CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE ASSAM MOVEMENT.

The background of the Assam Movement cannot be properly understood unless one analyses the political situation of Assam after it came under British rule at the beginning of the 19th century. Before the British came to Assam, the Ahoms, a Shan group of people ruled large part of Assam and were really masters of the entire Brahmaputra valley. In Assam migrations of people were both from the East and from the West. "As a result of these cross-movements of population groups belonging to different geoethnic stocks, the present-day Assam never at any time was occupied by one homogeneous group of population".  

The Ahoms came to Assam in the beginning of the 13th century and brought both lower and upper Assam under one political organisation. They were staunch Buddhists. They spoke language which was quite different from that of the local inhabitants. But they were tolerant and broadminded. They established matrimonial relationships with the local people. They learnt and encouraged the native dialects and languages. They repulsed the Mughal attacks in the 17th century and emerged as the supreme power. The decline of Ahom kingdom started towards the end of the 18th century. As weak rulers ascended the Ahom throne, there was disorder and revolts by various
tribes and disgruntled elements. There followed a period of bitter infighting and internal disturbances which continued for nearly a century and was brought to an abrupt close by the Burmese invasion of 1816. The new army pillaged, killed and destroyed wherever it went, earning the hatred of the local inhabitants. But it overstretched itself when it entered the territory under the jurisdiction of the British East India company in search of fugitives. Retaliation was swift.

The British marched against the Burmese and routed them in several successive military encounters. The latter exacted a terrible revenge on the local Assamese inhabitants for their open welcome to the British troops: thousands were slaughtered. Many were flayed alive and others burned in oil. Such was the fear and terror they induced in the Assamese that they fled into jungles to escape—but fell prey to the age-old enemy of man: hunger and disease.

But the Burmese were pushed inexorably out of Assam and defeated again on their homeground. In 1826 the king of Ava accepted the Treaty of Yandaboo ceding all rights to Assam. From then it was only a matter of time before the British, with a combination of deceit and force, annexed the whole of Assam and subdued the rest of the turbulent tribes in the north-east. It took them the best part of the 19th century but they steadily
and surely accomplished their job. The coming of the British heralded the entry into Assam of several kinds of immigrants. There were the Bengali Hindus, mostly civil servants and bureaucrats in various government departments. Then there were tea garden labourers from Orissa, Bihar and other states who came to work on the newly established tea plantations. The Britishers ignored the aspirations of the local people and were business-like in the execution of their policy of imperial expansion.3

The influx of Muslims from undivided Bengal, began with the introduction of railways to Assam in 1882. Many of them settled in Goalpara, Nowgong and Kamrup districts. In his remarkable study of the problems thrown up by migration in Assam, Myron Weiner observed in his book "Sons of the Soil Migration and Ethnic conflict in India" that the growth rate of the population in Goalpara shot up after the 20th century began, "while the growth rate of Goalpara district had been only 14 percent in the entire decade from 1881 to 1891. And only 2 percent from 1891 to 1900, it jumped to 30 percent between 1901 and 1911. By 1911 there were 118,000 migrants in the district of Goalpara alone. They constituted nearly 20 percent of the population. Weiner quotes the 1931 census commissioner who predicted that the mass influx of Muslims was 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. 4

In 1931 the Commissioner, an Englishman named C.S. Mullan, wrote: "I have remarked that by 1921 the first army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara. The second army corps which followed them in the year 1921-1931 has consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup has also taken to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. It is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district is the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home". 5 By 1941, in a space of thirty years, this silent horde had increased its numbers from 355,320 to 1,305,902 in the Assam valley district. Hem Barua, that ardent socialist and patriot, remarked in his book, "The Red River and the Blue Hill", that as a result of this unchecked flood, "twenty lakh bighas (about 670,000 acres) of the best cultivable land here were settled on by the immigrants, six lakh bighas (about 200,000 acres) were acquired by them through trespass, and all the other available lands were being gradually swallowed up and converted into their possessions". 6

The arrival of the Muslims gave rise to a new political culture. Their very presence encouraged the Muslim League to demand that Assam be included in Pakistan because they claimed
it was a Muslim Majority region. Despite the Muslim League's best efforts to invite the East Bengalee Muslims to Assam the scheme was frustrated by Assam's man of the hour, Gopinath Bordoloi who headed the first Congress Ministry in 1938 and again served as chief Minister in the critical period between 1946-1950. Neerja Chowdhury, an eminent journalist of the Himmat pointed out that Sadulla regims adopted colonisation and development" schemes for the settlement of East Bengal Muslims who were encouraged to come and grow more food. "These policies created an impression in East Bengal that there was limitless land in Assam."

