The reforms of 1919 established a measure of provincial autonomy by devolving authority in provincial matters and introducing the process of working of responsible Government in the British Indian provinces. The Government of India Act 1935, subsequently, developed this process by granting, for the first time, separate legal personality to the Provincial Governments and thus strengthened the provinces' potentiality. By providing further allocation of financial resources, the Act organised them into 'a federation of India' along with the native states. The freedom conceded to by the Act of 1919 in the 'transferred field' was extended further by the Act of 1935 which came to cover the whole gamut of the Provincial Government. The grant of provincial autonomy brought into limelight the separatist movements in several British Indian provinces, particularly in those which were the haphazard conglomeration of territories bearing little relation with the natural divisions and which were formed cutting across the frontiers of race and language. In the light of this trend, the Indian National Congress also despite its support.

for unitarian philosophy and denunciation of the evils of 'Provincialism' had to acquiesce and organise the electoral system on linguistic basis. The Act of 1919 introduced meaningful changes in the composition of the Legislative Council of Assam by bringing into existence territorial constituencies as well as reducing the strength of the official and the nominated members. The rights of the members of the Council were also extended on the model of the British House of Commons. With the advent of the provincial self-government in Assam, the spirit of provincial patriotism received impetus in the valley of the Brahmaputra and its representatives intensified their efforts to assert their position in the Government of the province.

Composition of the Legislature of Assam vis-a-vis the Position of the Brahmaputra Valley:

The Reformed Legislative Council consisted of 53 members of whom 39 were elected and 14 nominated. Of the

2. Coupland, ibid., Part III, pp. 38-39

The Council of the Chief Commissioner of Assam was composed of 24 members - 13 nominated and 11 elected. The members elected were: two by the Municipalities, two by the Local Boards, two by landholders, two by separate Muslim electorate and three by tea planting community of the province. (Report of the Franchise Committee and the Committee on Division of Functions, 1919, p. 76)

3. ALCD, 1923, vol. III, Governor's Prorogation Address, August 16, pp. 496-97

**Out of the 14 nominated members two were the members of the Executive Council of the Governor who were the ex-officio members.
nominated members seven were officials and seven non-officials. Two of the non-official nominated members were the representatives of the labouring classes and the inhabitants of the 'backward tracts'. Thirty nine electoral constituencies were distributed as follows: one General Urban Constituency of Shillong, twenty non-Muhammadan rural constituencies, twelve Muhammadan rural constituencies, three Assam Valley Planting constituencies, two Surma Valley Planting constituencies and one for Commerce and industry. In the Reformed Council, all excepting the planters came from the single-member constituencies. The Assam Valley planters' constituency returned three and that of the Surma Valley two. The Commerce and Industry constituency returned only one representative. These were functional and non-territorial constituencies. The remaining 33 constituencies were territorial, and 32 of them were evenly allotted to the two valleys of the province. The Brahmaputra Valley, including Goalpara, got sixteen constituencies. The Communal and territorial distribution of the constituencies in the valley of the Brahmaputra were as follows:

4. Report on the Administration of Assam for the year 1921-22, Shillong, 1923, p. 97
Table No. 1

The Brahmaputra Valley Districts: Total constituencies 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Non-Muhammadans</th>
<th>Muhammadans</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Goalpara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report on the Administration of Assam for the year 1921-22, p. 97

The Reformed Council was theoretically a House composed of non-official Indian majority. However, in actual practice the elected Europeans together with the officials and the nominated members continued to influence the decisions of the legislature. From 1921-1936 four reformed councils were constituted. The members of the council were mostly lawyer by profession and most of them were dependent on rent from land for livelihood. There had been very few representatives from the classes engaged in agriculture. Thus the petty middle class elements.

6. Guha, op.cit., p. 148
of different regional segments of Assam polity, having vested interests on land and jobs formed these councils and worked under the balancing influence of the European and the Government elements. In 1937 under the provision of the Government of India Act 1935 the Legislature of Assam became bicameral with a Legislative Assembly of 108 members entirely elected and a Legislative Council of 18 elected and, not less than 3 and not more than 4 members nominated by the Government. The community and territory-wise break-up of the constituencies of the Assembly and the Legislative Council was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituencies</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Muhammadan</th>
<th>Scheduled caste</th>
<th>Tribal (Plains)</th>
<th>Tribal (Hills)</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmaputra Valley:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goalpara: 5 5 x 1 x x 11

Table No. 2 (Contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surma Valley:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylhet</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hill Areas:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shillong</td>
<td>(women)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jowai</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikir Hills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Cachar Hills</td>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naga Hills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lushai (Mizo) Hills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontier Tracts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europeans:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European constituency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Planting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Commerce and Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indians:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Planting (Assam Valley)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (Surma Valley)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Commerce and Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Constituencies</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Administrative Report 1937-38, pp. 7-8
In the constitutional development of 1937 the principle of maintaining parity of the constituencies between the two valleys was waived and the Brahmaputra Valley including Goalpara was allotted 52 constituencies as against 37 of the Surma Valley. In the valley, however, the plain tribals were, for the first time, accorded separate representation to the legislature. Accordingly nine seats were kept reserved for the representatives of the Hills and the plains tribal population of Assam. Thus in the Assembly the Hills and the plains constituencies of Assam Valley* including the district Goalpara enjoyed marginal majority.

*The terms "Brahmaputra Valley" and "Assam Valley" were used to denote the same territory. In 1940, Siddinath Sarma objected to the official use of the term "Brahmaputra Valley" for "Assam Valley" and the Government declared that the term "Assam Valley" would be used in place of "Brahmaputra Valley" to designate the territory concerned hereafter. - AICG, 1940, vol. II, p. 1687

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elected Seats</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Muhammadan</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmaputra Valley including Goalpara</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surma Valley</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No. 3
The Assam Legislative Council (Second Chamber)
In the context of the political development of the period it may be recapitulated that in the first two decades of the present century Assam Valley passed through a period of upheaval. During the period the Assam Association (1903-20), the Assam Chhatra Samilan (established in 1916) and the Assam Sahitya Sabha (established in 1917) attempted to articulate the valley's unsettled quest for a linguistic regional identity and its desire to be administered at least at the lower level not by the recruits from Bengal but by the sons of the soil.\(^9\)

In the Reformed Council as well as in the Assembly these aspirations of the valley came in conflict not only with the policy of the colonial Government but also with the ideas, attitudes and aspirations of the other regional partners of the province and culminated in a sense of its identity being at stake. A study of the major socio-economic and political issues leads automatically to trace the determinants of the consolidating process of the valley's identity.

A. The Socio-Economic Issues:

(i) Employment opportunities:

The Brahmaputra Valley from the very beginning of the British rule confronted certain formidable constraints on the way of establishing its claim to reasonable share of Government

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9. Guha, op.cit., p. 335
posts. The traditional gentry of the valley being stranger to the system of British administration could not avail of the initial opportunities offered to them, for which the alien administrative structure of the province continued to be manned by the "men of ability and business" drawn from the neighbouring Bengal districts in place of the "men of ranks" of the valley. The traditional aristocracy of the valley was the first to react to their displacement by the outsiders. Four years before the Great Indian Revolt of 1857 they submitted a memorandum expressing resentment against the unsympathetic treatment and claiming provisions for employment, pension or grant of rent-free lands for their honourable living under the ruler. As a true representative of this displaced aristocracy Maniram Dutta Dewan voiced his protest against the administrative system of the British rulers and opposed the appointment of people from Marwar and the Bengalees of Sylhet as the Mausadars over them in their home land. The high-ups led by the Dewan, ultimately, opted for the extreme steps of confrontation and joined the Great Revolt of 1857 with the aim of overthrowing the British rule to safeguard their traditional interests.

13. Baruah (Mrs.), op.cit., p. 508
The enlightened section of the disgruntled gentry drawing inspiration from the Bengal renaissance and led by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, a 'practical apostle' of the new age, on the other hand, examined the problem from its practical perspective. They espoused the cause of the persecuted Assamese language. Anandaram entertained no animosity towards the Bengalees or Bengali language but opposed the exclusive adoption of Bengali language as the medium of instruction in Assam.\(^\text{14}\) He also refuted the Government notion that "the Assamese would never improve in European knowledge" and pointed out that the reason for slow progress of English education in the valley was not due to the fault of the people of the valley but the wrong educational policy of the new rulers was responsible for the same.\(^\text{15}\)

Under the frail and narrow educational infrastructure the turn-out of the educated personnel in the valley of the Brahmaputra was very low and as such the handful of educated Assamese youth faced no problem of unemployment in the nineteenth century. As for example, out of 1346 boys and girls who matriculated from the schools of Assam during 1882-83, only 335, i.e., only 25 per cent were from the valley of the Brahmaputra as against 629, i.e., 47 per cent and 382 or 28 per cent.

