid the ground for the relaxation of all restrictions on the settlement of East Bengali immigrants but a supplementary letter sent by A. G. Patton, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Revenue Department, dated 20th July 1940, to the

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342 ibid.
343 ibid.
344 ibid.
345 ibid.
346 ibid.
347 ibid.
Commissioners of Divisions, Assam, outlined a set of measures that virtually condoned immigrant encroachment on reserved lands and in areas closed to them for settlement.\footnote{Assam Secretariat, Revenue - B, June, 1941, Land Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, Nos. 254 – 258, Letter number. 3549R, From A. G. Patton, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Revenue Department, to the Commissioner of Divisions.}

The letter started with the observation that the present Line System was not maintainable under section 298 of the Government of India Act, 1935.\footnote{Ibid.} The letter ordered that those who encroached into reserves - other than those who were in occupation of it prior to 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1938, or those who were driven to them by erosion of their land elsewhere in the valley - should be evicted from them at once.\footnote{Ibid.} Encroachers of long standing should be provided lands in the reserves, if available for settlement, at the rate of Rs 5/bigha and back revenue, and if land was not to be settled with them in the reserves, they must be left where they were in the present, unless land is made available to them under the development scheme.\footnote{Ibid.} Reserves should be carefully scrutinized to see if they were in excess of requirement, and if so which part could be settled and in all such cases settlement must be compact and not scattered over the reserves and if necessary encroachers must be transferred from one part to another.\footnote{Ibid.}

The letter noted that it was the policy of the government to give adequate protection to the tribals and the schedule caste people and the district officers would determine which area were to be closed for settlement for the protection of their interests and to what extent eviction would be necessary.\footnote{Ibid.} Other closed areas which were meant for the protection of the indigenous people need not remain closed if they had been largely encroached by the
immigrants and therefore they should not be evicted and pattas be issued to them at the premium of Rs 5/bighas and back revenue.\textsuperscript{354} Again eviction from closed area must be made sparingly and must be reported to the government for prior approval.\textsuperscript{355}

The most important point highlighted in this letter was that anyone who may come to this province for the first time subsequent to 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1938, will be excluded from settlement in the development scheme but elsewhere there was no objection to settlement with newcomers when land was available and where the district officers had no objections.\textsuperscript{356}

Another important issue was the transfer of periodic patta land and land on annual lease to the immigrant by the indigenous Assamese in areas closed to immigrant settlement. This issue had acquired serious dimension in the Laluk and Naoboicha mauza in North Lakhimpur.\textsuperscript{357} The sub divisional officer of Lakhimpur reported that in 1938, the number of sale deeds executed in favour of the immigrants were 30, in 1939, it went on to 75, and in 1940 all of a sudden the figure was around 208 covering 2000 bighas of land.\textsuperscript{358} A. G. Patton, Revenue Secretary, observed in a letter to the Commissioners of Divisions, that there was little that the government could do in this matter and the Line System could not be applied to prevent this situation since “it was directed to control the settlement of waste lands and not the method of disposal of lands for which periodic pattas had been issued.”\textsuperscript{359}

On the issue of transfer of annual pattas to the immigrants in a closed areas, Patton pointed out that the orders of the Revenue Tribunal passed on 17\textsuperscript{th} June 1937, on a petition filed by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{354} \textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{355} \textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{356} \textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{357} \textit{Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Revenue - A, June, 1941, Nos. 1 – 9 (Sale of periodic pattas and transfer of Annual pattas to immigrants in closed areas) p. 2.}
\item \textsuperscript{358} \textit{ibid}, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{359} \textit{ibid}, pp. 3, 4.
\end{itemize}
Asim ud din Dewani and others, which laid own that non renewal notice should be issued when land on annual lease had been transferred to an immigrant must be followed.\textsuperscript{360} However this rule was modified by an instruction issued on 20\textsuperscript{th} June, 1940, which contemplates leaving the immigrants where they were if he was doing no harm or had come in large numbers.\textsuperscript{361}

The Land Development Scheme tended to create an erroneous impression that the object of the government was to develop as quickly as possible, all cultivable lands at its disposal, and share it out among all the communities, and this had led to considerable influx of land hungry immigrants into Assam and false hopes of providing them with land for early settlement.\textsuperscript{362} In fact most of the blocks selected for this development schemes were not vacant blocks, but were already more or less honeycombed with settlers, and this exacerbated the relations between the neighbouring colonists of different classes.\textsuperscript{363}

In 1940, during the different sessions of the Assam legislative Assembly, the issue of encroachments by immigrants into lined areas, closed villages, and grazing reserves were raised by a number of legislators like Kameswar Das, Mahadeb Sarma, and Ghayansam Das.

Kameswar Das, presented a petition signed by 200 signatories who were inhabitants of villages of Ulubari, Rangdia, Bennibari, Belguri, Kaurobaha, - mostly belonging to the Kachari tribes - in the Howli \textit{mauza} of Barpeta subdivision, where the people complained

\textsuperscript{360}ibid.
\textsuperscript{361}ibid.
\textsuperscript{362}\textit{Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy}, 1943, Appendix, IV.
\textsuperscript{363}ibid.
of mass raids by immigrant encroachers on their lands.\footnote{Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1940, The Assam Gazette, Part VI, A, 1940, pp. 327, 328.} Earlier a petition was presented by Beliram Das regarding immigrant encroachments in the Pubchamaria \textit{mauza} in the district of Kamrup.\footnote{ibid, pp. 518, 519.} Mahadeb Sarma also raised the issue of encroachment in the Komorakhati grazing reserve of the Tezpur sub division of Darrang district.\footnote{ibid, p. 26.} Kameswar Das presented another petition where he complained that the victims of these mass encroachments were the \textit{Kachari} tribes living in the closed villages of Gobordhana, Kharija and other such villages located in the Bijni and Howli \textit{Mauza} and the encroachers in most cases were not landless peasants but one who already had land elsewhere in the sub division of Barpeta, some possessing even 100 \textit{bighas}.\footnote{ibid, pp. 865, 866.}

The usual reply to all these queries by the Revenue Minister Saiydur Rahman was that the incidents of encroachments were under probe by the deputy collector or the sub division officer and since the issue of encroachment was inextricably linked with the issue of Line System, decision against which was pending with the government, any action had to be taken very carefully.\footnote{ibid.}

\textit{Resolution of 6th, March, 1942.}

In 1941, the Saadulla ministry was forced to resign when Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri’s party withdrew support to the Saadulla ministry and Chaudhuri could have formed a government with the help of Congress support but the Congress’s stand remained ambiguous for a long time and on 25th December, 1941, the Assam Legislative Assembly was suspended by the Governor by proclaiming Section 93 of the Government of India Act,
1935”.\textsuperscript{369} In fact there were persistent public agitations in Nogwong from September, 1941, onwards to pressurize the Congress party to resume parliamentary activities and a public committee was formed to urge the Congress high command to allow Congress legislators to participate in the ensuing Assembly session.\textsuperscript{370} Even the local press recommended this course for the Congress.\textsuperscript{371} The main reason for this growing public concern was Saadulla’s pro immigrant land settlement policy which he was able to frame easily in the absence of any effective opposition in the Legislative Assembly.

On 6\textsuperscript{th} March 1942, the Governor of Assam through resolution number RD3/43/13 laid down a new policy of land settlement with the objective of putting a brake on infiltration by the immigrants and to avoid the dislocation of peaceful relations in the villages which might result from accelerated immigration and the competition between various classes of settlers, attendant on the opening out of new areas on a large scale and to attain these objectives the following orders were issued.\textsuperscript{372}

1) It was not administratively advisable to continue with the Development Scheme already initiated or in the process of initiation, and it would be better to add to the existing Colonization Areas in the district of Nowgong, Darrang, and opening new ones in Kamrup, leaving the indigenous people to take up lands where they wanted. Land in all these districts would be settled only on written application under Rule 16

\textsuperscript{370} \textit{Ibid}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{371} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{372} \textit{Extract of the proceedings of the Government of Assam in the Revenue Department, No, RC 8/42/19, dated the 6\textsuperscript{th} March, 1942, (Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy, 1943, Appendix, IV.)}
of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, since this rule allows the Deputy Commissioner to refuse or allow settlement.