India's census commissioner R.B. Vaghaiwalla said in the first post independence census report of 1951: "I have personally seen hundreds of persons coming on trains during the first months I held charge of Goalpara District. I had the same experience as the Deputy Commissioner in Cachar..." Weiner pointed out that the 1961 census revealed that Muslims constituted 43.3 percent of the population in Goalpara district, 41.2 percent in Nowgong 39.2 percent in Cachar and 29.3 percent in Kamrup.

The Bengali Hindus did not come to Assam in such a large scale as the Muslims in the late British period. Most of the Bengali Hindus came in search of job to Assam as Bengalees could
avail the advantage of western education since early 19th century. They were mostly absorbed in Government services or in the tea industries. But in the early British period the Bengalee Hindu migration was more predominant.

India became Independent on August 15, 1947 and East Pakistan came into existence at the same time. The partition of India left the Hindus homeless in Pakistan. The Bengali Hindus then started pouring into Assam and Tripura from East Pakistan. But strangely along with the Bengalee Hindus a large number of Bengalee Muslims also came to Assam. The Government of India introduced on December, 24, 1949 a bill which in 1950 became the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 "which provided that any immigrant person excepting the displaced person, who because of civil disturbance or fear of civil disturbance, entered Assam, was liable to be deported". In western border of India the transfer of population between India and west Pakistan was over within a few years. But no such transfer of population took place in the eastern sector. During the Indo Pakistan war of 1965 large section of Bengali Hindus were forced to leave East Pakistan. Later just at the time of the freedom movement in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) at the beginning of 1971 Bengali Hindu as well as Bengali Muslims came to India. The Muslims mostly are supposed to have gone back to Bangladesh, which is very doubtful to accept but the majority of the Hindus
stayed back in India mostly in the adjacent areas.  

There are some historical factors responsible for the present movement. They are creations of states like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh etc. The States which were carved out of the British Assam are protected by the sixth schedule where non-tribals are not allowed to possess land. Moreover the immigrant Hindus and Muslims do not prefer to stay among the homogenous tribal majority states, where they feel insecure. The measures were taken from time to time to check the migration from East Pakistan and the first effort materialised in the Nehru-Liaquat pact of 1950 which allowed any one coming to India before December, 31, 1950 to become an Indian citizen. Though the pact provided for the return of Muslims, from Pakistan to India, and Hindu from India to Pakistan, the Hindus did not return to their original homeland, once they came over to India from East and West Pakistan.

The act has provided that the members of the minority community in East Pakistan who had left the country due to civil disturbance or for the fear of it should not be deported. The entire thrust in the sixties was directed at the Muslim infiltrators from the then East Pakistan. This is confirmed by the draft of the famous PIP (Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan) scheme of 1964 which the then director of the Intelligence
The second group of immigrants who were quite large in number are the Nepalees. They did not come in waves like the Bangalees but infiltrated gradually. They first came as the cattle grazers and settled in Assam, which is a more hospitable country than their own.