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from the Surma Valley and other provinces respectively. The scene, however, changed gradually and in 1905-06 52 students appeared in the Cotton College, Guwahati as against 63 in the Murarichand College of Sylhet. The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha in its memorial to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on 14 December 1892 expressing dissatisfaction at the ratio of employment of the "natives of the soil" including those of Sylhet in the executive services, demanded at least three-fourths of the executive posts to be filled up with the natives of the province. The Sabha resented the appointments of the non-residents of the province at the expense of the natives. It also pleaded for due weightage to the local candidates in the departments of forest, police, post and telegraph which were monopolised by the non-Assamese. Paying a deaf ear to the protests of Assam the colonial Government, however, continued to recruit the unemployed educated youths of Bengal to staff its Assam offices and reduced thereby the dangers of unemployment in the politically turbulent Bengal.

On the eve of the partition of Bengal and the creation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the Chief Commi-

17. The Memorandum pointed out that during the period of 1874-92 the posts of Extra Assistant Commissioners offered to the Assamese were ten and those to the people of Sylhet were seven as against nineteen to the non-resident. The Sabha also pointed out that in 1893 none of the fifty graduates of the Surma Valley was appointed as Extra Assistant Commissioner. - Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), Political History of Assam, vol. 1, pp. 161-62
18. Baruah (Mrs), op. cit., p. 510
ssioner Sir J.B. Fuller took up the cause of Assamese language as well as the issue of the Bengalees' hold over the Government jobs in the province of Assam and emphasized the implementation of the principle of "Assam for Assamese." In 1873 it was ruled that the natives of Assam proper would be preferred to the Bengalees for appointment in the five districts of Assam. In 1903 the first definite instructions were given regarding appointments in the district, division or departments as "some endeavour should be made to recruit from each race of the community in proportion to its number . . . subject to the condition that qualified candidates are available." The principle, thus, established the ethnic representation in the composition of the services of Assam. The communal representation in the services though dated back to 1877 it was precisely formulated only in 1903. The Government Resolution of 17 November, 1903 directed that except for the previous sanction of the Chief Commissioner all appointments in the province were to be made to the bonified permanent residents of Assam. Fuller, championing the cause of the Assamese people instructed that so long the candidates possessed the required educational qualifications preference was to be given to the Assamese for appointments.

19. EBALCP, 1909, April 6, p. 16
21. ALCD, 1929, vol. IX, p. 305

*The term permanent resident, however, included all the new comers who had land or house property in Assam and those who could prove their intention to live in Assam permanently.
22. Guha, op.cit., p. 74
In the legislative council of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the issue was repeatedly raised by Manik Chandra Borooah, the first representative of the valley in the Council. He complained that despite Government's clear circular and declarations for the appointment of the Assamese in the Government posts in Assam, these continued to be filled up by the people from outside. He also pointed out that the ministerial appointments and those in the Secretariat, offices of different Departments as well as in the Board of Revenue were not proportionate to the number of the Assamese population. Borooah also referred to the remark of Lt.Col. Gurdon, the Commissioner, Assam Valley Division wherein it was contended:

"both the Ahoms and the Assamese Hindus are in great danger of being elbowed out of all the Government as well as industrial employments by the people of Eastern Bengal."24

He tried his best to impress upon the Council about the rightful state of the Assamese in the employment sector of the province.

In the reconstituted Province of Assam of 1912 the valley's position remained more or less the same since the populous district of Sylhet of the Surma Valley was retained

23. EBALCP, 1910, March 10, p. 4
24. EBALCP, 1909, April 6, p. 16
in Assam. In the separate province the Government jobs continued to be distributed among the different communities of the province as well as between the two valleys. For the purpose of communal distribution of the services the following communities of Assam were recognised as separate communities:

1. The Europeans and the Anglo-Indians,

2. The Bengalees of Sylhet and Cachar,

3. The Assamese (other than the Ahoms and the Muhammadans, but including the Bengali speaking population of Goalpara, less the residents of Goalpara born in Bengal),

4. The Ahoms,

5. The Muhammadans,

6. The Khasis (including Syntengs),

7. The Bengalees other than the Bengalees of Sylhet and Cachar who were domiciled,

8. The Bengalees other than the Bengalees of Sylhet and Cachar who were not domiciled,

9. Others.25

The employment policy of the Government of Assam was laid down in the opening speech of the Governor to the Council in 1921. It insisted on the observation of two important rules,

25. ALCD, 1922, vol. II, A.W. Botham's reply, Sept. 11, r. 704
viz., (1) to recruit officers from within the province as far as possible, and (2) to maintain balance between the claims of the two valleys.  

In the first Reformed Council the councillors of the valley including those from the Muhammadan community proposed a resolution which suggested the recruitment of the Extra Assistant Commissioners and the Sub-Deputy Collectors through open competition. The point of the Assamese and the Muhammadan representatives in this regard was that since education had not made equal headway among all the sections of the people, retention of communal representation in the services would serve the purpose in a better way. As the wrangling and jealousies over the Government posts continued, the presence of the advanced district of Sylhet in Assam was viewed by the Brahmaputra Valley as detrimental to its interests. The predominance of the people of Sylhet in the Secretariat and other offices of Assam made the people of the Brahmaputra Valley feel that separation of Sylhet from Assam would provide the needed solution. The valley councillors also suggested that pending the exit of Sylhet an amicable adjustment had to be effected through an equitable distribution of the offices among the natives of the valleys. In 1936 Sarveswar Barua requested

27. ALCD, 1921, vol. I, p. 257
28. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 640
the people of the Suxma Valley to remain satisfied with their field and the facilities offered by their valley rather than coveting those of the Assam Valley which legitimately belonged to the Assamese.\textsuperscript{29}

As a follow up to it a formal resolution was moved in the Council recommending distribution of the provincial gazetted posts among the people of the Assam Valley Districts, the Surma Valley Districts and the Hill Districts on the basis of their respective territories.\textsuperscript{30} Rising consciousness among the hill people towards the issue made such a division desirable.\textsuperscript{31} The formal resolution to give effect to the desire, however, could not carry favour with the Council since the communal cleavage and the communal interests found it beneficial to treat the posts as provincial rather than regional.\textsuperscript{32} The categories of the 'Scheduled Castes' and the 'tribal people' entered the fray for sharing a separate ratio of appointments by 1935.\textsuperscript{33} Under the constitutional reforms of 1935 the valley came to witness a

\textsuperscript{29} ALCD, 1936, vol. XVI, p. 329
\textsuperscript{30} ibid., p. 1548
\textsuperscript{31} ibid., p. 1549
\textsuperscript{32} ibid., pp. 1552-53
\textsuperscript{33} ibid.

The Hindus of Sylhet and Cachar were treated separately from the Hindus of Assam Valley, whereas the Muhammadans of the province were not treated on the valley basis for the distribution of communal ratio of appointments in the Province. - ALCD, 1936, vol. XVI, March 27, p. 793
new awareness and assertion among the scheduled castes and the tribal people, particularly those of the plains about their rights and claims on Government jobs. In 1938, Rabi Chandra Pandharinath, the Plains tribal member elected from Kamrup moved a resolution in the Assembly demanding reservation of appropriate proportion of Government posts for the backward tribal people of the plains on the basis of their population.34 The members of the Assembly supported the demand. Haladhar Bhuyan ever pleaded for the reservation of greater percentage of jobs for the tribal people than they were rightfully entitled to. He emphasized that a strong Indian nation could be formed only on the basis of equal advancement of all the communities, particularly of those who were lagging behind.35 The following table represented the vivisection of the employment opportunities among the different communities of the province which was effected in November 1941, on basis the 1941 Census:

34. ALCD, 1938, vol. II, p. 887
35. ibid., pp. 390-91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>P.C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste Hindus</td>
<td>641,554</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surma Valley</td>
<td>401,302</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Valley</td>
<td>240,252</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hindus (Excluding Ahoms and Tribal Hindus)</td>
<td>2897,229</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surma Valley</td>
<td>846,212</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Valley</td>
<td>200,51,017</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>3,410,532</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surma Valley</td>
<td>2,114,131</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Valley</td>
<td>1,296,401</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahoms</td>
<td>295,292</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Christian (other than tribal Christian)</td>
<td>29,244</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal plains</td>
<td>1,112,782</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Tribes</td>
<td>844,056</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Garden Tribes</td>
<td>268,726</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal Hills</td>
<td>665,368</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Tribes</td>
<td>655,154</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Garden Tribes</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>2071</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>5612</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist (Excluding Ahoms and Tribal)</td>
<td>4861</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6134</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ALCD, 1942, pp. 95-96
As the Brahmaputra Valley lacked proper educational infrastructural facilities to produce the required personnel, the availability of the qualified people in the neighbouring Bengal at a minimum cost made its struggle on the issue complicated. The Province being composed of uneven partners, the efforts of the representatives of the valley to acquire greater share of employment were frustrated by the communal and valley cleavage. The responses of the other regional partners towards the valley's claim have been analysed in the relevant chapters.

