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PREFACE

The agitation on the foreign nationals issue generally referred to in the media and intellectual circles as the 'Assam Agitation', has brought the problem of immigration to sharp focus. Students of Assam Politics are aware of the fact that ever since the early British administration, immigration has remained a theory issue in Assam economically, politically and socially. It has drawn the attention of the scholars in the context of economic development and demographic changes. Other scholars have studied this problem in the context of identity crisis and nationality question in Assam. But no attempt has so far been made to study the political aspect of the problem in details.


2. There are a large number of articles by various authors on this theme but the following sum up the major arguments.


Ever since the introduction of electoral politics in Assam during the British period, the issue of immigration has been in the centre of political controversies. Political Parties like Muslim League and the Congress in the Pre-independence period and the various other parties in the post-independence period have been addressing themselves to this problem. Their attitude to the immigrants and the groups that oppose the immigration has very often influenced their political fortunes. On the other hand, this theory issue has also given rise to quite a few pressure groups in Assam politics. A close examination of the impact of the issue and the related controversies on the policies and the pronouncement of these parties and groups would go a long way in understanding politics in the State of Assam. The indigenous population of Assam has recently been so worried about the possible effect of immigration on their identity that a major section of them launched an unprecedented movement which in turn brought about major changes in the power structure of the State. Thus the importance of studying the impact of immigration on Assam’s politics cannot be over-emphasized. In this study, therefore, an attempt has been made to examine (i) How the issue of immigration influences the policies, pronouncements and actions of various political parties in Assam, (ii) the nature of political actions generated by interests connected with this issue, and (iii) whether this issue has a lasting impact on Assam politics in terms of generating new political forces.
As we have indicated above the 'Assam Agitation' has been an offshoot of the controversy and the problem created by large scale immigration into Assam. As a part of this study we propose to examine the nature of the agitation in the context of the crisis of identity that seems to engulf the Assamese speaking population of the State. In this context we propose to examine as to whether the problem of immigration alone was responsible for creating the conditions that led to the agitation. The agitation on the foreigners issue has often been branded as a middle class movement. The leaders of the movement, on the other hand, called it a mass movement. We propose to analyse the character of the movement including the nature of support it got from the peasantry. In view of the fact that a number of regional parties played active roles in the movement. We shall also examine, during the course of this study, the positions of these parties vis-a-vis the movement and the issue of immigration. In view of the political turmoil created by the movement and the changed political situation it would be interesting to examine the positions of the various national parties on the movement. We hope that an examination of the above mentioned issues, would enable us to have a clear understanding of the impact of immigration on Assam's Politics.

The bulk of the data have been collected from primary sources - published documents, census reports, official
reports, Government records etc. and secondary sources such as books, articles, newspapers, the Government publications and also form the publications of various political parties and interest groups in Assam.

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