The Assam movement launched by AASU was thus rooted in the past. It is a distressing spectacle for any Assamese who has an eye to see that massive infiltration by hordes of aliens and outsiders has been going on merrily in this state even after Independence. The Governments headed by Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnu Prava Medhi observed vigilance to some extent in this regard. But the succeeding Governments relaxed in pursuit of narrow selfish interests. The census Report of 1961 recorded a rise in the population of state by 35 percent over that of 1951 as against the normal and average increase of half that figure. And it was felt that this was mainly due to the large-scale infiltration of Hindus and Muslim from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

It is held by interested quarters that the relatively higher increase in the Muslim population in the census of 1961 in comparison with their number in 1951, was due to three reasons, (1) That the number of Muslims in the state in the census of 1951 stood considerably lower than their actual number as
lakhs of Muslims had fled away to East Pakistan during the communal clash in that year and were not available for enumeration in that census. (2) That they came back after pacification of the communal conflict in the wake of the Nehru-Liaquat pact of 1951 and (3) That only polygamy and fecundity of the Muslims have contributed to the comparatively higher increase in their population. There was communal conflict in Assam in 1951 or even in the latter part of 1950, nor was the Nehru-Liaquat pact enacted in 1951 to enable the fleeing Muslims of Assam to come back from East Pakistan after the census was already effected. Some clashes between the Muslim immigrants and Hindu refugees from East Pakistan took place in the latter part of 1949 and early 1950 and the Nehru-Liaquat pact was enacted in April, 1950. The East Bengal Muslim immigrants who had left Assam during these clashes came back in the wake of the Nehru-Liaquat pact long before the census of 1951 was effected. If the number of Muslims in Assam appeared somewhat deflated in the census of 1951 in comparison with their number in the census of 1941, it was because of the transfer of the overwhelmingly Muslim-majority district of Sylhet to East Pakistan in the wake of the partition of the country in 1947.

The Press and the public of Assam also supported this view and demanded stern measures against this alien mainly Pakistani, infiltration. However, the stream of migration did
not restrict itself to the partition days only. A steady flow of migrants from East Pakistan has continuously found its way into Assam's rich plains and forests. As long as East Bengal formed part of Pakistan, due to a hostile relationship with India the border was guarded by military and other para-military organisations, thereby considerably restricting the rate of infiltration. But, during the uprising against the Pakistani regime and the army crackdown on the Bangla liberation movement, Marcy 25, 1971, the boarders were virtually thrown open and the real floodgates of Bangladeshi infiltration started into Assam and other North-Eastern states, with a vengeance, while the Government lay in slumber, many prominent political parties encouraged aided and abetted this infiltration and consequent in corporation of their names in the electoral rolls for achieving their own selfish ends.

During the uprising in East Pakistan in 1971 nearly 11 Lakhs Bengalees entered Assam\(^{17}\) and the agitators claimed that a large number of them did not return to Bangladesh after the Indira-Muzib Treaty in 1971. The hope which was cherished by some people of Assam that some of the infiltrators would go back to Bangladesh was completely shattered. The students and non-political organisation then thought of taking up the issue of 'foreign Influx' in Assam. In 1974 the All Assam students union demanded the deletion, depotation and detection of foreign
nationals from electoral roll. As Professor D.P. Barooah, Present Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University observes, "Faced with the Government's failure to deal with the foreign nationals issue according to the constitution and the existing laws, combined with the exasperation generated by the dubious role of the major political parties, the student community of Assam raised the first voice of an organised movement when the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) presented a 21 point Charter of Demands to the Assam Government on 21 February, 1974: the delectation and deportation of foreign nationals was one of the demands".18

In the absence of any real guidelines to establish the quantum of infiltration, we may study the Government's own census figure for arriving at a calculated estimate for ascertaining the magnitude of the problem. The table overleaf shows the decennial growth rate of Assam's population from 1901 to 1971 along with the National growth rate.

It can be seen from this table that from 1951 to 1961 and from 1961 to 1971 Assam's growth rates of population were 34.99 per cent and 34.71 per cent against the all India average of 21.64 per cent and 24.57 per cent respectively. Assam's own increase is about 20 per cent before 1951. Assuming 24.57 per cent as the normal growth rate, which allows for normal inters-
tate movement of people, we may safely conclude that the extra growth rate of nearly 10 per cent is due to the presence of foreign infiltrators. Assam's population as per 1971 census was 1.46 crores which puts the foreign infiltration at 14 to 15 lakhs, as in 1971 on this basis. As already mentioned, the floodgates of infiltration really started during and after 1971, namely during and after the emergence of Bangladesh. Assam's projected population now is 1.88 crores, and foreign infiltration can be anything above 20 lakhs.