2) In the interest of peace and good governance, it was desirable to keep fresh settlement of immigrants in as close proximity as possible to their older settlement and in particular avoid making settlement in areas populated mainly by the tribals such as the Baska ‘mauzas’ of the Kamrup or the areas close to the Mikir Hills in Nowgong district.

3) The orders observed that it was impossible to stop immigration into Assam but it was equally true that there was not enough suitable land fit for settlement to accommodate all those who were in search of land without seriously prejudicing the interest not only of the indigenous people but also of those who had come into Assam from Bengal and settled in the last 20 or 30 years. However there were certain class of immigrants who have established claims to settlement which was not tenable on a strictly legal basis but are more tenable in equity and these are the first whom government proposes to accommodate in extensions to the colonization areas’. These classes were:

A) Those who were granted settlement but whose land had been eroded by the Brahmaputra or other rivers.

B) Those who had purchased annual ‘patta’ land in closed villages but whose continued occupation of land would mean constant friction with the larger majority of the indigenous inhabitants and who therefore in the interest of good administration must be evicted.

\[373\] *ibid.*
C) Those who were in unauthorized occupation of grazing reserves. They had no claim but as they had been allowed to remain in occupation on the understanding that they would not be evicted unless they could be provided land elsewhere, government therefore considered they must be provided land in the colonization areas. An exception to this rule was that when the local officer considers that their occupation of land had not interfered with grazing facilities and that land in their occupation would be excluded from the reserved areas, in such cases on payment of premium and back revenue, settlement would be allowed.

4) Only after these classes of immigrants had been settled, any additional land if available would be allotted to those applicants who have been longest in the province especially who came to Assam before 1st January. 1938.\textsuperscript{374}

5) The resolution also stated that the Government of Assam was resolved to remove all encroachers from grazing reserves and to keep those areas reserved in the future; old encroachers would be provided land elsewhere but new encroachers would be summarily evicted and attempts to re encroach would be dealt strictly.\textsuperscript{375}

6) In the Colonization areas, a premium of Rs 5/bigha would be levied and the greater part of the premium would be spent on the improvement of communication and water supply in the areas from which it was extracted.\textsuperscript{376} In areas which had a predominant immigrant population, restriction in individual village would be

\textsuperscript{374} ibid.
\textsuperscript{375} ibid.
\textsuperscript{376} ibid.
gradually withdrawn as recommended by the Line System Committee that the unit of restriction should be the ‘Mauza’.\textsuperscript{377}

According to Amalendu Guha, the resolution was a calculated move on the part of the Governor of Assam, to appease Hindu and Assamese public opinion at a critical juncture when the 2\textsuperscript{nd} World War was rapidly approaching in India’s eastern frontier, and when the Congress was being pressed by the people all over the country to throw the gauntlet at the Raj.\textsuperscript{378} However in the Memorandum on Waste Land Settlement and Immigrant policy of 1943, the Revenue Secretary stated that since the resolution of March 6, 1942, 75,000 \textit{bighas}, of land had been allotted for settlement with the immigrants and in the interests of the Grow More Food Campaign evictions on encroachers had been stayed.\textsuperscript{379} The Memorandum pointed out the fact that the accelerated influx of landless immigrants into Assam had been on the rise for the last couple of years as immigrants came to Assam lured by the cheap prices of food items and the possibility of obtaining land for cultivation.\textsuperscript{380} The number of such landless immigrants was somewhere around 2, 00,000, and only a proportion of them were able bodied man.\textsuperscript{381}

\textbf{De reserving the Grazing Reserves. (Resolution of August, 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1943)}

Meanwhile, Muhammad Saadulla returned to power on 25\textsuperscript{th}, August, 1942, “The raj was pleased to revoke Section 93 so that the popular resistance (Quit India Movement)
could be confronted by a popular ministry.”  

Here two points needs to be studied before analyzing land settlement policy of Saadulla by de reserving of the grazing reserves;

**Motive Behind such a Policy:** In February, 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah propounded his ‘Two Nation Theory’ and in March the same year, the All India Muslim League passed the Pakistan resolution at its Lahore session and it was resolved that the League would accept no constitutional plan for India unless two Muslim majority zones with autonomous and sovereign status were created in North western and North eastern India with such territorial adjustments as was necessary. The resolution did not by itself mentioned Assam in the future concept of Pakistan but Jinnah in a correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi in September, 1944, told that Pakistan was composed of 2 zones; north west and north east comprising 6 province; Sind, Baluchistan, North West Frontier Province, the Punjab, Bengal, and Assam subject to territorial adjustments as was agreed upon in the Lahore resolution. A pro Pakistani organization called the ‘East Bengal Renaissance Society’ claimed that Assam was within the Zone where Muslims were in majority and majority of the people in Assam was Bengali speaking. To make Pakistan work administratively and economically. Assam was needed in the East Pakistan Zone as Assam was the only outlet for the expanding Bengali population and the province of Assam being rich in forest and mineral resources. East Bengal needed Assam in order to become financially and economically strong.

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386 *Ibid*. 
Instigated by the Muslim League government in Bengal as well as the Muslim League party in Assam, which was a part of the Assam government, Saadulla started on his task of increasing the Muslim population by revising the land settlement policies in favour of the immigrants and the apparent motive was the ‘Grow More Food Campaign’ by providing land to the distress people of Bengal affected by the famine of 1943.

**Amount of Waste Lands in Assam:** In the Memorandum on Assam’s Waste Land Settlement and Immigrant policy of 1943, it was stated that the amount of waste lands available for settlement had been exaggerated.\(^{387}\) In fact in the year 1937, Revenue Minister Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, gave the figures as shown in Table 3.16: of the amount of cultivable waste lands other than fallow in the six districts of the Assam Valley in 1936 – 37.\(^{388}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the districts</th>
<th>Cultivable Waste Land other than Fallow in acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>932, 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>418, 050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>718, 890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>1, 438, 790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>1, 482, 573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>1, 486, 599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri added that all these lands were not fit for profitable cultivation and he cited the case of Nowgong where only 50, 000 acres were fit for

\(^{387}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{388}\) *Debates of the Assam Legislative Assembly*, Shillong, 1937, August – September Session, 1937, Volume - II, Number. 6, p. 1323.
profitable cultivation. To add one more important point here, settlement of immigrants in the district of Nowgong did not only take place on virgin waste lands but altogether 59 grazing reserves were opened up and added to the colonization scheme from 1931 – 32 till 1936 – 37, (in 1931 – 32, the area under grazing reserves in the district was 38, 753 acres but in 1936 – 37, it was reduced to 35, 716 acres).

Again to emphasize this point, the Memorandum on Assam’s Waste Land and Immigrant policy of 1943, quoted figures published in the Agricultural Statistics of Assam for 1940 – 41, by the Agricultural Department, which showed 177 lakhs acres as ‘land not cultivated’ and out of this 177 lakh acres of land, nearly 130 lakh acres, were located in the hill districts and the frontier areas and very little of this land was cultivable and the cultivation as was generally done there was of the ‘jhuming’ variety which no government would sought to encourage owing to effect on soil erosion. Out of the remaining 47 lakhs acres of land, 42 lakhs acres were situated in the six districts of the Assam valley and this figures included hills, swamps, roads and other uncultivable lands. The Memorandum then gave a detail break up of the figures of the extent of cultivable waste land in the plain districts of the Assam valley which was compiled by the Department of Agriculture on a request by the Government of India and is shown in the Table 3.17: below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Amount of cultivable waste land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>2 and a half lakhs of acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>3 lakhs of acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

389 ibid, pp. 1323, 1324.
390 ibid, p. 647.
391 Memorandum on Assam’s Waste Land and Immigration Policy, 1943, p. 2.
392 ibid.
393 ibid.
Nowgong | 1 and a half lakhs of acres  
| Darrang | 3 lakhs of acres  
| Sibsagar | 4 lakhs of acres  
| Lakhimpur | 4 and a half lakhs of acres  
| Sylhet | 2 and a half lakhs of acres  
| Cachar | half lakhs of acres  