(ii) The Opium Issue:

The inhabitants of the valley were in the grip of opium habit "to a degree unknown anywhere else in India", and the large scale use of the drug was "almost contemporaneous with the growth of British administration" in Assam. The British Government's professed official policy on the use of opium in the valley was to check its immoderate use by gradually enhancing the sale price as well as decreasing the number of the licensed opium shops. Despite Government's policy the consumption of the drug persisted in the valley at an alarming degree. The consumption of opium in the valley in the context

36. As against the internationally accepted norm of six seers per 10,000 people the relevant consumption in the valley was as high as 267 seers in 1891. - Gait, op.cit., pp. 321-82

37. Dutta, K.M., op.cit., p. 44

38. Guha, op.cit., p. 55
of the province as a whole was as follows: 39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Province as a whole</th>
<th>Brahmaputra Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875-76</td>
<td>1874 mounds</td>
<td>1689 mounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-81</td>
<td>1686 &quot;</td>
<td>1557 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-91</td>
<td>1308 &quot;</td>
<td>1208 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-01</td>
<td>1291 &quot;</td>
<td>1201 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>1512 &quot;</td>
<td>1391 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>1748 &quot;</td>
<td>1640 &quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Guha, p. 340

The opium as an issue of the Province was basically confined to the Brahmaputra Valley districts and the movement against it was carried on continuously in the valley. In 1907 an Anti-opium Conference held at Dibrugarh gave a call for the formation of an Assam Temperance Association with permanent committees at the sub-divisional level in the valley to deal with its eradication programmes. In 1912 another Anti-opium Conference of Dibrugarh recommended the opening of 'Public register of opium eaters' to check the habit. 40 The Assam

39. ibid. (for details see, p. 340)
40. ibid., p. 88
Councillors of the Provincial Legislative Council also tried to impress upon the Government to adopt effective measures for reducing the opium consumption in the Province. The resentment of the Valley Councillors against the Government policy on the use of opium reached its climax in the closing years of the pre-Reformed Council when Pharidhar Chaliha in his budget speech of 5 April 1919 demanded a total ban on opium trade. He also termed the revenue derived from the opium as 'tainted money'. He subsequently resigned in protest against the Chief Commissioner's remark centering round the opium revenue. 41

The annual conference of the Assam Association in 1919 took a concrete step while demanding gradual eradication of the opium trade within a period of ten years. The forceful recommendation of the Association was brought before the Council in 1920. However, the formal resolution moved by Ghanashyam Barua to this effect was defeated in the Council. The defeat was a major setback for the valley councillors as it was opposed by the non-official majority. Several Indian members also voted against it. 42 The following table reveals the nature of involvement of the different districts on the issue of opium as well as its consumption.

41. Dutta, K.N., op.cit., pp. 44-45

42. Out of twelve Indian members only four, namely, Saadulla, Krishna Kumar Barua, Chandradhar Barua and Ghanashyam Barua voted for the resolution. All the three Hindu and three Muslim members of the Surma Valley and a Goalpara zamindar member voted against it. - Guha, op.cit., see pp. 90-91.
### Table No. 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1914-15 Mds-Srs</th>
<th>1917-18 Mds-Srs</th>
<th>1919-20 Mds-Srs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Surma Valley and the Hill Districts:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>62-14</td>
<td>35-28</td>
<td>26-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylhet</td>
<td>17-25</td>
<td>12-33</td>
<td>9-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasi and Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>30-10</td>
<td>36-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naga Hills</td>
<td>1-06</td>
<td>11-24</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lushai Hills</td>
<td>N11</td>
<td>N11</td>
<td>N11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Assam Valley and the Hill Districts:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>450-15</td>
<td>466-16</td>
<td>562-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>429-12</td>
<td>357-01</td>
<td>394-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>246-09</td>
<td>233-00</td>
<td>292-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>182-38</td>
<td>135-13</td>
<td>177-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>209-29</td>
<td>202-12</td>
<td>211-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>7-03</td>
<td>9-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
<td>N11</td>
<td>N11</td>
<td>N11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Until the emergence of the Provincial Congress Organisation in Assam in June 1921 no organised movement worth the name worked for the prohibition of opium. The first organised programme against the opium traffic, thus, came through the Non-cooperation Movement of 1921-22. The Congress programme


The first Assam Provincial Congress Committee was formed with six Brahmaputra Valley districts, Cachar and Sylhet.
not only enabled the councillors to understand the issue but also to appreciate the agony of the valley. Thus, the first Reformed Council adopted J. J. M. Nichols Roy’s resolution on registering the opium eaters as well as rationing of opium by 26 to 13 votes. It also recommended wiping out of its use within a period of ten years.44 However, during the tenure of the same Council the House took a different stand on Baki Phukan’s resolution, which wanted the introduction of “Pass book System” for rationing of the opium eaters in the Brahmaputra Valley districts or at least in the worst affected district of Lakhimpur. The resolution of 17 March 1922 was viewed by the Government as going ‘too fast’ and ‘too far’ with the problem,45 for which the House turned uncongenial to the measure. The mover also prudently avoided the division of the council on the issue.46 The valley councillors suffered another defeat on the same issue in 1924 when the Council accepted the Government’s viewpoint by declining to accept a resolution regarding the formation of an all India Committee to examine the problem. In accordance with it the Government of India was to be requested to form a Committee with substantial non-

the Surma Valley districts remained under Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 35).

44. ALCD, 1921, vol. I, pp. 53, 72
45. ALCD, 1922, vol. II, p. 310
46. ibid., pp. 312-13
official members to study the question of opium and submit recommendation through an accredited Agency to the Committee of the League of Nations. The defeat of the resolution was most disappointing for the valley as the non-official members of the Council could not make it a common cause. 47

The House, however, on 3 March 1925 adopted a resolution moved by Kuladhar Chaliha recommending total prohibition of opium excepting on medical and scientific purposes. The resolution also underlined the need for enactment of appropriate legislation to tackle the situation. 48 A major breakthrough on the opium issue seemed to come to the valley with the House adopting a resolution in 1927 which recommended ten per cent reduction in rationing of opium annually to the registered opium eaters below the age of 50 years. It also emphasised the need for enforcing total prohibition within ten years. 49 The Government also for the first time agreed to accept the time bound programme to eradicate the evil.

The concrete steps towards total prohibition, however, came much later. There had been financial constraints to get the policy implemented. Moreover, the Brahmaputra Valley councillors faced hostile and unfavourable quarters within the

47. ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, pp. 709-21
Council, even though it was dominated by the non-official members. Besides this the Colonial Government was neither prepared to accept any prohibition scheme nor was it ready to surrender the 'Goldmine' of revenue.  

The following table shows the monetary interests involved in this trade.

**Table No. 7**

**Economics of Opium 1932-33**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross Provincial opium revenue</td>
<td>Rs. 21,20,944 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less price paid to Ghasipur Factory</td>
<td>Rs. 2,74,686 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less maintenance cost of Excise Staff</td>
<td>Rs. 1,08,118 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Provincial revenue</td>
<td>Rs. 17,38,140 (87%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p. 196

The councillors, particularly the Europeans representing the tea gardens were hostile to the proposal of total prohibition. They were in favour of moderation instead of total prohibition. Expressing their considered opinion on the issue, in 1934, this group wanted the Indian members themselves to examine and decide the course of action on the same.

50. The opium was the most important source of revenue of the Province, next to land revenue. Government derived Rupees 1982 thousand from this source in 1905-06 and it came to Rupees 4412 thousand by 1920-21. - Guha, op.cit., pr. 55, A7

51. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, p. 769

52. ALCD, 1934, vol. XIV, p. 894
The Indian members who represented the other regions of the province and not being seriously affected by the dreadful drug, failed to appreciate the concern of the valley on this issue.

It was the Congress-coalition Ministry headed by Gopinath Bardoloi that introduced a scheme of total prohibition in the two sub-divisions of Dibrugarh and Sibsagar on 15 April 1939. The Coalition Ministry of Saadulla (1939-41) extended the scheme to all the non-excluded areas of the province on 1 March 1941. 53 A complete eradication programme in the province could not be materialised during the period under survey.