P.K. Bhuyan observes "In the above light, the 1977 electoral rolls contain a minimum of 14 to 15 lakhs of illegal voters. The Assam Government's acceptance of this so-called "voters list" as the base makes a mockery of the present 'deletion' operations. As per the Government statement the total number of voters in the electoral rolls for the ensuing Loksabha election is 85,37,479 out of which only 3.46 lakhs objections and 2.6 Lakh claims have been filed. In view of the vastness of the infiltration, the objections raised seem very small being only 4.1 per cent of the total number of voters. This is because immigrants who have been granted Indian citizenship earlier have created expensive pockets, and may in fact be harbouring illegal foreign immigrants being their own kith and kin. They will not for obvious reasons, raise objection to names of foreigners being
included in the electoral rolls." This is supported by the fact that inspite of recording the highest rise in the voters list figures in 1978-79 the objections raised in Nowgong and Goalpara district were much less than (say) in Darrang where the increase in the number of voters was much less. This clearly indicated that objections were not raised from predominantly infiltrated areas. Thus the figure of 3,46 lakh objections merely touched the fringe of the problem. The way back in 1931 the superintendent of Census Operations in Assam, C.S. Mullan, in his report observed: "Probably the most Important event in the Province during the last 25 years likely to alter permanently the whole structure of the Assamese culture and civilization, has been the invasion of a vast horde of land hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly muslims from the district of eastern Bengal and in particular from Mymensing." 

In the year 1944, Mr. S.P. Desai, I.C.S., concluded his report on Government forest reserves with the following words: "The immigrants do not listen to the officer's protest. Verily, the cup of humiliation for the Assamese is full. They feel the law is meant for them only and not for the immigrants, that the Government which is the custodian and trustee of their interest has failed them. All sections of the local population are greatly perturbed and their talk exhibits deep rooted bitterness." Late Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to Sri B.R. Medhi,
Congress Leader of Assam on 1.12.37, admitted the seriousness of the problem and advocated a policy of restriction to which the Muslim League objected and deliberately demanded Assam to be included in Pakistan. In the Parliament on June, 27, 1962 by way of reply to a question of infiltration he replied, "you refer to Pakistani infiltration. This is perfectly true..... I believe that most of this infiltration took place in the first five years after Independence when the border was not adequately guarded. Probably it will be difficult now to deal with illegal immigrants who came before 1952, we might therefore fix 1952 as the date of our enquiry".

C.S.Mullan's prophetic warning was borne by the events that followed. The seeds of the identity crisis of the Assamese people which were sown in the first decade of the century bore fruit in the sixties, yet, neither the people nor the Government then took cognisance of his warning. It was only in 1965, almost 30 years later as Mullan envisaged, that an action plan to stop migration from East Pakistan and to detect and report those who had already infiltrated, was drawn up by the Union Home ministry. Prepared by Mr. B.N.Mullick, the plan was known as the Pakistani Infiltration Prevention project (PIP). But following persistent pressures by a powerful section of the minority community in the Congress led by an influential minister that Indian citizens were harassed, the project proved non-starter
### Table I

Decennial Growth of Population of North East Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>1911-21</th>
<th>1921-31</th>
<th>1931-41</th>
<th>1941-51</th>
<th>1951-61</th>
<th>1961-71</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-11</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>13.31</td>
<td>21.64</td>
<td>24.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>16.84</td>
<td>20.19</td>
<td>20.04</td>
<td>20.45</td>
<td>20.12</td>
<td>34.99</td>
<td>34.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>21.71</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>16.04</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>35.04</td>
<td>37.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>15.71</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>15.59</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>31.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>46.76</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>12.62</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>14.07</td>
<td>39.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>32.48</td>
<td>32.59</td>
<td>25.63</td>
<td>34.14</td>
<td>24.56</td>
<td>78.71</td>
<td>36.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical abstract of India 1972, Published by Govt. of India.
which was further aggravated at the time of Bangladesh war. From 1961 till 1977, several Lakhs of refugee from Bangladesh, Tibet, Bhutan and tribes from hill areas of Bangladesh were rehabilitated in Assam. Since then influx from other sources declined but, for the patronage and inspiration of the rehabilitated population, countless infiltrators continued their sojourn and poured into the nook and corner of the State. Consequently the estimated population was expected to increase abnormally.

