CHAPTER - II

IMMIGRATION IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD - POLICIES OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE CONGRESS PARTY ON THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE
IMMIGRATION IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD - POLICIES OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE CONGRESS PARTY ON THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE

In order to understand the problem of Immigration in Assam, we must go back to the period when Assam included Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh as well as some areas now in Bangladesh. As we have indicated in Chapter I, even during the Ahom period, Assam was a sparsely populated area. There was scarcity of labour. So much so that when the Ahom Kings gave land to a person or to an institution, they had to give paiks 1 with it. During the British period specially in the early days of British administration vast tracts of uncultivated fertile land and jungles invited lakhs of peasants from eastern Bengal to develop agriculture and meet the requirements of the newly introduced plantation economy. In Assam Valley and specifically in Goalpara, plenty of vacant land was awaiting the plough and the British Government did take measures to bring these areas under cultivation. To quote Hunter,

"There is a great deal of spare land in Goalpara district, and in order to encourage the extension of cultivation, waste land leases are readily granted. The lands are

1. They were the servants for three months in a year and enjoyed rent free tenure in return of such services to the state. For a discussion on Paik system see N.C. Dutta, Land Problems and Land Reforms in Assam (New Delhi, 1968).
leased out to new settlers and a remission of rent is allowed for two or three years in order to enable them to make a fair start and to settle conveniently. The remission is termed as Pail. In certain cases also money advances are made to new settlers. Under all circumstances it appears that this distribution of tenure is decidedly favourable to the cultivators. The tenure is called Pail-Patta."

Hunter's description also points out that there was much immigration into Goalpara up to the last quarter of the 19th Century. But there was some movement of population and in a way this movement opened the way for a large scale immigration of population into Assam Valley.

The first settlers came as agricultural labourers from across the provincial boundary of Assam, who succeeded in occupying some pieces of land out of the plenty available for occupation and cultivation and thus proved as the light houses to give hopes to the new immigrants for many coming decades. The absentee landlord system prevailing in Goalpara, where the landlords were residents of Rangpur with landed property taken care of by the tenants and labourers in Goalpara, was also helpful in showing the way to settlers. The permanently settled portions of Goalpara originally formed part of the districts of Rangpur, but were transferred

to Assam after "the annexation of the Valley in 1826 and under the Raiyatwari system the British created a new class of peasants proprietors in Assam. This class of peasant proprietors became increasingly antagonistic to British rule in Assam as the burden of taxation imposed on them began to increase progressively. It is significant that these peasant proprietors developed national consciousness more than those in the permanently settled estates, because their conflict was directly with the state and not with the Zamindars. As the local inhabitants had sufficient land available for cultivation the question of their accepting tenantship or working as labourers in the lands of absentee landlords did not arise. Hence "the landlords recruited the tenants and labourers from Rangpur who eventually arranged and occupied land of their own and left their tenancy holdings, and their place was taken by fresh recruits as tenants and labourers." Thus the absentee landlord system also proved as a source of initial inspiration for emigration and settlement.

Goalpara became the first camp of these immigrants and besides being a border district, the ethnic factor was also responsible for the district being selected and settled as the first camp.

4. Ibid., Loc.cit.
Muslims constituted 85 percent of the immigrants and Goalpara with 28 percent Muslims, the highest in the Assam Valley, was rightly the best choice to settle without much trouble and opposition on ethnic grounds. Linguistically, the Bengali speaking immigrants could try to assimilate easily with the 69 percent local inhabitants having Bengali as mother tongue in Goalpara in 1901. "The immigrants from Mymensingh, however did not stop here and along the course of Brahmaputra advanced upwards." Selection of Nowgong as the second best choice for settlement by Bengali immigrants during the decade 1911-21 and why Kamrup could not become the second favourite district with the settlers during the first two decades of the century, although it was nearer to the first district of settlement, Goalpara, and connected with the river Brahmaputra can be explained by the fact that Kamrup not only had the highest density of population in the Valley, but also the highest percentage of area already under cultivation. The following table clearly proves this point:

5. Ibid., Loc. cit.
Table - IV : District with excess cultivable land in Assam Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area 1901</th>
<th>Density 1901</th>
<th>Cultivated area 1901</th>
<th>P.C. of area under cultivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>3858</td>
<td>153 (1901)</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>20.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>3418</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>13.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>3961</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>16.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>3843</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>9.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>4996</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>16.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>4529</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Computed from the figures in Statistical Hand Book, 1980.