(iii) The Developmental Problems:

The developmental aspirations of the valley also confronted regional claims and counter claims as the facilities offered by the colonial Government were limited. The Province as a whole lacked the necessary institutional facilities as well as developmental infrastructure. However, of the notable institutions of the Province one was the Berrywhite Medical School at Dibrugarh. The school, established in 1900 with the help of a legacy left by the late Brigade Surgeon Mr. Berrywhite, was maintained by the Government. The institution taught up to the Civil hospital assistant standard in a

53. Guha, op.cit., pp. 232-33
four years' course. The facilities for engineering education had been all the more disappointing. There was only one engineering school known as the Williamson Artizan School at Dibrugarh founded on a bequest left by late Mr. Williamson, a tea planter of Sibsagar and maintained by Williamson Trust Fund. The institution could not survive and was subsequently closed. The institution was closed since there was no demand for sub-overseers in Assam. The members representing the main-land of Assam demanded the establishment of technical schools, an engineering school and an agricultural school in the valley. They also wanted the establishment of a college for women, a Medical College, a Veterinary College, an Engineering College and other institutions in the province for its all-round development. The proposals for the establishment of such institutions, in most occasions, however, generated controversy over sites. Moreover, they led to the development of jealousy between the valleys. In 1921 the Government proposal for the establishment of an Emporium in the Brahmaputra valley faced opposition from the councillors of Sylhet. Similarly, on 9 September 1922 a resolution for the establishment of a Technical School at Jorhat was adopted in a modified form since it was opposed by the members of the Surma Valley. Their demand

54. An Account of Assam and its Administration, 1903, Shillong, 1903, pp. 161-62
56. ALCD, 1921, vol. I, pp. 405-06
was for the establishment of a medical school in Sylhet on priority basis. 57 About the site of a technical school rival claims of the valley districts surfaced and it was demanded that the same should be between Goalpara and the Garo Hills in Lower Assam instead of in Jorhat in Upper Assam. 58 The same fate happened to Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri's resolution of 28 September 1936 on the establishment of an Agricultural School/College in the province. It faced controversy over the location between the two valleys. 59

A major demand in the valley was to have a High Court or a Court of Supreme judicature in the province. Assam was under the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court for which it had to pay a share of its maintenance to the Government of Bengal. The valley's demand for a High Court met with unfavourable views not only from the Government but also from its co-partners of the province. The Government opposed the proposal on financial considerations, whereas the Surma Valley particularly the district of Sylhet opposed it for its interests in the Calcutta High Court as well as in the judicial procedure of Bengal. The financial constraints of the province compelled Dalim Chandra Borah to withdraw his resolution on 22 September

57. ALCD, 1922, vol. II, p. 668
58. ibid., p. 665
59. ALCD, 1936, vol. XVI, p. 1425
1921 which he tabled demanding the appointment of a committee to examine the proposal of a High Court for Assam. The demand for a separate High Court persisted so much so that on 20 March 1934 the councillors of the valley expressed their strong resentment for the non-realisation of the institution even after a decade of the working of the Governor's province. In 1935, in the wake of the new constitutional reforms Jogendra Nath Gohain appealed to the people to launch a continuous agitation for the fulfilment of the demand. The councillors of the Brahmaputra Valley through a cut motion on the provision of Rs. 79000, which being the cost of maintenance of the Calcutta High Court, in the budget of 1935, criticised the Government for not establishing a separate High Court in Assam but continuing to pay to the Government of Bengal for the same. They pointed out that the amount paid for the Calcutta High Court was sufficient to maintain three to four High Court judges in Assam itself. In the same year two separate resolutions were moved to demand the establishment of a High Court. The resolution of Kasinath Saikia recommending early establishment of a High Court in Assam was passed only after dropping the term 'early' from the resolution as the Government was not ready to

60. ALCD, 1921, vol. I, p. 671
61. ALCD, 1934, vol. XIV, p. 719
63. ibid., pp. 361-63
accord priority.\textsuperscript{64} Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri through another resolution highlighted the 'undoubted demand of the Assam Valley districts' for a High Court in the province.\textsuperscript{65} Participating in the discussion Nilambar Dutta, a Councillor from Upper Assam wanted the House to decide finally the stand of all the partners, namely, the Sylhetis, the Assamese, the planter group as well as the Government on the issue as the province was going to have further constitutional reforms.\textsuperscript{66} The resolution was opposed by the Government not only on financial ground but also for the lack of unanimous support behind the demand. The Government of Assam, thus, declined to approach the Government of India to establish a separate High Court in Assam.\textsuperscript{67} Ultimate fate was that despite strong advocacy for this cause the valley members failed in their efforts to carry the House and the resolution was defeated by 16 to 23 votes.

On 13 March 1936 a fresh resolution was tabled to demand steps for immediate establishment of a High Court. Through this resolution the valley representatives recorded their protest against the finding of Sir Otto Niemeyer who suggested that Assam needed no separate High Court. Karamat Ali, a Councillor of the valley wanted the Government to be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} ibid., pp. 1463-71
\item \textsuperscript{65} ibid., p. 1478
\item \textsuperscript{66} ibid., p. 1485
\item \textsuperscript{67} ibid., p. 1483
\end{itemize}
'consistent, insistent and persistent' to get the claim of the province fulfilled. He demanded that the proposal be placed before the Subvention Committee of the Government of India. The valley members were very keen to have the High Court in Assam and tried to meet Sir Otto Niemeyer in a non-official delegation for the purpose of apprising him on the issue but failed. To overcome the opposition from the other partners of the province, Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri suggested that those who were not ready to cut adrift from the Calcutta High Court could remain with the same, but asked them not to stand on the way of the Assam Valley to have the same. He tried to impress upon the opposing councillors that the Assam Valley people needed the institution for them. However, all the efforts of the valley to have unanimous support in the Council for a High Court ended in fiasco during the functioning of the reformed Councils.

A partial success to the valley's demand came through the Assembly in 1937 when a resolution recommending the establishment of a High Court received the practical support of the Government. The resolution was ultimately carried on by an overwhelming majority despite Surma Valley's opposition.

68. ALCD, 1936, vol. XVI, pp. 218-19
69. ibid., p. 226
70. ibid., p. 228
In 1938 the Government of Assam presented an Address through the Assam Legislative Assembly urging the British Government to establish a High Court in Assam. An amendment was suggested to the address by Lakheswar Borooah proposing the venue to be at Guwahati. The amendment faced opposition and Sylhet councillors suggested Shillong, the capital of the province, as the venue, if a High Court was to be established at all. The Secretary of State for India, however, refused to entertain this recommendation of the Assembly as it was not adopted unanimously. Thus the valley’s aspiration to have a separate High Court remained unfulfilled till the attainment of Independence and partition of Sylhet.

(iii) Land Revenue:

The enhancement of land revenue without any regard to the improvement in agriculture or Commerce was a root cause for the miseries of the people of the Assam Valley districts, namely, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Nowgong, Darrang and Kamrup. The peasant proprietors of the valley, placed under the raiyatwari system of land management, were subjected to regular enhancement of

72. ALAD, 1938, vol. I, see pp. 912-933
land revenue rates by the Government through its periodic resettlement operations. The Brahmaputra Valley ryots and the small peasant proprietors, who possessed only a few bighas of land were affected by these enhancement and they reacted against this system through their 'rais mels', the traditional socio-economic congregation of local people. The peasants of Kamrup and Darrang even organised campaign for non-payment of revenue which alarmed the authorities. These resistance movements took the form of open rebellion against the Government. In the context of its revenue burden, the valley as a part of Eastern Bengal and Assam administration found itself heavily taxed than Eastern Bengal.

As the Colonial Government enhanced the rates of the land revenue in every resettlement operation the valley representatives in the legislature continued to oppose the renewed resettlements process. They received general support from the councillors of other parts of the province as well. Thus in 1923 the Council adopted overwhelmingly a cut motion on Government demand for grant to start re-settlement operations.

75. ALCD, 1923, vol. III, p. 553
76. Dutta, K.N., op.cit., pp. 32-33
78. Guha, op.cit., pp. 76-77
in the districts of Kamrup and Sibsagar. The valley members also received regular support in the Council in their demand for remission of the land revenue arrears. The Council adopted on 20 March 1934 without division a resolution of Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri recommending fifty per cent reduction of land revenue payable for that year. Similar resolutions were passed almost every year in the tenure of the fourth Reformed Council, i.e., in September 1933, March 1934, October 1935.