The abnormal growth of population in the State has completely jeopardised the plan achievement during the last 30 years. The most significant demographic feature of population growth in Assam, is its wide variation in different districts. It is revealed from the Table No.2 that the areas of earlier Bangladeshi settlement continued to remain major strongholds of infiltrators. Consequently these areas show higher rate of growth. In Goalpara, Nowgong, Lakhimpur and Kamrup the growth rates remained as high as 44.12, 38.83, 58.56 and 38.38 respectively during the 1961-71 decade. The normal growth rate of population is seen only in Sibsagar district where infiltration is negligible. The Land problem, therefore, is not of great significance except on reasons of natural calamities like flood and erosion in these influx free areas and the growth of agricultural production could be maintained with upward trends.
The quantum of influx was considerably lower in the Sibsagar district. So the growth rate of population during the last three decades in the district may be safely taken as the normal growth rate of population of the indigenous people. Besides, this rate is almost the average India rate at per with the national average growth rate of population. Moreover, during the last three decades the import of tea-garden labours from other states of India was totally stopped. Naturally the abnormal growth of population, rather violent explosion of population in Assam can be safely attributed to the bulky of foreigners to this region.

The geographical location of Assam stands in the way of accelerated development. The people of North East India feel that they are neglected by the Centre and so developmental programmes in this region are not many. One of the grievances of the people of Assam is that the raw materials of the state are utilized by the Centre, but proper attention to the state is not paid. The rise in population density without any industrial progress or development in the agri-cultural method or sufficient irrigation facilities etc. has resulted in bringing down the economic condition of the people of the state. The economic hardship is one of the reasons for making the people more involved in the foreigners issue. As Prof. Parameswar Sarma, a noted economist of Assam says, "The relentless demographic
pressure created by large scale and continuing immigration has depressed the rural economy of the state resulting in intensification of the twin problems of poverty and unemployment among the rural masses. Superimposed on a situation of underdevelopment and stagnation, unrestricted immigration in the region has produced a conflict situation, especially that immigration has carried with it the threat of upsetting the demographic balance and altering the ethnic or linguistic composition of the population. 28

The immediate factor which geared the agitation was the picture revealed during the revision of the electoral roll of Mangaldoi Parliamentary Constituency, after the death of Sri Hiralal Patowari in March 28, 1979. There were about Six Lakhs electorates in that constituency and objections were raised against some 70,000 names during the revision of the voters' list. Here students took active participation and proclaimed that the names of about 45,000 foreigners existed in that particular constituency only and then it remained a guess work as to the number of foreign nationals all over the state. 29 The All Assam Students Union demanded a thorough scrutiny in electoral rolls of all the constituencies. That was the starting point of the Movement. The All Assam Student's Union called a meeting of all organisations who were actively in support of the demand for deletion of names of foreigners from the elec-
toral rolls. It was decided to give a wider base to the agitation. For that purpose All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) was formed on August 27, 1979 at Dibrugarh with representatives of AASU and other local organisations. Sri Bhrigu Kumar Phukan (AASU), Sri Jatin Goswami (Assam Sahitya Sabha) and Shri Atul Bora (P.L.P) were chosen as convenors of the AAGSP. But instead of determining the vital question of citizenship once for all, the Government was keen to hold elections with all possible speed. The process of deletion of the names of foreigners from the voters list would have started but some of those having vested interest with fear of losing traditional supporters who had consistently voted in the elections, took up the matter with the Government of India and Election Commission of India and started putting pressures to stop the process of deletion. The movement for deportation of foreigners from Assam and deletion of their names from the electoral roll started in a democratic manner with a rally of students at Gauhati held on November 6, 1979, followed by week long Satyagraha ending on the November 17, 1979, participated by all sections of the society and residents of Assam. But the Government was determined to hold Lok Sabha elections in Assam.