Between the years 1911 to 1971 there was a conspicuous increase in the Muslim population in the Assam Valley. The following table presents the decade wise proportion of Muslim population in the district of Assam Valley and indicates well, when and how the Muslim immigrants changed the ethnic structure of the Valley.

Table - V: Increase in the Proportion of Muslim Population in Assam 1901-1931.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>27.76</td>
<td>35.19</td>
<td>41.48</td>
<td>43.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>9.10</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>14.61</td>
<td>24.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>17.73</td>
<td>31.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>33.06</td>
<td>37.60</td>
<td>37.61</td>
<td>40.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>13.57</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>17.07</td>
<td>22.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Various Reports.
It is observed from the above table that between 1901 and 1931 the proportion Muslim population in Goalpara rose from 28 to 44, in Kamrup 9 to 24, in Nowgong 5 to 31 and in Darrang 5 to 11.

C.S. Mullan stated that "this change is likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than did the Burmese invaders of 1820, the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization." 7

The transfer of population on such a large scale completely changed the components of population growth in the two areas involved Eastern Bengal and Assam. The first decade of the century witnessed the involvement of only two districts, Mymensingh and Goalpara. This is also visible from the fact that Mymensingh districts percentage decadal population growth rate came down from 12.8 p.c. in 1891-1901 to 6.9 in 1911-1921. The following table shows that the decadal growth rates for all the Eastern Bengal districts went down sharply in each successive decade 1901-1911, 1911-1921 and 1921-1931 while the population growth rates for Assam Valley districts rose sharply starting with 1911.

7. C.S. Mullan, *India Census, 1931 - Assam*, Delhi, Manager Publications, p. 64.
Table - VI: Percentage Increase in Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mymensingh</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India - Assam Census Reports and Districts Census Handbook.

From the above two tables it is clear that the population of Mymensingh, Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna keep on decreasing while the percentage of population of Goalpara increases to 2 percent in 1901 while in 1931 it increased to 15.8. In Kamrup it rose from 7 percent to 28 percent. In Darrang from 9 percent to 22 percent and in Nowgong from 30 percent to 91 percent.

The period which followed the Khilafat and the non-cooperation movement gradually saw the withdrawal of Muslim cooperation from the freedom movement which was started by the Congress Party. A section of the Muslims felt that they should be separated from the Congress, in order to achieve their aspirations independently. This parting of ways with the Indian National Congress was clearly asserted by M.A. Jinnah. He asked the Congress leaders not to interfere in the
affairs of the Muslims and claimed on behalf of the league that it was the only legitimate organisation represented the Indian Muslims. However, the Congress refuted the claim of Jinnah by saying that they represent the whole of India including the Muslims. The Congress on the other hand, with a view to winning over the Muslims took special care in including a fair proportion of the Muslims who were either elected with Congress ticket, independent or pro-Congress Muslims leaguers while forming ministries. The main aim of the Congress was to win over the Muslim masses to the Congress. This made the position of the Muslim League shaky and their reaction was also quite sharp.