In the June - July session of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1943, the government of Assam stated that the amount of cultivable waste lands in Assam was 18 million acres, and of this more than three fourth were in the Hills, over which Government had no hand as they were included in the excluded or partially excluded areas.\(^{394}\)

On 24\(^{th}\) August, 1943, the Revenue Department, Government of Assam, through resolution number RD 3/43/13, decided that in view of the present urgent need of growing more food, coupled with the desirability of increasing the revenue of the province, and of providing land for an increased number of landless persons, the government intend to review the present policy in respect of land settlement, and thus accordingly the government of Assam had decided that\(^{395}\)

1) In the districts of Darrang and Kamrup, to encourage further settlement of the indigenous population in the submontane areas, and in other parts of the districts to add to the colonization areas by opening more lands for the immigrant population

\(^{394}\) Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, *File No. RD. 42/45*, Year, 1945.  
\(^{395}\) Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD 3/43, Year, 1943, Subject - *Memorandum on Assam’s Waste land and Immigration Policy*, 1943, Orders of the Governor, *Extract of the Proceedings of the government of Assam in the Revenue Department, No. RD 3/43/13, dated the 24\(^{th}\) August, 1943.*
and particularly by de reserving lands reserved for professional graziers when these were found to be surplus to requirement.

2) In the district of Nowgong, to proceed with the development scheme outlined in the government of Assam, resolution of 21st June, 1940, whereby blocks of lands would be apportioned to different communities in proportion to their needs and here also the surplus portion of professional grazing reserves would be opened to settlement in the same way.

3) In the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, to open surplus reserves and to encourage further settlement of waste lands with the indigenous population.

4) A special officer would be appointed to examine the grazing reserves with a view to determine how far these were surplus to requirement. He would begin in the district of Kamrup, and work up the valley making recommendations to government as the examination proceeds. He would thereafter examine in consultation with the two forest officers the two forest reserves of Laokhoa, and Orang, in Nowgong, and Darrang districts respectively, with a view to find out whether they should be deforested in whole or in part, for settlement in the same way as remaining waste lands to be thrown open in these two districts.

5) It was stated that government consider that in the present circumstances the premium to be levied in respect of these new settlement should be fixed at Rs 10 per bigha; but they propose to realize only Rs 2 in the first year, collection being made after the harvest; the balance will be payable in equal instalments in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th year, and no revenue will be realized as at present during the first two years.
On 28th August, 1943, the Government of Assam through the Department of Revenue, Settlement Branch, letter number RD 3/43/20 from A. G. Patton, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Revenue Department to the Commissioner of Divisions, forwarded a copy of the resolution (number RD 3/43/13 dated 24th August 1943) on the land settlement policy and also forwarded the following few instructions for communication to the District officers.\(^{396}\)

1) In the district of Nowgong, the Government has decided to revert to the Development Scheme as was notified in the resolution of June, 1940, and proposed to include new areas within the development scheme.\(^{397}\) Settlement should be made as quickly as possible in the interest of the Grow More Food Campaign in order to bring under cultivation a considerable area of waste lands which was still available in the district of Nowgong. The criterion to be observed in the settlement of land should be the need of the respective communities as evidenced in the numbers of valid application filled for waste lands rather than the proportion of the respective population in the district or the province.

2) In the districts of Kamrup and Darrang, the policy to be followed was to add to the existing colonization areas but prior to that those blocks which had been proposed by the Deputy Commissioner and examined by the Development Officers should be re examined as to find out whether these were suitable for settlement with the immigrants. The letter stated that the government was aware that a large proportion of the cultivable waste lands were located in the submontane ‘mauzaa’ inhabited

\(^{396}\) Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD 3/43, Year, 1943, Subject – Waste Lands Settlement Policy, Letter Number RD 3 /43/20, dated the 28th August, 1943, From A. G. Patton, Revenue Secretary, to the Commissioner of Divisions, p. 1.

\(^{397}\) ibid.
predominantly by the tribals who were opposed to the near approach of the immigrants. Although the government was committed to protect these tribal classes and had even directed that the areas so colonized should be at a distance from the submontane ‘mauza’ but in some cases, if the opinion was that the areas might be settled there without danger of injury to the interests of the tribal classes, then those areas could be included within the colonization scheme.

3) In all the three districts including the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, more land should be made available for settlement by de reserving parts of the professional grazing reserves which might be superfluous to their requirement. The examination of the professional grazing reserves had been taken up by Mr. Desai and the government would issue separate orders on receipt of his report.

4) As far as the issue of encroachment, the following instructions were provided to the District Officers to deal with this problem. Encroachments were generally of two kinds and needed to be handled in the following manner -

A) Encroachments on Government reserve lands – In this kind of encroachment, the government policy was that all new encroachers should be evicted but no steps should be taken to evict encroachers pending the report of the special officers; if the areas encroached was subsequently de reserved, there would be little objective to be gained by evicting encroachers. They would be given settlement on payment of full premium and back revenue and a fine of Rs 2 per bigha on the area encroached so that it could act as a deterrent to future encroachers. If the area encroached was not de reserved then all new encroachers should be evicted provided that if they could produce proof of having formerly held land which had
been eroded, they must be provided land elsewhere but their eviction would not depend on this provision.

B) If the encroachment consisted of annual ‘patta’ land transferred to the encroachers for valuable consideration, the government would generally allow settlement but a premium of Rs 3 must be paid before the ‘patta’ could be converted into periodic. If the encroachment was on areas predominantly inhabited by tribal classes, all encroachers who had taken possession later than 1st January, 1942, should be evicted; in other areas new encroachers should be evicted unless the number of such encroachers was so large and the number of indigenous inhabitants of the village so small that the Deputy Commissioner has no further objections in maintaining a reservation against immigrants. In all cases where encroachers were allowed to remain, settlement would be made on payment of back revenue and a levy of Rs 1/bigha encroached to act as a deterrent for future encroachers.

5) Premium would be payable in installments until the issue of periodic pattas but if such land was fit for immediate settlement on periodic ‘pattas’, full premium would have to be paid before such ‘pattas’ was issued. The above rules were subject to the proviso that premium will not be levied in area where the surrounding immigrants had not paid premium, example Barpeta. The word ‘new’ should be applied to those encroachers which had taken place since 1st January, 1943. In case of all settlement of land with the immigrants, preference should be given to those who had been longest in Assam.

6) Eviction should normally be carried during the cold weather to cause less hardship to the person evicted and in the interest of the Grow More Food Campaign, crops
should not be destroyed but arrangement should be made either to harvest them on behalf of the government or to put them to auction, the proceeds whereof would go to the grower minus cost to the government.

On 18\textsuperscript{th} February, 1944, the Revenue Secretary of the Government of Assam wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Divisions, No RD 24/43/10 in which he informed that the government of Assam had received the report from the Special Officer, S. P. Desai, appointed to examine the professional grazing reserves and decided not to accept the standard adopted by Mr. Desai which was as follows – an area of 5 bighas may be allowed for each buffalos assessed to tax and a similar areas for every 3 cows assessed to tax\textsuperscript{398}. However the above principal should ‘now be accepted as a guide’ by District Officers in the Assam Valley for computing the area to be retained for the professional grazing reserves subject to the following considerations\textsuperscript{399}:

a) Care should be taken to preserve those reserves on which depends the supply of fresh milk to the neighboring towns, example, Charkolia in Dibrugarh, or of drought animals to the neighboring villages.

b) The unnecessary eviction of old encroachers should be avoided as stated in letter No RD 3/43/20 dated 28\textsuperscript{th} August, 1943. This did not apply to those who had been encroaching in large numbers in recent months who must be evicted, if the reserves encroached by them were not found to be excess in requirement. Old encroachers should be given priority in allocation of land to be de reserved.