The Assam press was concerned over the continuing in-
flux of illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries, specially from Bangladesh. A number of articles and editorials pointed out that the problem was old but its impact was only recently felt in many ways, including a phenomenal spurt in population growth, changing composition of the electorate in border areas, rapid destruction of forests and diminishing employment opportunities for Assamese youths. If the foreign nationals entered Assam unabated, then in near future the Assamese would be relegated to the back ground and foreigners would be the virtual rulers of the state through the exercise of their voting rights. So the demands was made to detect the foreigners, delete their names from the electoral rolls and eventually deport then out of Assam.

The press in Assam was very prompt in flashing a statement of S.L. Shakdhar, Chief Election Commissioner at a conference of Chief Electoral officers at gota canund on September 24, 1978. He said: "I would like to refer to the alarming situation in some states, specially in the North Eastern region, Wherefrom disturbing reports are coming regarding large scale inclusion of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls. .... The influx has become a regular feature... In other words, a stage would be reached when that state may have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may, in all probability, constitute a sizable percentage, if not the majority of the population in
the state. Another disturbing factor in this regard is the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the names of such migrants who are not Indian Citizens, without even questioning and properly determining their citizenship status.31

The Dainik Asam pointed out that unless positive measures were evolved to check the frightening flow of immigrants from neighbouring countries and to deport those who had illegally entered Assam, there would be a record rise in the number of voters because lakhs of foreigners secured Indian citizenship through the connivance of some politicians and corrupt officials.32 On January 4, 1979, the same paper said that the people of Assam would be wiped out by hordes of foreigners if the present situation continued. It suggested that deletion of foreigners names from the voters lists should start; otherwise it would be a treason to the indigenous people of the state. The Assam Tribune warned people against the endless influx of Bangladeshi nationals in to Assam. "Judging from reports of official and unofficial sources one cannot but be alarmed at the increasing number of Bangladeshis coming over to Assam and registering themselves as Indian Citizens. Already such persons have reportedly become voters and participated in the panchayat elections. The matter needs to be thoroughly investigated and foolproof measures taken to deport
those who have entered India and to prevent further influx....
Public opinion which was in evidence last year against the
problem of influx seems to have warned; it should be vigorously
revived so that the Government is made to exercise constant
vigil and to act effectively."33

The Assam Tribune highlighted the gravity of the situa-
tion in an illuminating article "Problem created by Influx of
population into Assam" by Sri K.C.Barua."34 From the be-
genning of the present century a large number of Muslim immigrants
from the East Bengal (later East Pakistan and Now Bangladesh)
began to flow into Assam in search of land. They encroached
upon Village and professional grazing reserves and Government
khaslands and reclaimed large tracts of low lying areas. They
originally occupied riverin areas, but gradually pushed to the
north and came in clash with the local people, particularly the
tribals. In order to protect the local people from the onsla-
ughts of the land hungry immigrants, the "Line system" was in-
troduced and the immigrants were not allowed to go beyond these
"Lines", Later, this immigration was encouraged in a planned
manner with political motives to convert Assam into a Muslim
majority province. At first a "Colonisation scheme" was stag-
ted to settle the immigrants in colonies. There after, in 1940,
after the resignation of the Congress Coalition Government, Sir
Sadulla's Government took up 'Development scheme' to settle the
Muslim immigrants in a firm and solid basis. The unauthorised occupation of thousands of bighas of grazing reserves was legalised by throwing open the occupied Reserve areas. After Independence when East Bengal became East Pakistan regular flow of Muslim immigrants stopped; but the flow is continuing till today surreptitiously with the help of interested persons.

From the very beginning the problem of influx of foreign nationals into the State of Assam as well as into the other States and union territories of the north eastern region was taken up seriously by the local press. The Assam Tribune in its editorial of June, 28, 1979 laid emphasis on the need "to evolve a common strategy to deal with the menace". It observed, "The continued influx for years has already disturbed the demographic structure of the region and the reports that many of the immigrants have been able to get their names included in the electoral rolls are really disconcerting. The fact that some political parties are overtly or covertly encouraging infiltration to serve their own political ends is reprehensible. Fear has already been expressed in several quarters that unless the infiltration is put a stop to and those who have already crossed over are not sent back there will be serious imbalance in the socio-political life of the states."