In 1938, the Muslim League appointed a committee to study the conditions of the Muslims in the Congress Governed provinces. The report which was published soon after contained a long list of allegations against the Congress. The main allegation was the introduction of the Wardha Scheme of education and the compulsion which was put on Muslims to show respect to Congress flag and to sing Bande Mataram. In Assam prior to 1937 the relationship between these two communities, Hindu and Muslims, was cordial. But later on, some Muslims in Assam also opposed

9. Ibid., Loc.cit.
10. The Wardha scheme of education was introduced by Gandhi to inculcate the spirit of non-violence among the students.
the introduction of Wardha scheme of education. It must be admitted here that prior to 1937, there was no solidarity among the Muslims in Assam. The Muslim League was yet to emerge as an organized force in Assam. But when the Congress Government refused to form a ministry, it gave an opportunity to the Muslim to form a ministry in Assam.

Meanwhile the stream of immigration continued and it gathered momentum during the first half of the 1941-51 decades and specifically during the Muslim League ministry. Prior to 1937, the Muslim League had no influence in the politics of Assam. But after the 1937 elections, the United Muslim Party under the leadership of Saadullah formed a government in Assam. This government pursued a policy of patronising Muslims immigrants. "During the period between 1939-41, Saadullah government allotted one lakh bighas of land in the Assam Valley for the settlement of East Bengal immigrants." Saadullah appeared to have maintained that the immigrants were mostly landless and the only solution was to provide them with available lands.

When the immigrants after occupying all vacant available lands threatened to swamp land even in and around

Assamese village, the problem reached a most critical point. This situation was reflected in the report of S.P. Desai in 1939. The report stated,

"They came in numbers raise (sic) sheds and latter began to cultivate. The few graziers in the neighbourhood are incapable of doing anything apart from protesting and appealing to local officers. The only alternative for the graziers is to shift himself bag and baggage." 13

In post-independence days Assam had provided shelter to a large number of people from outside the state; with the resources available at the time of independence the state was not in a position to welcome further immigration. But the partition of the country compelled a large number of Hindus to migrate to West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and various other neighbouring states. Under legal process most of these refugees were rehabilitated and given Indian citizenship. But taking advantage of the presence of their own relatives or acquaintances in Assam, a large number of Hindus, and even a considerable number of Muslims farm labourers came to Assam after partition illegally. Hindu refugees came as a result of religious persecution in East Bengal and they also had the inducement to get rehabilitation grants and government assistance to start some business or profession in India.

At the initial stage of the influx of immigrants, the Congress Government of Assam had introduced a 'line system' early in 1920 as per suggestion of the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong. The aim of this system was to isolate the immigrants from the local people by compelling the former to live and toil in particular segregated localities beyond which they were not allowed to settle.\(^{14}\)

Under the Line System, a line was drawn in the districts under pressure in order to settle immigrants in segregated areas specified for their exclusive settlement. The number of settlers including children born after their arrival, increased from an estimated three lacs in 1921 to over half a million in 1931.\(^{15}\) Colonists were settling on government waste lands by families and not singly. They were better cultivators and hence, could offer higher and lucrative land prices to induce Assamese peasants to sell out portions of their holdings. As has been pointed out by Banking Enquiry Committee Report "local marwari and even Assamese money lenders financed the immigrants so that the latter could reclaim land and expand the cultivation of jute, rice and vegetables."\(^{16}\)

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The line system was disliked by the immigrants, and "when pressure were put on the government, it appointed a line system enquiry committee in 1937 under the chairmanship of Hockenhull to examine the issue." The findings of the committee revealed that the immigrants both Hindus and Muslims, wanted immediate abolition of the Line System. But the views of the Assamese Muslims, according to the report was divided on the issue, while Assamese Hindus strongly supported the Line System. The Congress coalition government (19 Sept. 1938 - 16 Nov. 1939) could not arrive at any concrete decision, and before it relinquished office published a notification, in Nov. 1939 whereby it prohibited settlement of land to persons who came from outside the province after 1 January 1938. "The resolution was not executed when Saadullah came to power." The Communist Party of India also urged upon the Saadullah government to abolish the Line System and to give lands to the Bengalee immigrants. Their stand was that the "Government communiques of 1939 restricting settlement of land from 1938 was unjust and oppressive." They also said, it should be extended upto December 1944, as the immigrants had already settled.