\textsuperscript{398} Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD 3/43, Year, 1943, Subject – Waste Lands Settlement Policy, Letter Number RD 24 /43/10, dated the 18\textsuperscript{th} February, 1944, From A. G. Patton, Revenue Secretary, to the Commissioner of Divisions, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{399} ibid.
c) District officers should not open any reserves in predominantly tribal areas for settlement with immigrants without referring the case to the government for orders.

Taking all these factors into consideration the District Officers must open the professional grazing reserves or surplus part of it for settlement.\textsuperscript{400} This should be done without any loss of time and additional staff must be employed for early settlement of the surplus areas.\textsuperscript{401} However settlement would not be made with immigrants in the areas de reserved in the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, but elsewhere, they were eligible for settlement, preference being given to those who had been longer in Assam and had no land.\textsuperscript{402}

Government of Assam attached considerable importance to this aspect of the land settlement policy which matched with the interest of the Grow More Food Campaign and all the officers would devote their energy in implementing the policy of the government so that land de reserved might be bought under cultivation for the March/April sowing of the ‘Ahu’ etc paddy and other food crops and other crops grown well in time.\textsuperscript{403}

In its note for the Famine Enquiry Committee of 1944, the Secretary to the Revenue Department of Assam, stated that in the interest of ‘Grow More Food Campaign’, the government of Assam had re stated its policy on land settlement and issued a resolution to that effect, dated 24\textsuperscript{th} August, 1943, and had issued a number of supplementary instructions

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{402} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid, p. 2.
from time to time to give effect to its policy. The results of this change in land settlement policy as pointed out by the note for the Famine Enquiry Committee were as follows:

a) Lines were withdrawn in a number of villages where they existed before, enabling immigrant to obtain settlement of land on the Assamese side of the lines and also recognizing encroachments made by the immigrants so as to obviate necessity for their eviction, and in fact a number of encroachments in the reserves were validated.

b) After a thorough enquiry made by an ICS officer into the need to retain the existing professional grazing reserves, the government had decided to cut down the area so reserved according to a formula of 5 bighas for each buffalo assessed to a grazing tax and a similar amount for three cows and instructed the Deputy Commissioners to de reserve portions of grazing reserves found excess according to such formula and settle them with immigrants or indigenous people according to the locality in which the reserves were situated. De reservation in Nowgong district had started and considerable areas had been settled and the work was proceeding slowly.

c) A large number of small village grazing grounds meant for village cattle and which were not fully utilized for this purpose were thrown open for settlement.

d) Instruction were issued to the Deputy Commissioners to cancel the annual ‘pattas’ of those persons who left their land uncultivated and resettle them with others who would be willing to grow more food.

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404 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD 3/43, Year, 1943, Subject – Waste Lands Settlement Policy, Note for the Famine Enquiry Committee, p. 1.
405 ibid, pp. 1, 2.
406 ibid, p. 2.
407 ibid.
408 ibid, pp. 2, 3.
e) Since the resolution of 24th August, 1943, considerable areas were included in the colonization scheme in the three lower districts of the Assam valley – Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong - and were thrown open for settlement to the immigrants who had formerly not been admitted to settlement in this areas.\textsuperscript{410} In the districts of Goalpara and Sylhet, two permanently settled districts, there was not much waste lands available and in the district of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, immigrants had not been admitted to settlement as the Deputy Commissioners of these two districts were more engrossed with the problem of requisitioning more lands for the military and the Air force and allied commands.\textsuperscript{411}

S. P. Desai, who was appointed in 1943, as the special officer to investigate which of the grazing reserves could be de reserved for settlement, stated that the resolution of August 24th, 1943, regarding land settlement policy, and paragraph 4 of government policy enunciated on 28th August, 1943, of their letter to the Commissioner of Divisions which forms its pendant, had opened the floodgates to the immigrants and they had already invaded several reserves and although the graziers were complaining about the encroachments made by the immigrants on the reserves, the graziers found that they had no option but to shift themselves bag and baggage.\textsuperscript{412} He also pointed out that the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, as far the immigrant encroachers were concerned, was virtually non existent and they openly claim that they had short circuited the local officials.\textsuperscript{413} The Assamese Pamuas and a few Nepali graziers were driven away from the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[409] \textit{Ibid}, p. 3.
\item[410] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[411] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[413] \textit{Ibid}.
\end{footnotes}
grazing reserves and their cup of humiliation was full and they were greatly perturbed and their talk exhibit deep seated bitterness.414

**Involvement of the province of Bengal**

The Bengal Legislative Council moved and carried a motion on 16\textsuperscript{th} July, 1943, under rule 12 of the Bengal Legislative Council procedure rules.415 The motion read as

> “An address be presented to his Excellency, the Governor of Bengal, through the Hon’ble president of the Bengal Legislative Council, requesting his Excellency, to urge upon the Government of India, to take immediate steps so that all existing restrictions imposed by the Government of Assam on cultivators from this province in getting settlement of land in the Assam valley be removed.”416

On 6\textsuperscript{th} March, 1944, S. Banerjee, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, wrote a letter to his counterpart, A. G. Patton, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Revenue Department, drawing his attention to the motion passed by the Bengal Legislative Council on 16\textsuperscript{th} July, 1943.417 In the beginning of the letter, Banerjee pointed out the fact that in the Line System Committee Report of 1938, it was stated that without the aid of the immigrants from East Bengal, the indigenous people of Assam would not be able to develop the enormous areas lying waste within a reasonable time.418 However the

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415 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, File Number, RD 25/44, Year, 1944, Subject: *Reference from the Government of Bengal regarding Line System in Assam*, Letter from S. Banerjee, Revenue Secretary to the Government of Bengal to A. G. Patton, Revenue Secretary to the Government of Assam, p. 5.
government of Assam by their resolution – Number 3252, dated 21st June, 1940, with the objective of protecting the indigenous people of Assam, prohibited settlement of land with persons coming from outside the province after 1st January, 1938.\textsuperscript{419} The letter then stated that the government of Bengal fully appreciates the concerns of the government of Assam to safeguard the interests of the indigenous people, but it felt necessary to represent to the government of Assam to kindly consider the difficulty caused to the immigrants from Bengal in view of its decision prohibiting settlement to outsider who came after 1st January, 1938, as embodied in paragraph 6 of the resolution of 1940.\textsuperscript{420} The letter stressed the fact that Bengal had a population disproportionately large for her area which had led to enormous pressure on land compelling the surplus population from the border districts like Mymensingh to emigrate into Assam to take up settlement of land in order to sustain their livelihood, and the need for such migration was made more pressing by the acute distress prevailing in Bengal.\textsuperscript{421} In such circumstances, the government of Bengal would be grateful to the government of Assam to reconsider their decision and withdrew or at least suspend the restrictions provided in the resolution of 21st June, 1940, in the interest of inter provincial amity and particularly as a practical token of sympathy towards the distressed people of Bengal.\textsuperscript{422} The letter concluded with the remark that the said restrictions violated Section 298(1) of the Government of India Act, 1935.\textsuperscript{423}

In reply to this letter, A. G. Patton, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Revenue Department, wrote a letter dated 5. 5. 1944, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal,

\textsuperscript{419} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{420} \textit{ibid}, pp. 2, 3.
\textsuperscript{421} \textit{ibid}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{422} \textit{ibid}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{423} \textit{ibid.}
Revenue Department, where he stated that since the publication of the Government Resolution No. 3252R, dated 21st June, 1940, government policy on land settlement with the immigrants had been considerably liberalized.\textsuperscript{424} To emphasize his point he drew the attention to the following resolutions of the Government of Assam, copies of which were attached with the letter.\textsuperscript{425}

1) Government resolution No. RC. 8/42/19 dated 6. 3. 42.


4) Memorandum on Assam’s Waste Land and Immigration Policy.

5) Government letter No. RD. 24/43/10 dated 18. 2. 44. to the Commissioner of Divisions.