In the matters of land revenue the Assamese landholders of the valley districts found themselves in a disadvantageous position compared to that of other landholders of the province. The planters, the bigger landholders, the vast majority of whom were the Europeans, were left almost untouched by the enhancement of revenue. Between 1839 and 1901 the planters were settled with 642 thousand acres of lands, which was almost one-fourth of the total settled areas of Assam proper. 85 per cent of these lands were enjoyed as rent free and only 15 per cent were subjected to regular revenue. Jagadish Chandra Medhi in a peasant meeting in October 1938 raised this particular aspect and viewed that the ryots 'from Kamrup to Lakhimpur ... paid

80. ALCD, 1923, vol. III, p. 553
81. ALCD, 1934, vol. XIV, see pp. 739-764
82. Guha, op.cit., p. 200
Rs. 2-8-0 as revenue for every three bighas of land' whereas '60,0000 acras of land in Assam had been acquired by the European tea planters' as 'free simple grant' and they paid almost nothing as land revenue. He also highlighted that the Zamindars of Goalpara and Sylhet were enjoying a comfortable position in this regard as they had to pay no land revenue as such. The main agrarian issue in the Brahmaputra Valley was, thus, based on land revenue and as such the cry for a fifty per cent reduction of land revenue was common throughout the valley. The issue was echoed by the Congress through its programmes. Though the Congress championed the cause it could not give effect to thirty per cent remission during the period of the working of the first Congress-Coalition Ministry due to financial stringency. The demand for remission of land revenue was continuous in the valley and it formed the annual feature of the official policy of the Government during thirties and it continued to be so till 1941-42.

One distinguishing feature of Assam proper was the availability of large areas of unsettled waste lands. For nearly a century after the discovery of the tea shrubs in Assam it became the policy of the Government to encourage the opening up of the sparsely populated tracts of the province on specially favourable terms for the growth and expansion of the tea

industry. Besides the tea planters, the land-seeking immigrants from the neighbouring over-populated districts of Eastern Bengal, 85 per cent of whom were Muslim cultivators, were allowed to pour into the land-abundant valley and settle. These immigrants at first occupied lands in the valley's water-logged, jungle infested reverine belts, but subsequently pressed forward in all directions in search of more lands and thus encroached upon the areas held by the autochthones.

The circumstances that helped to tolerate the outsiders' pressure on the valley's land gradually disappeared and the people began to feel that their indigenous wealth was at stake. The people of the valley, thus, raised their voice against the waste land settlement policy of the Government. The leaders of the valley demanded for some protective measures to safeguard the interests of the indigenous inhabitants. On 10 April 1913 Padmanath Gohain Barua as a councillor exposing the treat to the society, stated:

"Assam is a purely agricultural country and about 90 per cent of the population depend on agriculture. Practically agriculture is the only industry of the country, there being no other industry worth the name. All the resources at the command of the raiyat, therefore, lie in his land.

85. Assam Land Revenue Manual, op.cit., p. VI
there being no other source of income. But with the
steady and gradual increase of population due to a
continued period of peace and prosperity under the
benign British Government even that also is becoming
insufficient. Cultivable waste lands at the same time
getting rather scarce owing to the infusion of large
number of foreigner into the country and expansion of
tea industry ......

The Government, however, refuted the apprehension of the valley
member and pointed out that the province still possessed large
areas of waste lands waiting to be ploughed by the settlers.

The valley wanted to mould the waste land settlement
policy for the benefit of the indigenous inhabitants. On
11 March, 1925, Rohini Kumar Hatibara resented the unfavourable
treatment to the Indian applicants as against the Europeans in
the matters of waste land grants. In the same council, on
8 September 1925, a resolution was formally moved demanding
settlement of the waste land with the Indians only with preference to the Assamese so that general cultivation could be
encouraged on a big scale. The resolution was actuated out of
the feeling for the economic betterment of the indigenous

86. ALCP, 1913, April 10, pp. 26-27
87. ibid., p. 62
88. ALCD, 1925, vol. V, p. 359
population as well as out of fear for the future. The general apprehension was that the rate at which the settlement of the waste land was going on and if the same continued for another decade there would remain no more land for the children of the soil. The efforts to ensure preservation of adequate quantum of waste land in each district of the valley for the future progeny encountered opposition not only from the alien government but also from the influential lobby interested in immigration. Thus, a vital resolution was opposed. The resolution was, however, adopted in an amended form. In its amended form the word "Assamese" was replaced by the term 'natives of the soil' and incorporated the words "without hampering the claims of immigrants." 

The protests of the Assamese people against large scale immigration from Bengal was voiced by the Assamiya Samrakshini Sabha. In December 1925 the Assam Association in its sitting at Nongpoh urged the Government to stop further immigration. The representatives of the valley continuously tried to preserve their agricultural land from being occupied by the immigrants. Thus in 1926 Nilmani Phukan in his budget speech claimed that a reasonable proportion of all the available

89. ibid., pp. 1388-89
90. ibid., p. 1437
lands should be kept reserved for the children of the soil for their future upliftment. 92 Similarly, another move to contain further settlement of waste land of the valley came in 1927 when Mahadev Sarma brought a resolution to appoint a committee for preventing or at least restricting settlement of waste land with the immigrants. 93 The move was, however, opposed and defeated in the Council. 94 The unabated influx of the immigrants from Bengal, mostly the Muhammadans, aggravated the fear psychosis of the valley. The publication of the Census Report of 1931 pinpointed further the danger that the valley was facing. Subsequently, Mr. Jinnah's claim to include Assam into the Muslim majority eastern zone of Pakistan added a new dimension to the land settlement policy, although it was essentially an economic issue. 95 The politicisation of the economic issue on the eve of the division of the country complicated the attitude of the valley towards the landless immigrants of Bengal. The occupation of all the available lands in the valley of the Brahmaputra by the Muslim immigrants was later designed by the Muslim League adherents as a part of their move to convert Assam Valley into a Muslim majority area. 96 The Hindu Indian

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92. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, p. 415
94. Ibid., p. 1105
identity of the valley, thus, suffered the strains and it appeared to be at stake.

B. Linguistic-Cultural Aspirations:

In the linguistic-cultural arena the valley's concern was to establish, preserve and develop Assamese as the language of the province. In 1831 Bengali was introduced as the Court language of Assam in place of Persian. The change came as the replacement of the Persian scribes was a difficult and costly affair. Introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction and the language of the Courts marked the beginning of a new tension in the culturo-linguistic life of the valley. The politically conscious section of the people became apprehensive about the future existence as a distinct linguistic community.

The Assamese were to wage agitation at regular intervals to establish separate identity of their mother tongue and counteract the attempts to brand the language as a patois of Bengali. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan initiated the movement in 1853 while the American Baptist Mission in Assam extended their support to the cause in general. Brown, Bronson and Farwell in particular laid the foundation of modern Assamese literature.

98. Bhuyan, B.K., Studies in the History of Assam, op.cit., pp. 15-16
By a resolution in the General Department (Education) of 19 April 1873 the Government of Bengal introduced Assamese as the medium of instructions in the primary and the middle schools of the Brahmaputra Valley. The literal implementation of the language as the medium of instruction in the higher classes was delayed due to the non-availability of suitable Assamese text books. For it Bengali continued to be the medium in the middle classes till the end of the last century. In 1897 Col. Gurdon took initiative and introduced Assamese in some middle schools of Kamrup whereas Bengali continued to be the medium in other districts.

A separate institutional arrangement for the control and regulation of the academic affairs of the valley was also felt. Since the arrangement made by the Government through the Calcutta University could not satisfy the people, a demand for a separate university was thus raised. Rai Bahadur Ghanashyam Barua raised the issue in March 1916 in the Senate meeting of the Calcutta University. It was supported by F.R. Gurdon, the Commissioner of Assam Valley Division. In this regard Gurdon wrote to A.W. Botham, the then Second Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on 25 March 1916 that Assam would

100. Barkataki, M.S., British Administration in North East India (1826-1874) A Study of their Social Policy, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1985, p. 71

not be able to make any arrangement with the Calcutta University to suit its interests and so it must have a University of its own. In his view finance and inimical attitude between the two valleys, however, remained the main hurdles. A scheme of the University confining jurisdiction within the areas of Cotton College, Guwahati, having facilities for Arts and Science education was, accordingly, visualised in the official correspondence of the period. Since then the demand for a University occupied a prominent place in the agenda of demands of the valley. It was repeatedly placed before the Government by the Assam Association through its annual sittings.

The Governor's address to the first Reformed Council in 1921 outlined the necessity for developing education as well as establishing universities in the two valleys to meet their respective needs. The Address stated:

"And so the day is not far distant when Sylhet and Gauhati will become as I prophesied once before in this room - the Oxford and Cambridge of Assam."