18. Ibid., Loc.cit.
19. Ibid.
20. Assamiya (bi-weekly), 5 October, 1940 Dibrugah.
The Assam Provincial Muslim League also tried for the abolition of the Line System. The Muslim League member Mayeenuddin Ahmed Choudhury argues: "Line System in Assam has no legal sanction behind as much as it is neither an act of legislature nor an enactment of his excellency the governor."

The Line System acquired a new dimension when the Muslim League began to champion the cause of the immigrants by launching an all out campaign in rural areas. They announced that they would expouse the cause of the landless immigrants settled in Assam." Later Saadullah, convened a conference of the members of the legislature representing different interests in 1940 and formulated a policy known as the "Land development scheme." According to this scheme a ban was imposed on settlement of immigrants in wastelands who had entered Assam after 1 January 1938. "The main feature of this scheme was the division of wastelands into blocks for indigenous Assamese and tribal people, scheduled caste and immigrants after reserving thirty percent of the wastelands for the expansion of the existing population." Under this scheme, a special officer was appointed by the Government to

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22. Ibid., Loc. cit.
examine whether the proposed areas could be opened for settlement without any detriment to the districts normal requirements of grazing and forest reserves. The settlement was to be confined only to indigenous landless people and the pre-1938 immigrants. Besides, the flood and erosion affected people than illegally squatting in some 'lined' villages and reserves were also to be accommodated, eligible applicants were to receive wastelands in specified development areas on payment of stipulated premia, in blocks segregated for different communities as before. The government promised to put the scheme into operation as early as possible.

The declared intention of the scheme was to protect the interests of both the indigenous and immigrant population. But in practice, it was found that immigrants persisted with their unauthorised encroachment of the Assam Valley with the help of ministerial tutelage.

The various vested interests kept on pressing the Saadullah ministry to remove restrictions on the immigrants. It is interesting to note that the Bengal legislative council carried a motion on 16 July 1943, calling upon the Government of India to take immediate steps to remove all existing restrictions imposed by the Assam Government on the emigrant cultivators from Bengal. In a letter to the Secretary, Government of Assam, A.G. Patton, S. Banerjee, Secretary to the Government of Bengal wrote:
"It has been brought to the notice of the Government of Bengal that a large number of immigrants from this province, who entered Assam after the 1st January, 1938, have been refused settlement of land and are consequently in great distress. With a view to remove their hardship, the Bengal legislative council at its meeting held on the 16th July 1943 moved and carried a motion 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 Assam Valley must be reduced."24

Exactly a year after its formation, the fourth Saadullah ministry then adopted a new resolution on land development under the slogan of 'grow more food'. The salient features of this resolution of 24th August 1943 were as follows:

1) "resumed distribution of wastelands in proportion to needs of different communities in Nowgong and dereservation of select grazing reserves for that purpose, as per Resolution of 21 June 1940;

ii) dereservation of professional grazing reserves in Kamrup and Darrang if found surplus to actual requirements, and

iii) opening up of surplus reserves in all the submontane areas, and in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, for settlement of landless indigenous people. The blatantly pro-Muslim and pro-immigrant policies of this Government pursued under the slogan 'Grow more food' was described by Lord Wavel as "Grow more Moslems."25

S.P. Desai, a senior ICS man was appointed special officer to ascertain what portion of professional grazing reserves could be declared as surplus available for settlement. Desai reported that the "forcible occupation of grazing lands by immigrants had already taken place to a large scale even in the predominantly Assamese or tribal areas. His conclusion was that there was no surplus land available for new settlements." Ignoring the report, Saadullah's Muslim League coalition government threw select professional grazing reserves open for settling immigrants.

The land development scheme of Saadullah's government were subjected to severe public criticism. This forced Saadullah to resign on 12th December 1941. Robert Reid the Governor of Assam who took over the administration of the province after Saadullah's exit, "bruised aside the decisions of the Saadullah ministry on the ground that there was not enough wastelands in the Assam Valley to accommodate further immigration."