Patton pointed out that settlement of land with the immigration was increasing and the government was trying to accelerate it by de-reserving surplus land in the professional grazing reserves for settlement with the immigrants.\textsuperscript{426} He concluded his letter by stating that the Line System could not be abolished wholly by the government of Assam particularly in tribal areas, as the indigenous tribals need protection and since they apprehend at the slightest approach of the immigrant settlers.\textsuperscript{427} Elsewhere the government would gradually abolish the Line System and the process had already started and would continue in areas where castes Hindus were in the majority.\textsuperscript{428} He assured that government

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid, pp. 5, 6.
\textsuperscript{425} Ibid, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{426} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
would provide additional land to the immigrants for settlement provided it was consistent with the government’s policy of reserving adequate land for the indigenous people as well as protecting the vital interests of the tribal classes.  

It must be noted that the Bengal government itself was not doing enough to ameliorate the distress of the famine stricken and landless people in their own province. Lord Wavell on his tour of Bengal in November, 1943, agreed with the views of H, N. Kunzru, a highly reputed moderate nationalist politician, as he made the observations that there was a lack of civic spirit and inefficiency of the Bengal government who were more concerned with their political rivalries than with the famine. In fact Lord Wavell said that he believed that there was more anxiety and sympathy about the Bengal famine in England than any where in India. About the situation in Assam, Lord Wavell pointed out that the natives Assamese were lazy and likely to be ousted by more pushing but less attractive Bengali Muslims. The chief political problem of Assam, Lord Wavell noted, was the desire of the Muslim ministry in Assam to increase immigration into the uncultivated government lands under the slogan of ‘Grow More Food Campaign’ but what they were really after was Grow More Muslims.

Saadulla-Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami Rift, and Revision of the Land Settlement Policy.

During the conference of the Provincial Muslim League held at Barpeta on April, 1944, Muhammad Saadulla was greeted with the following lines written on the walls of the

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429 ibid.
431 ibid.
432 ibid, p. 41
433 ibid.
pandal ‘Minister Give us Land or Resign’. This made Saadulla to remark and charge that the greedy headmen of immigrant villages, Dewanis, and Matabars, had managed to get for themselves pattas for 70 to 100 acres of land each with a view to induct sub tenant there upon. He cited instances when even Assamese Muslims were driven out of their newly reclaimed lands.

On 16th November, 1944, Beliram Das moved an adjournment motion in the Assam Legislative Assembly on the forcible occupation of the grazing reserves by the immigrants from East Bengal and charged that it was being done at the behest of the Bengal government. Saadulla realized that he cannot afford to remain in power by ignoring the indigenous interests and so agreed to a suggestion of Gopinath Bardoloi for an All Party Conference on land settlement which started on 16th December 1944, at Shillong. The conference accepted all the important demands made by the Assam Congress and also a few from the two Muslim League invitees. It was agreed, except by Abdul Matin Chaudhury, and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami, that government would start a well planned scheme of settlement of land and application must be considered not only from landless persons from outside the province but also from indigenous landless people including those outsiders who came before 1st January, 1938. 30% land should be reserved for the future expansion of the indigenous population (Abdul Hamid Khan dissenting with both the proposals). In the settlement plan, land would be divided into blocks for the landless

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435 ibid.
436 ibid.
438 ibid.
439 ibid, p. 176.
440 ibid.
441 ibid.
people of different communities (Abdul Hamid Khan dissenting). Landless persons were defined as those who held not more than 5 bighas of land, and the maximum allotment for each family should be 30 bighas.

A special tribal officer would be appointed which would examine the population of the tribals in tribal and other areas and suggest boundaries to be defined for them in each district and the area required for them would be calculated as double the area required for the present population plus a reservation of 30% (Abdul Hamid Khan dissenting with this proposal). In order to advise the Deputy Commissioner of the three principal districts concerned, there would be a small board in each district who in an advisory capacity would oversee the smooth functioning of the scheme for planned settlement (Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Abdul Hamid Khan dissenting). Following the decisions made at the All Party Conference, a resolution was passed on 15th January 1945, by the Saadulla coalition ministry and the main points were.

1) In the district of Goalpara, Kamrup, Daarang, Nowgong, land would be allotted in a systematic manner to the landless people of all communities including pre 1938 immigrants.

2) No family would get more than 10 acres or 30 bighas.

3) In case of shortage of lands in these four districts, North Lakhimpur sub division would be opened up.
4) Any person having less than 5 bighas of land for cultivation would be regarded as landless.

5) Tribal blocks would be created which would be double the size of the present area in their possession and with additional areas made available for future expansion.

6) Every district would keep 30% of the cultivable waste land for future expansion.

7) No land in the professional grazing reserves, even if in surplus, would be used for settlement but the old settlers would not be evicted.

8) If the land allocated to a community remained unoccupied for 2 years, it would be reallocated to needy people from other communities.

9) With the participation of the members of the All Party Conference, a provincial and three district advisory boards would be constituted.

10) A part of the old scheme to settle grazing grounds would be scrapped.

The resolution was ambiguously worded and it could not be worked out as the both the Revenue minister Munawar Ali and Finance minister Abdul Matin Chaudhury acted against it by preventing officials from taking any actions against immigrants who squatted unlawfully on the reserves and added to it was the encouragement given by Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami to the immigrants to squat on the grazing reserves. Another major complaint was that while an indigenous Assamese having 5 bighas of uneconomic holding would not be allotted additional amount of land, a landless immigrant would on the other hand be allotted 30 bighas of land.

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447 ibid, p. 178.
448 ibid.
In 1945, during the course of the debate on the Budget, in Assam legislative Council, the land settlement policy of the Saadulla ministry came under severe criticism from the Assamese leadership. Beliram Das, one of the members blamed the land settlement policy of the government for the depletion of the cattle population who were dying out of starvation as the government had thrown open all the grazing reserves for settlement with the immigrants.\textsuperscript{449} He cited the case of a number of grazing reserves located in the Kamrup, Nowgong and Darrang districts where the graziers had been put to great hardship even though in the All Party Conference of December, 1944, it was decided to maintain the inviolability of the grazing reserves.\textsuperscript{450} He stated that in the Borghuli and Bhurbhandha grazing reserves in the Nowgong district, nearly 200 huts had been raised in November 1944, in feverish haste although most of these houses were still unoccupied and the land nearby them were uncultivated.\textsuperscript{451} He claimed that a number of Nepali graziers were imposed with a fine of Rs 5/ buffalo and in some cases their cattle were impounded when they took their cattle to some of these grazing reserves.\textsuperscript{452} He alleged that the Revenue Minister Munawar Ali, in his speech in the Muslim League Council meeting held at Gauhati in 1945, had assured the conference that if he could remain the Revenue Minister for another 2 years at least, he could convert Assam into a Muslim majority province.\textsuperscript{453} He also alleged that the invasion of the immigrants has increased the river dacoities in the Kamrup and the Goalpara districts.\textsuperscript{454} If the land settlement policy of the government continueS, he warned, it might led to a civil war like situation as the indigenous people had

\textsuperscript{449} Debates of the Assam Legislative Council, March – April Session, 1945, Volume, IX, No. 2, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{452} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{453} Ibid.
suffered a lot and had endured most and there was a limit to their toleration and they might resort to aggressive steps like the immigrants which might lead to breach of peace.\textsuperscript{455}

Another member Sarveswar Das pointed out that in the plea of ‘Grow More Food Campaign’ the Revenue Minister was settling more land with the immigrants in an unseemly haste by opening up a number of reserves like Laokhowa game reserves, Bhurbhandha reserves, and others in the Nowgong districts and also in different tribal areas.\textsuperscript{456} He cited the report of the colonization officer of Nowgong who stated that out of 12,000 \textit{bighas} of land settled in the Nowgong districts 9,400 \textit{bighas} of land were settled exclusively with the immigrants.\textsuperscript{457} He even alleged that the Revenue Minister had plainly asked the immigrants not to fear anybody, not even the Deputy Commissioner ‘as the Raj was a Muslim Raj.’\textsuperscript{458} Gopinath Bardoloi also pointed out that all actions taken by the government in pursuance of the land settlement policy favoured the immigrants and threw out the local people and the graziers out of their soil.\textsuperscript{459}