The apathy and financial constraints of the Government, however, belied the high expectation for which Nilmani Phukan demanded

102. Bora, K., First Move for a Separate University in Assam, Assam Tribune, May 3, 1907
103. ALCP, 1910, April B, P. Chaliha's Welcome Address to V.D. Beaton Bell.
104. ALCD, 1921, vol. I, p. 5
adequate representation of Assam in the Senate, the Syndicate and also in the Councils and Committees of the Calcutta University. A resolution to that effect was passed unanimously in the Council on April 11, 1923. 105

As a pre-requisite to the establishment of a University with sufficient autonomy, the valley felt the need for a separate Board of Secondary Education in the province. A resolution in this regard was moved by Khan Sahib Muhammad Mashraf in 1932. While proceeding with the demand he deprecated the ever dependence of Assam on Bengal for the education of her children. He also claimed that the distinct racial and cultural necessities of Assam proper required a separate Board. Since Government was opposed to it the resolution was defeated. 106 In the absence of its own University the valley insisted on having an adequate voice in the educational policy of the Calcutta University. In order to deal with the educational matters of Assam with that University Abdur Rasid Chaudhury made a move to form a panel of Assam members. The move, however, failed to get the sanction of the Council. 107

With the aim of making Assamese the medium of higher education in the province in 1926 Kuldhar Chaliha demanded

105. ALCD, 1923, vol. III, pp. 479-81
106. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, pp. 233-37
steps in this regard. Since the colleges and the Calcutta University fell far short of the expectations of the requirements of Assamese literature, a demand was made by the valley in 1935 for the appointment of a lecturer in Assamese in the Calcutta University with some financial help from the Government of Assam. The demand for separate University persisted and in 1935 a cut motion was tabled to censure the Government for its failure to establish the University in Assam. In response to the valley's allegation the Government told the Council that in the absence of a consensus on the demand between the two valleys a definite scheme on University could not be formulated. The Government, however, agreed to place the demand before the Subvention Committee of the Government of India. Though the Government accepted the proposal it declined to give any priority to the scheme. Accordingly, the Governor of Assam refused to accord sanction to the introduction of a private member Bill on University as it would impose heavy charge on the bankrupt economy of the province.

108. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, p. 534
110. ibid., p. 534
111. ibid., p. 540
112. ibid., p. 546
113. ibid., Governor's Address, p. 701
The issue remained alive throughout the period of working of the reformed councils and reappeared in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1938. In the same year Mohi Chandra Bora urged the Government to examine the feasibility of starting at least an examining University in Assam. In the meantime accommodating the conflicting views of different parts of the province a Government scheme on University known as “Munawwarali Scheme” emerged. Under the scheme the Arts Departments of the University were proposed to be located in Sylhet and the Science Departments at Gauhati. Its Senate was proposed to be setup at Shillong. The scheme was opposed by the valley and a demand was made to locate a full-fledged University at Gauhati. The valley observed the “Assam University Day” on 16 August 1941. In the third convention of the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha held at Gauhati on 7-8 December 1941 through its fifth resolution a demand was made for a University at Gauhati so that the cause of Assamese language, culture and civilization could be served. The convention also extended its whole-hearted support to the desire of the people of Sylhet to remain under the Calcutta University on the basis of their cultural and linguistic ties. The convention appealed to them


*The scheme was named after Munawwarali of Sylhet who was the Education Minister in the First Saadulla Ministry of 1 April 1937.

not to stand on the way of the Assamese in getting a University at Gauhati. 116

A positive step towards the fulfilment of the aspiration of the valley was reached when "Assam University Bill, 1941" appeared on the floor of the Assembly on 4 March 1941. The Government motion to refer the Bill to a Select Committee was also carried on. 117 The tribal leaders of Assam while extending their support to the Assamese Legislators shared equal sentiments for a separate University in the province. They explained that every Assamese from Sadiya to Dhubri felt the need to have a University in the Brahmaputra Valley. 118 The Bill, however, faced strong opposition from the members of the Surma Valley.

After a gap of four years in 1945 Jogendra Nath Gobain moved a resolution in the legislative Council (Second chamber) demanding the establishment of a University within two years. The resolution once again highlighted the agony of the valley over the issue. It viewed it as a matter of shame for both the Government and the people not to have a University in the province. It was felt that Assam was failing to keep pace with the developments of the civilised world for lack of essential institutions like University. Though the House accepted the

116. Tin Diniya Assamiya, December 23, 1941
117. ALAD, 1941, vol. I, p. 297
118. ibid., pp. 272-73
spirit of the move, the Education Minister, Mr. Sayidur Bahar, told the House that the Government would take no action on the resolution until the members reached unanimity on the location, jurisdiction as well as representation on the University. The Government also pointed out that the experts' opinion favored only one University in Assam to avoid division of the province into fragments. Unanimity on the issue seemed to be a tough proposition. A relief came apparently when Arun Kumar Chanda, a leader of the Surma Valley came to support the chair to have the first University of Assam at Gauhati. But the problem remained unsolved as a section of the representatives of Sylhet remained adamant to oppose the demand. They claimed that if a University was to be setup the same should be in Sylhet. The Assam Sahitya Sabha was opposed to the idea of a Government University to be situated at the hills of Shillong either. The Assam Valley declined to accept a University established outside the valley. While participating in a discussion on the 'Assam University Bill' Jyobang D. Marak, a leader of the Hills, with all his sincerity suggested that, the headquarters of the Garo Hills to be the site for the proposed

119. Amrit Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), March 29, 1945, p. 6
120. ALCD, 1945, vol. IX, pp. 150-52
121. ibid., p. 155
122. Tin Diriya Asamiya, December 31, 1937
123. ibid., March 8, 1941
University. Thus, evidently an irreconcilable tussle persisted over the location of the proposed University. The valley's expectation to have a University under its own control and management also met with similar claims and counter-claims from other culturo-linguistic communities of the province. Thus, though the demand for a University for the Assamese and the Hills people received general support from the tribal leaders, their demand for the inclusion of their representatives in the management of the institution remained strong. They demanded representation on the basis of their distinct civilization and culture, if not in proportion to their population. A section of the Bengali population of the province, which claimed themselves to be larger in number than the Assamese, demanded two universities in the province on the basis of language and culture. The other section of the same community, however, while contributing to the cause of the Assamese people, demanded that all the major vernacular languages be declared as the medium of instructions of the University. In their opinion such a step would help to allay the suspicion regarding the linguistic character of the University. In view of these constraints the valley could not realise a vital institution like the University despite its strenuous efforts. The valley's

124. ALAD, 1941, vol. I, p. 275
126. ALCD, 1945, vol. IX, pp. 155-56
127. ibid., p. 157
aspiration to see Assam as the homeland of Assamese language and culture, like that of other politico-linguistic communities of India, thus passed through a chequered course. It was only on 26 January 1948, that the foundation of Gauhati University was laid.

C. Politico-territorial Issues:

(i) Separate Politico-administrative Existence:

The separate political status of Assam with which the particular interests of the Brahmaputra Valley were intertwined remained under continuous strains throughout the period under review. The valley as the homeland of a distinct political community desired to have a separate politico-administrative existence to protect its political identity. After the acquisition of the valley by the British it was treated as a Division of the Government of Bengal and administered through a Commissioner. It remained tagged to the huge territorial administration of Bengal extending over 2,48,231 square miles with a population of 6,68,56,859 till the formation of the Assam Chief Commissionership in 1874. In 1904 the valley once again met the worrisome proposals regarding its amalgamation.

128. Bhattacharjee, K.K., op.cit., p. 27
129. ibid., p. 49
with certain districts of Bengal. The valley became a part of Eastern Bengal and Assam Province on 16 October 1905 along with Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong Divisions of Bengal despite its strong reservations. However, some amount of satisfaction came to the valley in 1912 when Assam was restored as the Chief Commissioner's province with a Legislative Council of its own. Thereafter the valley's concern turned towards its preservation as a separate province ensuring the individuality of the Assamese nationalism and enjoying the benefits of constitutional reforms granted by the British to the Indian Provinces.