This however proved temporary because the arrest of many Congress leaders created conditions for Saadullah's return to power especially when the governor himself was keen on installing a popular ministry to combat the mass upsurge.

27. The Assam Tribune, 31 January, 1941.
of 1942. On 25 August 1942, Saadullah came back to power. He then threw open even the grazing and forest reserves which were earlier held to be inviolable. This resulted in innumerable clashes between the immigrants and the graziers. Public agitation was soon ensued against dereservation and settlement of land to immigrants. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha, Sibsagar Ahom Sabha, the Assam Provincial Hindu Sabha, the Assam Kachari Association and Assam Mouzadar association criticised the action of Saadullah. "The Hindu Sabha criticised the scheme of Saadullah's Government as an insidious move towards creating a Pakistan in Assam." 28 Suggestion was given to Saadullah by the members of the opposition to convene a conference so that the whole question of land settlement could be reconsidered. This time Saadullah did not consult the Muslim League and held a conference from 16th to 19th December 1944. The conference was attended by the representatives from different parties and they made certain recommendations. On the basis of these the government passed a resolution on 16th January 1945 by which it was decided to keep the professional reserves intact. Reservation of thirty percent of the available wastelands as provisions for the future expansion of the indigenous people, a planned settlement of the residual wastelands with the landless sons of the

soil and the pre-1938 immigrants and a system of protection to tribal people in belts specially reserved for them. It was also agreed that the integrity of grazing reserves should be strictly maintained and all trespassers evicted. "The decisions of course were not unanimous. Two Muslim League participants both of them immigrants dissented. Despite the fact that many parties were represented the Congress party claimed apparently the outcome of the conference was the victory of the Congress."^29

A proposal was also laid out to give special protection to the tribal people. But the above resolution could not be put into operation owing to opposition from both the Congress and the Muslim League. The demand of the extremist section of the League was the full accommodation of the immigrant Muslims even at the cost of the local people interest.^30 "The Congress on the other hand, refused to support the resolution as it gave discretionary powers to the local officers, who it was suspected would abuse their powers with regard to the allotment of land to the immigrants."^31

29. See, Assam Pradesh Congress Committees leaflet issued by Harendra Nath Baruah and Hemkanta Baruah, APCC Publicity Department, APCC Office, Gauhati, 1945.

30. Ibid., Loc.cit.

Because of the stiff opposition both from the Congress and the League Saadullah feared his own position and came forward to make an agreement with Gopinath Bordoloi and Rohini Kr. Choudhury. Bordoloi was ready to support Saadullah on certain conditions. The first and foremost of which was that there should be a reconstitution of the cabinet and a review of the land settlement policy. But later on, Bordoloi withdrew his support on the ground of non-implementation of the agreement fully by Saadullah. On 1st October 1945, the Assam legislature was dissolved. And on 11th February, 1946, a Congress ministry was formed in Assam headed by Gopinath Bordoloi.

But the Muslim League succeeded in establishing tremendous influence on the Muslim population of Assam by opposing the eviction policy of the Congress Government headed by Gopinath Bordoloi. The problem of immigrants who came from Bengal and settled in certain districts of Assam becoming chronic issue in provincial politics. As soon as the Congress ministry was installed in Assam, it took up the eviction issue and decided to evict the immigrants from the professional grazing reserves. This prompted the "provincial League Committee to form a committee of action headed by Bhasani on 19 February 1946 which directed the Muslim League workers and volunteers to agitate the eviction policy of
the Congress Government all over the province."\(^{32}\) Tension generated in the reserve areas on 21 March 1946. Under these circumstances it became difficult for the government to drive out the encroachers. The more so, when Jinnah after his arrival at Gauhati on 7 April, 1946 made a remark that "if the government does not immediately revise its policy and abandon this persecution, a situation will be created which will not be conducive to the well being of the people of Assam."\(^{33}\) At the same time the Assam Provincial Muslim League Council, in a resolution adopted on 30 April, 1946 also moved the Central Council of action for launching 'direct-action' against the Congress Government. They also made an appeal to the Muslim population to contribute generously towards an ad-hoc eviction relief fund. In 1946, Liaquat Ali Khan in his press conference criticised the government stand and stated that "to call these villages professional grazing reserves is a misnomer and was a mere excuse for eviction."\(^{34}\) He further pointed out in his statement that it was 'brutal and barbarous', to evict the poor immigrants from their villages as they had spent time and labour to build their dwellings.