He stated

“…time has therefore come for us to say that we can not be a party to any government resolution or to agreement which does not safeguard the interest of the local people, indigenous people, including the schedule caste, tribals, and graziers. Government want to carry a communal policy of complete

\textsuperscript{455} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{456} \textit{Ibid}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{457} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{458} \textit{Ibid}, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{459} \textit{Ibid}, p. 246.
aggressiveness and our position is that if they wish to do so let them alone take
the consequences of their actions.\textsuperscript{460}

Abdur Rouf, an immigrant leader from Barpeta, criticized the government by
pointing out what lakhs of acres of land are lying fallow in the country, whereas lakhs of
immigrant cultivators are starving to death.\textsuperscript{461} He warned the government that the
immigrant would prefer to be shot to death than to die of starvation and before they do that
their representatives and well wishers would withdrew its support from the present
government.\textsuperscript{462}

The vulnerability of the Saadulla ministry was exposed when a number of supporters
of the ministry started shifting their allegiance and to remain in office Saadulla conceded to
the opposition demands for a new resolution on the land settlement policy. A tripartite
agreement was arrived at between Bardoloi, Saadulla and Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri as a
result of which Saadulla agreed to hand over the revenue portfolio to Rohini Kumar
Chaudhuri, a caste Hindu Assamese. The Tripartite agreement also resulted in the
resolution of 13\textsuperscript{th} July, 1945, which was a landmark in the history of land settlement
policy.\textsuperscript{463}

\textsuperscript{460} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.
Resolution of 13th July, 1945.

The Resolution of 13th July 1945, initiated a new land settlement policy with the following four objectives:

A) The establishment of a planned system of land settlement where allowance had been made for the future expansion of the existing population, with the remaining area of cultivable waste lands settled to the best advantage, as early as possible, with those whose need was greater i.e. those who had no land or those having insufficient land for their support.

B) The recognition of landless immigrants from other provinces who came to Assam before 1st January 1938, as being equally entitled with landless indigenous persons to considerations in the allotment of surplus cultivable waste lands on application.

C) The protection of tribal classes in the areas predominantly occupied by them against aggressive elements which were meant to endanger their normal economic and social life.

D) The maintenance of grazing reserves deemed necessary for grazing or other purpose free of encroachers and subject to certain exceptions, the eviction of all encroachers there from.

To achieve the first objective, instructions were issued to collect accurate figure of total settled lands and unsettled lands and the total cultivable waste lands in every cadastral village in the temporary settled areas of the province during the ‘Mandal’s’ summer recess.

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464 Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD. 35/44, Year, 1944, Orders of the Governor, Extract of the proceedings of the Government of Assam in the Revenue Department, No RD 68/44, dated the 13th July, 1945, p. 1.
of 1945.\textsuperscript{465} These instructions were issued because there was always a great misunderstanding between uncultivable waste lands and cultivable waste lands resulting in gross misappropriation of the latter in million of acres which had led to much acrimony and controversy over its plan for disposal.\textsuperscript{466} It was also decided that that all cadastral villages which had an area of less than 200 \textit{bighas} of cultivable waste lands would be recognized as fully developed village and the remaining waste lands in such villages would be reserved for settlement with the villagers themselves.\textsuperscript{467} All villages containing more than 200 \textit{bighas} of waste lands would be classified as undeveloped and would be included in the planned settlement scheme, and taken up in group for allotment, after a reservation had been made for future expansion which would be 30\% of the area of cultivable waste lands as it stood in the year 1940, and would be divided among all districts in such a way so as to ensure the maximum provision for the landless where it was most needed.\textsuperscript{468} Settlement of land would be made on application and preference would be given to those who were having no land or were having land less than what may be called as an economic holding: Government defined it at 20 \textit{bighas} for a family of 5.\textsuperscript{469} The resolution also decided to restrict all allotment to a maximum of 30 \textit{bighas} for the larger families.\textsuperscript{470} Preference would be given to those who had lost their land to erosion or whose land had been taken up for military purpose.\textsuperscript{471} Those with whom land might be settled would be entitled to revenue

\textsuperscript{465} ibid, pp. 1, 2. 
\textsuperscript{466} ibid, p.2. 
\textsuperscript{467} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{468} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{469} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{470} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{471} ibid.
exemptions for 2 years but they must pay a premium of Rs 5/ bighas. The scheme would operate in the 4 lower districts of the Assam Valley.

Immigrants who came to Assam before 1st January 1938, and those who lost their ‘khiraj’ ‘patta’ land to erosion or acquisition for military purpose would receive preference over other immigrants in matters of land settlement. Outside the tribal belts, their claims would be considered along with the claims of the indigenous landless people in respect of land available for planned settlement.

Additional information would be collected of all villages in which the percentage of people of tribal classes exceeds 50% and of the areas in those villages occupied by tribals and others. These villages would be marked on maps and after the enquiry was over, a tribal belt or belts in the submontane areas would be notified, the boundary being fixed with regard either to easily recognizable geographical features or following the boundaries of ‘mauzas’. Within this area, a reservation which would not be less than the area occupied by the tribal people plus the stipulated reservation for general future expansion would be made for safeguarding the tribals and others at present living there and no further settlement would be made with others. A special tribal officer would be appointed to look into the welfare of the tribal classes with reference to all question concerning with settlement of land.
The Resolution acknowledged the fact that encroachments had been going on in the professional grazing reserves for many years in a sporadic manner but intensified over the last few years due to a variety of reasons and therefore the government was determined to deal with encroachment in the professional grazing reserves with all the seriousness it deserved.\textsuperscript{479} Eviction of encroachers from professional grazing reserves would be carried out without further delay but long standing encroachers dating from before 1\textsuperscript{st} January 1938, as well as those encroachers who previously held government \textit{patta} land but had lost it due to erosion or because of military purpose would not be evicted and would be allowed to remain for the present, and all the operation of concentrating them together in one part of the reserves concerned or of providing them with alternative land elsewhere would be taken up later.\textsuperscript{480}

\textit{Eviction Issue communalized}

After winning the 1946 election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Congress government under Gopinath Bardoloi, started the eviction of encroachers among the immigrants from the professional grazing reserves. During the budget session in 1946, Bishnuram Medhi, the then Revenue Minister of the newly formed Congress government in Assam made a fervent appeal to the government of Bengal to dissuade people of their province from coming to Assam in the hope of getting land in Assam.\textsuperscript{481} He pointed out that the available arable waste lands in Assam were not sufficient for the landless indigenous people and those having no economic holdings.\textsuperscript{482} There were two sources

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{479} ibid, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{480} ibid, pp. 3, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{482} ibid.
\end{itemize}
responsible, he pointed out, for the influx of these immigrants into Assam – ‘Dewanias’ - middle class landlords among the immigrants - who were the original pioneers among these East Bengali Muslim immigrants who prospered and brought up land from their neighbors forming a small yet wealthy class of landlords with large of areas of land under their control sometime as large as 1000 bighas. Since they needed labour to cultivate these huge tracts of land, they started importing labourers from their native districts of East Bengal on one pretext or the other. With some of these tenants being provided with land, the landlords of the immigrants started importing fresh batches of labourers commonly known as ‘kamalas’ to work for them. He stated that after the Muslim League put up its claim to include Assam within Pakistan zone, a huge number of immigrants practically started invading Assam. These immigrants encouraged by their leaders had started encroaching on the professional and village grazing reserves which were essential for the grazing of the cows and buffalos, as these animals played a vital role in the economy of the province as a source of supply of draught cattles for ploughs and carts and of milk and milk products to villagers and towns. They were also a source of supplementary income for those who were interested in the production of milk and milk products and draught bullocks. However during the previous ministry about 1, 60, 000 bighas of land were settled with these immigrants in the name of ‘Grow More Food Campaign’. This had led to huge public agitation and the Muhammad Saadulla government realizing the enormity of the situation called a conference in Shillong on December 1944, and a resolution on 13th
July 1945 was passed which stated new encroachers on the professional and village grazing reserves should be evicted.\textsuperscript{489} This resolution which in fact accorded no protection to the indigenous people was not given any effect by the previous caretaker ministry of Saadulla.\textsuperscript{490} He also cited several instances in which it was found that the colonization officer had settled lands with immigrants who already had land - some even having 300 bighas – elsewhere in the province at the expense of both the indigenous as well as immigrant landless people.\textsuperscript{491} He pointed out that the Congress government would root out this sort of favoritisms and would not encourage these classes of land grabbers to have more lands and become landlords.\textsuperscript{492} He therefore appealed to the encroachers to get out of the professional grazing reserves so that their case could be carefully considered after providing land to the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{493}