It is not that the Government were not unaware of the
problem. But the steps taken so far did not go even half way to meet the challenge. Besides there were vested interests among politicians, bureaucrats even among the guardians of law, who were not whole-heartedly committed to the task of detecting and deporting. As Asam Sahitya Sabha observed, "Local politicians found these immigrants ideal cannon fodder for their electoral battles and settled large colonies of East Pakistani infiltrators in some of the most fertile areas of Assam with the active co-operation and connivance of the state revenue department". The role played by some neighbouring states made the situation more difficult. How keenly Meghalaya also felt of the problem was evident from the trend of discussion in the state Assembly. The hill states and union territories in the region were therefore thinking of evolving a common strategy to meet the twin threats. In the context the seminar proposed for August did not come a day too soon and it was hoped that all the states and union territories of the region would join hands to find a way out of the difficulty caused by unabated influx. It was high time the problem was given the importance it deserved. There could not be any dillydallying when the future survival of the entire region was involved.

In its editorial, The Asam Bani described the feeling among the Assamese of being exploited and neglected for the
development projects along with the uncertainty of jobs opportunities of the educated middle class, coupled with the decreasing land-man ratio in rural areas. As the identity of the Assamese people as a cultural unit was threatened by the endless infiltration the paper asked the government to be vigilant in this regard.37

The problem of large scale foreign invasion of a part of India was surely a national problem, but complacency and neglect on the part of the Government and the political parties reinforced the feeling among the Assamese that the Centre was apathetic to its problems. "The fear of being overwhelmed by Muslim immigrants has always haunted the Assamese, especially since 1937, when the Muslim League Ministry of Mr. Saddula encouraged Muslim immigration to turn Assam into a Muslim - Majority state".38 While after pertition people kept pouting into Assam East Pakistan, the Govt. did not take steps to check the illegal immigration. The manning of the Indo - East Pakistan border was cursory and inadequate. So the silent invasion of Assam could not be stopped. The cumulative effect was disastrous, but Delhi remained indifferent. Shekhar Gupta observes, "Frequent communal disturbances in East Pakistan made the influx of Bengali Hindu refugees a regular phenomenon, and as the Indian Government stuck to the commitments made in the constituent Assem-
bly to the minorities in Pakistan, a large number of Hindu families kept coming in at random and were settled in Assam, as they were in neighbouring West Bengal and Tripura. The situation was different in Assam in the sense that taking advantage of the absence of any organic dislike for the Muslims and the propensity of the Assamese politician to nurture vote banks, the Muslim immigrants never ceased to consider the fertile Brahmaputra valley as his promise land". 39

Foreigners succeeded in infiltrating into the voters lists. This was admitted by the Govt. in a document 'Influx - Infiltration from East Pakistan'. It observed, "The fact that the enlistment of foreigners in the voters' lists has at times taken place at the instance of politically interested persons or parties. Political parties have been known to enforce dubious steps to inflate the number of their supporters at the election time, and some undoubtedly used the illegal settlers from Pakistan to wards this end ... The mere fact that a person's name is, rightly or wrongly, inscribed on the voters list does not prove or confer Indian nationality or citizenship. This legal position has been confirmed by decisions of the supreme court of India. 40 Professor D.P. Baroowa, now Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University, aptly observes, "The Assam Movement's insistence on the constitution and the existing laws is based precisely on these grounds. Under the law of the land, aliens
cannot be allowed to decide the political destiny of the state and the Country.*

References


10. Quoted from Sanjayya, op.cit. P. 5.


13. See Appendix.

14. See Appendix.


21. Ibid.


23. Quoted from Borthakur, M: Influx of Foreign National and Demographic change in Assam in Coordination Committee GUTA (ed) Invasion in Disguise, P. 30.

24. Ibid.


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