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He also remarked that "this way the Congress Government in Assam serves the poor, when they happened to be Muslims. Cruelty and inhumanity exceed all bounds in the Congress tyranny over the Muslim immigrants in Assam." 35

This perspective was however, not appreciated by the Congress because Gopinath Bordoloi went round the Goalpara and some areas of Barpeta where immigrants had settled. But on his return he issued fresh instruction on 14 May 1946, to execute the earlier order of the government. The government seemed to have done a good job because as Mahadev Sharma says "from the Kumolin professional grazing reserves of Tezpur between 15 and 16 May as many as two hundred and twenty nine families were evicted successfully." 36

This was highly resented by the members of the Assam Muslim League and by organising meetings and processions and hartals they registered their anger. Abdal Hamid Khan "gave a call to the evicted persons to return to the grazing reserves. He also resorted to a fast unto death in May 1946 in the evicted areas of Barpeta. His fast had the desired effect and by 6 June 1946 about one hundred and sixty persons

35. Ibid., p. 70.
encouraged by their leaders advice reoccupied their holdings and reconstructed their hovel overnight."^37 This made the task of eviction difficult, the more so when the Muslim League members wholeheartedly supported the cause of the immigrants. To counter act this opposition the Congress Government in Assam introduced stringent measures by promulgating the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance on 18 November 1946.

The introduction of this ordinance was an indication of the firmness of the government to tackle the immigration problem. The reaction of the Muslim League leaders against the stand taken by the Congress Government was immediate. They decided to launch a civil disobedience programme in protest against the eviction policy pursued by the Congress Ministry in Assam. The civil disobedience movement was in fact a major programme which the Muslim League successfully carried out. The effect of the movement was felt in those areas inhabited by the immigrants. Later on when communal feelings were running high, Gopinath Bordoloi decided to go slow with his policy and was able to keep the province free from communal riots.

37. D.N. Banerjee, East Pakistan: A Case Study in Muslim Politics (Delhi, 1969), P. 69.
It must be stated here that Muslim League activities in the province centered mainly on the issue of Pakistan. The enthusiasm which was generated during the popular upsurge among the Muslims in Assam was successfully channelised by the league leaders towards the achievement of Pakistan in Assam as an idea which had been receiving serious attention of the members of the league for a long time. Early in 1944, the scheme of Pakistan was approved in the third provincial Muslim League conference under the presidency of Sahabud-din. "They believed that Assam and Bengal would form an independent Sovereign Eastern Pakistan." 38 During the 1935 Reforms period the Muslim League dominated Government of the province under Chief Minister Saadullah were specially bent upon bringing in more Muslims from East Bengal to Assam to outnumber the Hindus. The then Governor General Lord Wavel himself stated that the policy of Saadullah was to bring more Muslims to Assam. In 1941 Census, Saadullah suggested that population should be classified on the basis of religion. The result was that "a large number of tribal people who had earlier enrolled themselves as Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, included under the head Tribal. Thus it is clear that the Hindu tribals were shown as non-Hindus in the 1941 Census. The result was that there was a considerable reduction in the Hindu population." 39

The Congress on the other hand, realised the danger of immigration in Assam. They submitted many memoranda to oppose the policies of Saadullah government. But some section of the Congress partymen seemed to have taken advantage of the situation. They appeared to have realised that these immigrants can easily be a vote bank for them in near future. So they refused to take any action against the immigrants even at the cost of the country's security and integrity.