Abdur Rouf, representing the immigrants in the Assembly, however alleged that after receiving lakhs of rupees from the immigrants by selling their land, the Assamese with the help of their leaders and officers were driving the immigrants from their lands and thus cheating the immigrants off their money.\textsuperscript{494} He also stated that when the country was facing a famine like situation, the government was busy in evicting the immigrants.\textsuperscript{495} He expressed his amusement that the Revenue Minister was more generous towards the needs of the cattle population but was less bothered about the life of a dozen ‘Charuas’ or immigrants.\textsuperscript{496} He winded his speech by saying that the remedy for all these evils lie in the

\textsuperscript{489} ibid.
\textsuperscript{490} ibid, pp. 24, 25.
\textsuperscript{491} ibid, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{492} ibid.
\textsuperscript{493} ibid.
\textsuperscript{494} ibid, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{495} ibid, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{496} ibid, p. 65.
achievement of Pakistan “as these criminals against humanity, worse than the war criminals, can only then be bought to book…..”

From April 1946, the Bardoloi government took up the policy of eviction of immigrants from the professional grazing reserves. The situation was really grave particularly in the districts of Darrang and Kamrup. In Barpeta subdivision of the Kamrup district, 4000 families who settled themselves in the reserves of Pokabetbari, Theka, Koimari, Mandia, Gobindapur, Fulora were evicted. In the Mangaldai subdivision of the Darrang district, 969 families were scattered in the Bagpuri, Kharpark, Hatipuri, and Missamara reserves. In Guwahati, 600 families occupied reserves in Bhonganmari, Pukripur, and other such reserves. On 15th and 16th May, 1946, 229 families were evicted from the Komolia professional grazing reserves in Tezpur in the Darrang district. In retaliation Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami, the most vocal and aggressive among the immigrant leaders, asked the evicted person to return to the grazing reserves from where they were evicted and started a programme of fast unto death in May 1946, in Barpeta.

It must be remembered that the provincial Muslim League in Assam always tried to mix the issue of land settlement with the immigrant East Bengali Muslims with their demand for including Assam in Pakistan. For instance, on 16th November 1944, when Beliram Das moved an adjournment motion on the land settlement issue in the Assam Legislative Assembly, Muhammad Saadulla gave an assurance that further development on

\[497\] *ibid*, p. 66.
\[498\] *Political History of Assam*, File No. 36, Year, 1944, Subject: *Muslim League in Assam*, State Archives, Assam, p. 42.
\[499\] *ibid*.
\[500\] *ibid*.
\[501\] *ibid*.
\[502\] *ibid*.
\[503\] *ibid*. 
the land settlement scheme would be kept in abeyance. This gave offence to some members of the provincial Muslim League who apprehended that the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha were making a combined effort to “convert Assam into Hindusthan instead of Pakistan.” On 14th October 1944, a meeting of the provincial Muslim League was held at Pakistan road, Barptea, chaired by Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami, and attended by 500 immigrants and the topic of discussion was the unity of Muslim youth for the cause of Islam and their claim for including Assam within Pakistan.

The eviction policy of the government of Assam was severely criticized by the Muslim League leadership. Maulana Abdul Quddus Bihari who was deputed by the All India Jamiat Ulema – I - Islam to enquire into the condition of the Muslim immigrants gave a graphic account of the “tragic drama enacted particularly at Mangaldoi – the worst affected district of the province.”

Quddus Bihari observed that the government of Assam’s communiqué to suspend eviction during the monsoon season was ‘colossal bluff’ calculated to hoodwink the people as the eviction party was indulging in regular orgies of violence with the orders and the backing of the government of Assam and he characterized the action of the government as most “brutal, inhuman, and barbarous.”

Continuing, he further said that the immigrants were left with hardly anything to live upon as not only their houses were demolished but their crops were destroyed and they

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504 Political History of Assam, File Number 157, Year, 1944,(Office of the superintendent of Police Kamrup, intelligence Branch), State Archives, Assam, p. 42.
505 Ibid.
506 Political History of Assam, File Number 157, Year, 1944,(Memo 8576 C, Dated - 16, 12, 1944)
507 Star of India, dated. 19. 6. 1946. Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD. 35/44, Year, 1944
508 Ibid.
were speedily heading towards starvation deaths.\textsuperscript{509} He severely criticized the government of India for its callous attitude towards the condition of the Muslim immigrants in Assam and remarked that India had no right to approach the Combined Food Board at Washington while the destruction of lakhs of maunds of paddy was allowed to continue in Assam.\textsuperscript{510} He warned the Assam government that unless the evictions were stopped, Muslim India would be forced to retaliate.\textsuperscript{511}

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasami, president of the Assam Provincial Muslim League in the course of a telegram to M. A. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan said that the agonies of the Muslim immigrants in Assam had crossed all limits of patience, as the Congress government in the province was unabashedly carrying out the eviction policy despite its announcement to suspend the same during the monsoon season.\textsuperscript{512}

Abdul Matin Chaudhury issued a statement in which he described the government of Assam’s communiqué to suspend eviction during the monsoon as a “deliberate fraud perpetrated on the unsuspecting public as their actions belies their assurances and promise.”\textsuperscript{513} He pointed out that evictions were ruthlessly continued and the burning of the houses of the immigrants and destruction of their crops could find a parallel only in the exploits of the Attila and the Huns and this was how the Indian National Congress, the champions of the masses served the people when they happened to be Muslims.\textsuperscript{514} He expressed his shock and surprise to the fact, that while the entire Muslim India was raging

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{509} \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{510} \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{511} \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{512} \textit{Star of India}, dated. 24. 6. 1946. Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD. 35/44, Year, 1944
\item \textsuperscript{513} \textit{The Statesman}, dated, 24. 6. 1946. Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD. 35/44, Year, 1944
\item \textsuperscript{514} \textit{ibid.}
\end{itemize}
at the inhuman atrocities meted out to the Muslim immigrants in Assam, the Congress High Command was silent and turned a deaf ear to them.\textsuperscript{515}

He also stated that what the white ruffians in South Africa were doing to the Indian passive resisters in Durban, the Congress government in Assam was doing with hundred fold severity to the Muslim immigrants in Assam.\textsuperscript{516} He stressed that while increasing production of food crops was the imperative need of the hour, thousands of ‘sturdy’ Muslim cultivators were not only being debarred from cultivating millions of acres of fallow land in Assam, but were being prevented from producing food crops in the land which they had reclaimed and made fit for cultivation.\textsuperscript{517} He appealed to the American Famine Commission to make enquiry from the government of India about this aspect of the problem of food supply in India and at the same time he asked the government of India to immediately put a stop to the most ‘scandalous’ eviction policy of the Congress government in Assam and prevent the food crop from being destroyed and provide for the maximum output of food production in Assam.\textsuperscript{518}

The Assam Provincial Muslim League also tried to communalize the eviction issue of the immigrants either by making anti government speeches or through formation of peace missions which was “more like an enquiry committee into the eviction process with the objective of stirring up communal feeling and creating general lawlessness.”\textsuperscript{519} Printed handbills and leaflets were distributed asking the immigrants Bengali Muslim not to co