The valley suffered a threat to its expectation as the constitution Reforms Proposals of 1918 failed to spell out in clear terms the fate of Assam under the scheme. The Chief Commissioner himself and the European planters' lobby were opposed to the inclusion of Assam in the reforms at par with the other advanced provinces of India. Taking up the issue the Assam Association, a mouth-piece of the people of the valley sent a delegation of two persons, namely, Nabin Chandra Baroeloi and Prasanna Kumar Baruah to London to present Assam's case before the British Parliamentary Committee. Admittedly, the strenuous efforts of the valley leaders brought enhancement to

130. Report on the Administration of Assam for the year 1921-22, op.cit., p. 49

131. Barpujari, H.K., Political History of Assam, vol. 1, op.cit., p. 204

132. Ibid., p. 217
the political status of Assam, making it the smallest major province of India in 1921.

The problem, however, did not end up with the attainment of provincial status. A more serious matter was how to retain the individuality of Assam in the political structure of India. The apprehensions regarding its future existence as a separate province were echoed in the floor of the Council. The liabilities of the province were many. The small province was left with a top-heavy administration along with that of the Hill areas as well as with the maintenance of the Assam Rifles. For it suggestions were made for transferring the areas included in Cachar but excluding the North Cachar Hills, Sylhet, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nongmok, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur along with the Municipal and the cantonment areas of Shillong to Bengal. The councillors of the valley also realised that a thinly populated Assam would not be able to command the resources necessary to provide large scale institutions like University, High Court, Department of Industries, Commerce, etc. They, thus, suggested the amalgamation of some north Bengal districts to Assam or the basis of their past historical connections to make it a viable unit of separate political administration, instead of tagging

133. ibid., pp. 219-21
134. ALCD, 1922, vol. II, pp. 103-04
135. ALCD, 1923, vol. III, p. 28
The sentiment of the members found expression in the following statement of a councillor of the valley:

"Assam has been treated like a football in matters of territorial redistribution. This must be stopped one for all. I (Nilmani Phukan) know some of my friends entertain doubt that Assam as a small province cannot stand. Smaller provinces than Assam are living as self-governing colonies or countries in other parts of the world. We are separate entity and we must stand and fall on our own strength or weakness." 137

Though the Brahmaputra Valley anticipated separation of the district of Sylhet from Assam to make Assam a homogeneous homeland of the Assamese people it could not proceed boldly with the move till the eve of the partition of India. The fear of losing the major provincial status loomed large although. 138

The valley suffered another major threat to its political existence on the publication of Rajagopalachari's partition formula on 10 July 1944. It suggested the inclusion of Assam in East Bengal. In view of that Gopinath Bardoloi wrote to Rajaji that if the province or any of its part excepting Sylhet was grouped with Bengal to form a single unit 'the

137. ALCD, 1922, vol. II, p. 494
138. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, pp. 18-19
whole province will join as a man opposing it'. The agony of the valley was intensified as Saadulla Ministry launched land settlement to the immigrants under the banner of Land Development Scheme. The policy of the Saadulla Government was viewed as going against the interest of the people of the soil as it invited large scale Muslims from Bengal.

Baliram Das, a member of the Legislative Assembly identified the policy of the Government as a trick to tag Assam with Pakistan. Jinnah's demand for inclusion of Assam into Eastern Zone of Pakistan was regarded as the modus operandi of the land settlement policy of the Saadulla Government. The indigenous people of the valley became apprehensive about their future. The immigrants who came in their thousands increased the anxiety of the inhabitants with their provocative slogans under the inspiration of the Muslim League.

The political development of India during the Cabinet Mission plan kept the Brahmaputra Valley and the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee worried about the future political status of the valley. Gopinath Bardoloi met the Cabinet Mission on behalf of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and opposed Jinnah's claim as "absolutely impossible and preposterous".

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139. Guha, op.cit., p. 283
140. ALAD, 1945, vol. I, p. 203
142. ibid., vol. X, No. 35, November 12, 1946
He asserted as follows:

"He (Jinnah) might as well expect the moon to come down to him but he could never have Assam in his Pakistan."\(^{143}\)

The valley rejected the Cabinet Mission's scheme of grouping Assam with Bengal in Section "C". It also successfully enlisted the support of the Assembly to pass a mandatory resolution on 16 July 1946, instructing the Assam representatives to the constituent Assembly to frame its own constitution by refusing to sit in Section for the purpose.\(^ {144}\) A public meeting held at Gauhati also demanded the same. The members were asked to frame a constitution for Assam making it an autonomous unit without being grouped with Bengal.\(^ {145}\) The valley's attitude towards 'Grouping' was best revealed in the cables addressed to Attlee and Pethick Lawrence, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India respectively by Debeswar Sarma, the Speaker of the Assembly. He communicated thus:

"Whatever interpretation on Section or Grouping in the Cabinet Mission statement of May 16 be given, Assam cannot and shall not accept undemocratic and

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144. Guha, op.cit., p. 311

anti-national position of the future constitution being framed by Bengal. Assam defeated all invasions, maintained complete independence till about 1926 and shall struggle for true provincial autonomy inside the framework of the whole India Constitution. Pray do not Balkanise India to placate Mr Jinnah as that will not only destroy Indian peace and prosperity, but also jeopardise world peace for years to come." 146

The valley, however, faced threat on this issue from within. Saadulla, the Ex-Premier and leader of the Muslim League Party of Assam in the Assam Assembly while claiming that Grouping of Assam with Bengal was for the best interest of Assam advocated further for its acceptance by all and sundry. 147 He pointed out that according to 1941 Census the Muslims formed the majority in Assam if the Ahoms, the Scheduled Castes, the tribals, the Sikhs and the Marwaris were excluded from the Hindu-fold. 148

The Brahmaputra valley's persistent popular demand was for a homogeneous province of the Assamese people. "The ambition of modern Assam" explained the editorial of the Assam Tribune on 3 May 1947, "is not for a sovereign state but for an autonomous unit where her civilisation and culture may have the sway

146. ibid., vol. X, No. 59, December 6, 1946


148. Assam Tribune, April 10, 1947
as an integral part of the greater India statehood. This explains her attitude towards immigration and all other similar problems. This attitude guided the valley's attitude towards the Bengal districts on the eve of partition of India. Ambikagiri Roy Chaudhury, the General Secretary of the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha explained that Sylhet, Jalpaiguri or any such part of Bengal seeking shelter in Assam to get themselves saved from Pakistan must do it as per to the terms of Assam. They must be prepared to accept Assamese nationality as well as Assamese language as the language of the state. He also pointed out that no attempt to claim extra-territorial interests like religious, linguistic, economic or political other than national would be accepted or tolerated in the body politic of Assam. Although Premier Bardoloi shared similar sentiment he was not opposed to retention of Sylhet and North Bengal districts in Assam provided there was no exploitation of Assam by these districts.

The Declaration of the British Government on 3 June, 1947 relieved the agony of the valley by removing the prospect of its grouping. The Declaration left Sylhet to decide its fate through a referendum. To ascertain the separation of

149. ibid., May 3, 1947
150. ibid., May 16, 1947
151. ibid., May 31, 1947
152. ibid., June 5, 1947
Sylhet the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha and the Secretary of the District Congress Committee of Dibrugarh demanded a province-wise referendum on Sylhet. Though the demand was not conceded to, the district of Sylhet itself voted to join East Pakistan.

(ii) The Hill Regions vis-a-vis the Brahmaputra Valley:

The Hill regions created no threat to the regional identity of the Brahmaputra Valley. The approach of the valley towards the hill entities was, thus, based on material, moral and practical considerations. Since the Hill districts were financially deficit they were dependent on the revenue of the plains for its development. The following table shows the financial position of the hill districts under the Assam administration:

153. ibid., June 7, 1947
154. ibid., July 15, 1947
### Table No. 8

Revenue and Expenditure of the Hill Districts for the year 1923-24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue and Expenditure</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>Khasi and Jaintia Hills</th>
<th>Lushai Hills</th>
<th>Naga Hills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>₹ 4,95,573</td>
<td>₹ 3,04,681</td>
<td>₹ 1,50,582</td>
<td>₹ 1,34,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>₹ 42,377</td>
<td>₹ 78,271</td>
<td>₹ 49,807</td>
<td>₹ 1,70,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>₹ 42,371</td>
<td>₹ 37,942</td>
<td>₹ 13,147</td>
<td>₹ 16,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Relief including sanitation</td>
<td>₹ 45,154</td>
<td>₹ 83,247</td>
<td>₹ 53,790</td>
<td>₹ 62,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Administration</td>
<td>₹ 49,061</td>
<td>₹ 1,06,635</td>
<td>₹ 83,548</td>
<td>₹ 63,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>₹ 2,69,587</td>
<td>₹ 2,05,823</td>
<td>₹ 1,61,600</td>
<td>₹ 1,05,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>₹ 4,48,550</td>
<td>₹ 5,17,918</td>
<td>₹ 3,61,892</td>
<td>₹ 4,27,041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ALCD, 1925, vol. V, p. 1289

The material condition as well as the political administration of the Hill regions were not conducive to the development of the valley. Though the valley members regarded the hill areas as an integral part of the province, the financial liability for their administration occasionally compelled them to think in terms of "disjoining from the hill districts" which constituted more than two thirds of the province. The