\textsuperscript{515} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{516} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{517} \textit{The Statesman}, dated, 24. 6. 1946. Assam Secretariat, Revenue Department, Development Branch, File Number, RD. 35/44, Year, 1944
\textsuperscript{518} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{519} \textit{Political History of Assam}, File Number. 154, Year, 1946, (Confidential no, 126, con, Letter sent by the Sub divisional officer, Barpeta District, 26\textsuperscript{th} September, 1946), State Archives, Assam, p. 3
operate with ‘anti Pakistanis’ and not to sell their products in the **Bazars**, and follow the
directions of the 1 Lakh volunteer who had decided to lay down their lives for the sake of
Pakistan.\(^{520}\) In response, the indigenous people in Barpeta distributed leaflets asking people
to form defense parties to save themselves from the immigrant ‘**goondas**’.\(^{521}\) On 10
November 1946, in a Muslim League meeting held in Barpeta which was attended by a
number of immigrants, people were asked to form national guards, and to raise funds to
stand against the evictions process of the government.\(^{522}\) Similar meetings were again held
in Barpeta on 7\(^{th}\) AND 13\(^{th}\) March 1947, where the local leadership of the Muslim League
asked the immigrants to re encroach on lands from which they were evicted, to defy
government orders, and fight the eviction process tooth and nail.\(^{523}\)

On 3\(^{rd}\) January, 1947, ‘Black flag Day’ was observed throughout the province of
Assam, against the eviction policies of the government.\(^{524}\) Black Flags were displayed in
houses, mosques, and prayers were held “to save the Muslims from the oppression of the
Congress government.”\(^{525}\)

The Eastern Zone Pakistan conference was held in February, 1947, at Rowmari,
Bengal, a few miles away from the Goalpara district.\(^{526}\) A number of Muslim League
leaders from Assam and Bengal participated in the conference with Abdul Hamid Khan as

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\(^{520}\) Political History of Assam, File Number. 154, Year, 1946, (Confidential no, 84, con, Letter sent by the Sub
divisional officer, Barpeta District, 26\(^{th}\) August, 1946), Directorate of State Archives, Assam, p. 8.

\(^{521}\) ibid.

\(^{522}\) Political History of Assam, File Number 154, Year, 1946, (Confidential notes on the activities of the
Muslim League), State Archives, Assam, p. 27.

\(^{523}\) ibid.

\(^{524}\) Political History of AssamFile Number 154, Year, 1947, **Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the
week ending 8\(^{th}\) January, 1947** (secret), State Archives, Assam, p. 3.

\(^{525}\) ibid.

\(^{526}\) PHA, File no. 154, **Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 26\(^{th}\) February, 1947**
(secret), p. 3.
the main speaker.\textsuperscript{527} A number of resolutions were passed criticizing the Bardoloi government for its eviction policies, and stressing the need for Pakistan. People were asked to make preparation for the coming of the 1 lakh \textit{mujahidin} – Muslim National Guards Volunteer – including the provision of one lakh five foot \textit{lathis}.\textsuperscript{528} In this conference, strangely the Marwari community came under criticism ‘as they were held responsible for the exploitation of the country.’\textsuperscript{529} In the meeting of the working committee of the provincial Muslim League at Maulvibazar, Sylhet, a number of resolutions were passed like to raise the issue of eviction strongly in the forthcoming session of the Legislative Assembly, to encourage immigrants to reoccupy lands from where they were evicted, and ask them to settle within prohibited areas.\textsuperscript{530} Darrang district was one area where local leaders encouraged immigrants to reencroach and resist any harassment carried by the police or military in the course of their eviction.\textsuperscript{531} On 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} March, 1947 a conference of the Bengal and Assam Muslim National Guards was held at Dhubri.\textsuperscript{532} In this conference it was decided to launch a civil disobedience movement, if the government did not abandon its atrocious eviction policies within 15 days and resettle those who were evicted.\textsuperscript{533} On 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947, the Assam Day was observed throughout the districts of lower and central Assam as these districts had a sizeable immigrant population.\textsuperscript{534} Abdul Hamid Khan was arrested from Tezpur and this led to huge protests and procession and on 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1947;

\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{529} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{530} PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 5\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947 (secret), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{532} PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 12\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947 (secret), pp. 1, 2.
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{534} PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 19\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947 (secret), pp. 1, 2.
a large meeting of the Muslim League was held at Guwahati to protest against the arrest of Bhasami with the usual slogan ‘Down with the Bardoloi ministry’.\textsuperscript{535}

The Provincial Bengal Muslim League also assured their counterparts in Assam of all possible support in their campaign against the government by dispatching large number of volunteers for the ‘invasion of Assam’.\textsuperscript{536} In a meeting held at Jaduchar, Bengal, four miles from Mankachar, Goalpara, leaders of the Assam and Bengal Muslim League who were members in their respective Legislative Assembly and Council, it was declared that Muslims from Punjab and North West Frontier were on their way to take part in the \textit{jihad} against the Congress government in Assam.\textsuperscript{537} The Pakistan \textit{Quilla} at Barbanda, on the Bengal border, a few miles from Mankachar was started to train volunteer of the Muslim National Guards and the number continued to increase slowly.\textsuperscript{538} It was reported from all the districts of Assam that the Muslim League national volunteers showed considerable paper strength whereas in reality enthusiasm had evaporated and attendance in training parade had been negligible.\textsuperscript{539} Nevertheless the Bardoloi government deployed detachment of the armed police and Assam Rifles at Mankachar near the Pakistan \textit{Quilla}.\textsuperscript{540} It was reported that they were boycotted and had difficulty in obtaining supply.\textsuperscript{541}

\textsuperscript{535} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Forthrightly confidential Report for the forthrightly ending 28\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947.}
\textsuperscript{536} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 19\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947 (secret), pp. 1, 2.}
\textsuperscript{537} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 26\textsuperscript{th} March, 1947 (secret), pp. 3, 4.}
\textsuperscript{538} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 2\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1947 (secret), p. 4.}
\textsuperscript{539} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 15\textsuperscript{th} January, 1947 (secret), p. 4.}
\textsuperscript{540} PHA, File no. 154, \textit{Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 23\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1947 (secret), p. 5.}
\textsuperscript{541} \textit{Ibid.}
Meanwhile Gopinath Bardoloi and Muhammad Saadulla had reached some agreement on the eviction issue but the proposals were rejected by the Muslim League working committee due to an attack on a police station by the Muslim League volunteers in Sylhet which had to be repelled by firing.\(^5\) With the prospect of including Assam in Pakistan becoming dim, the Muslim League High Command did not give the expected permission for the mass invasion of Assam from Bengal and asked the cultivators to return to their field.\(^4\) Saadulla advised the immigrants to continue with the civil disobedience movement but in a peaceful and a non violent manner.\(^4\) Still attempts went on to enthuse the immigrants on the eviction issue, for instance: in a meeting at Puranigudam, Nowgong, in May, 1947, the Muslim League leadership tried to stress that the civil disobedience movement was launched not in support of Pakistan but entirely on behalf of the landless people whose existence were at stake.\(^5\) In Darrang, Imran Hussain Chaudhury, a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly, and also member of the All India Muslim League Council of Action tried to spread a propaganda in the form of an allegation that the tea garden coolies were as much as immigrants as the Bengalis but the government had decided to drive out 19 lakhs Bengali Muslims from Assam.\(^6\) Interests in the Muslim League activities were waning among the immigrant community itself. It was reported from Darrang that immigrants who had been in the districts since 1938 were reluctant to

\(^{5}\) PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 30th April, 1947 (secret), p. 1.
\(^{5}\) PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 7\(^{th}\) May, 1947 (secret), p. 3.
\(^{6}\) PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 14\(^{th}\) May, 1947 (secret), p. 5.
participate in the civil disobedience movement or other anti eviction agitation as they knew that doing so would prejudice their own position.\footnote{PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 12\textsuperscript{th} February, 1947 (secret), p. 5.}

The indigenous Assamese Muslims in large numbers did not participate in the anti government demonstration.\footnote{PHA, File no. 154, Assam Police weekly intelligence report for the week ending 8\textsuperscript{th} January, 1947 (secret), p. 5.} In fact during his meeting with the Cabinet Mission members in 1946, Governor Andrew Claws stated that the local Muslims were lukewarm to the idea of Pakistan but the immigrant Bengali Muslim whose immigration into the western districts of the province had created problems for the government were aggressive.\footnote{Political History of Assam, File number. D/9, Year, 1946, p. 6.}