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155. ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, pp. 595-96
valley councillors even suggested in 1924 the transfer of the
hill districts, with exception of the British portion of the
Khasi Hills, to the administration of the Government of Bengal. 156

Apart from this objective contradiction the valley
otherwise manifested better regional understanding towards the
inhabitants of the hills. The linguistic-cultural traits of
the hills also offered scope for easy assimilation. The adaptability of the Hills was echoed in the following statement:

"We will be able to assimilate the Phasis as the
Assamese. In fact are we different in race? I
think Khasis are Assamese and Assamese are Phasis
and we will assimilate them sooner or later." 157

The valley councillors also held that the expenditures on the
hill areas were not a sheer wastage of revenue but rather a
necessary investment. They contended that these territories
would be able to contribute to the economic development of
Assam in future. 158 The Brahmaputra Valley also played a
positive role to frustrate sinister plan of the British to
separate the Hill Areas in order to form a North Eastern Frontier Province. The plan was viewed as detrimental to the

156. Memorandum of the Government of Assam on the Working of
the Reformed Government, July, 1928, op. cit., Para 20,
p. 42; ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, p. 1365
157. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, Kuladhar Chaliha, p. 123
158. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 127
interests of the people of both the hills and the plains. The issue was discussed in the Working Committee meeting of the Assam Pradesh Congress on 27 January 1946. It also observed "All Assam Anti-partition Day" to register its protest against the scheme of a separate Hills Province. The leaders of the valley also counteracted the last bid of the British imperialists to incite the people of the hill to demand separation from India. They urged the hill people to accept Assam as their political unit. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha suggested to the Sub-Committee on the Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam that the Excluded, the partially Excluded and the tribal areas of Assam must be administered by Assam until they could stand on their own. They should be allowed to enjoy full autonomy in regard to their language, culture, social system and economy.

(iii) The Brahmaputra Valley and the District of Goalpara:

The Assamese intelligentsia had a distinctive view about the Goalpara region since they considered the district as an integral part of Assam. The issue on the separation of

159. ALAD, 1945, vol. I, p. 231
161. ibid., vol. X, No. 59, December 6, 1946
162. Assam Tribune, June 20, 1947
Goalpara from Assam appeared on the floor of the Assam Legislative Council along with that of Sylhet. The councillors of the Brahmaputra Valley expressed their strong determination to fight to the last against this move. 164 The Assam Sahitya Sabha took positive steps to bring the district within the fold of Assamese language and culture. The Sabha organised its ninth and tenth sessions in Dhubri and Goalpara respectively and opposed the separation move. In the tenth session the demand for introduction of Assamese as the language of the courts and schools was made. 165 During the consideration of the Goalpara Tenancy Bill, the movement for separation of the district gained momentum. The councillors of the valley boldly identified the movement as that of some vested interests carried under the pretension of protecting the culturo-linguistic identity of Goalpara. They, thus, took up the issues of Zamindari tenants of the district and won their confidence. The valley refused to treat the separation movement of Goalpara as a movement for the preservation of Bengali language and culture. 166 The councillors also tried to dissuade the Goalpara Zamindars from their separatist idea for the sake of the land-tenure system. Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, while reminding the Zamindars about the permanently-settlement holders of Oudh, the Talukdars who had secured their position

164. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, p. 46


166. ALCD, 1927, vol. VII, pp. 979-80; Asomiya, July 21, 1927
In the big United Province held that the same could be attained by them too in Assam. He also reminded the Zamindars about the favourable treatment that they had received from the Assam Valley brethren at the time of passing of the Tenancy Act affecting the district and assured them to feel safe. The movement for the separation of the district ultimately died down in the face of the concerted efforts of the legislators and that of the literary Association of the valley.

(iv) The Brahmaputra Valley and the District of Cachar:

Unlike the separation issue of Sylhet the Brahmaputra Valley's approach to that of Cachar was based on cautious considerations. In 1924 though the councillors of the valley readily supported the resolution on the separation of Sylhet, they opposed the amendment suggesting the transfer Cachar. However, accepted the separation of Cachar alone with Sylhet only because they were very eager to get rid of Sylhet and the Sylhetis. Thus, in the January Session of 1926 a resolution tabled by Sadananda Dowerah recommended the transfer of Sylhet alone and keeping the district of Cachar intact within Assam. The councillors even declined to entertain any discussion

167. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 664
168. ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, p. 610
concerning the transfer of Cachar to Bengal as it historically formed a part of Assam. In the Karch session of the same Council they opposed a formal resolution moved by Rasid Ali Laskar recommending the transfer of Cachar excluding the North Cachar Hills to Bengal along with Sylhet.

The valley’s opposition to the transfer of the district to Bengal was based on certain intrinsic factors. The district was historically connected with Assam and so was considered as part and parcel of the same. The British Government repeatedly cautioned the members that if Sylhet and Cachar were allowed to leave, the very foundation of the province would be destroyed. The district of Goalpara would also follow the suit. The councillors were also apprehensive that the transfer of Cachar on racial and linguistic grounds might have further ramifications on other districts in view of large number of immigrants swamping Nowgong and Kamrup. The transfer of Cachar, it was repeatedly reminded that, would have its geographical implication also, as it would affect Assam’s connection with the Lushai Hills. The inclusion of Cachar in Bengal would bring isolation to the Lushai Hills District of Assam.

170. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, p. 46
171. ibid., p. 85
172. ALCD, 1928, vol. VIII, pp. 2, 730
173. ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, p. 610
174. ibid., pp. 49, 581, Governor’s Address, p. 921
only the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha that expressed its readiness to overcome these obstacles and concede to Pakistan's demand over the Muslim majority Sub-division of Hailakandi of Cachar in 1947. The Sabha wanted to safeguard Assam's interest over the few thanas of Goalpara, which were in the heart of the Brahmaputra Valley in exchange for Hailakandi Sub-division of Cachar.175

(v) The Brahmaputra Valley and the district of Sylhet:

In the Brahmaputra Valley there had been continuous clamour for the separation of Sylhet from Assam. The public opinion of the valley was, by and large, sympathetic towards Sylhet's reunion with Bengal. The councillors of the valley not only extended their support for its transfer but initiated resolutions recommending transfer of the district.176 The councillors identified the district as the veritable clog in the all round development of Assam.177

The Assam Association in its session held on 19 June 1931 resolved to mobilise public opinion in favour of separation of Sylhet178 and subsequently a resolution was also moved in the Council to give effect to it.180 Another resolution tabled

175. Assam Tribune, July 22, 1947
177. ALCD, 1926, vol. VI, pp.18-19; ALCD, 1932, vol.XII, r.640
178. ALCD, 1924, vol. IV, p. 596
180. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 640
on 1933 also demanded the transfer before the inauguration of 
the Reforms of 1935. The issue was also raised by Gorinath 
Bardoloi before the British Cabinet Delegation who told Sir 
Stafford Cripps that the Congress would not object to the 
transfer of Sylhet to Bengal as its people and culture had 
strong affinities with those of Bengal.

The Brahmaputra Valley's attitude towards the district 
of Sylhet reflected its regional considerations. The presence 
of the district in Assam polity appeared to be the greatest 
obstacle in the way of achieving the linguistic and cultural 
unity within Assam. The valley found that excepting the 
Sylhetis all others accepted Assamese as the lingua franca.
The councillors apprehended that the Sylhetis would never accept 
Assamese as their vernacular. They would rather lead in esta­
blishing a rival language on behalf of those elements that had 
already migrated to Assam. The transfer was also considered 
necessary to bring in financial improvement of the provincial 
exchequer as the district had been a deficit one. The coun­
cillors viewed it as a white-elephant which took lion's share 
of everything at the expense of the valley. Moreover, continu­
ation of this district in the province was found detrimental to

181. Rao, V.V., A Century of Government and Politics in North 
East India, vol. I, op.cit., p. 252
182. Minutes of Meeting of April 1, 1946, Transfer of Power 
New Delhi, 1978, p. 78
183. ALCD, 1928, vol. VIII, p. 783
184. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 292
the rightful claims of the Assamese as it monopolised huge chunk of the Government posts. The valley, thus, anticipated that the transfer of the district would provide remedy to their depressing state of employment position in the Government sector. 185

The Assam Tribune, a leading newspaper of the valley in its editorial commented on 24 June 1947 as follows:

"The Assamese people do not want Sylhet to remain in Assam. ... They feel that Sylhet will be a sore in the body politic of Assam, that she will foment bitterness and mutual acrimony, create disruption and exploit Assam as she is doing now." 186

Presiding over the special session of the Assam Association in April 1933 Kuladhar Chaliha observed that as long as Sylhet remained in Assam she could never have her own University, High Court, trade and commerce, nor could she develop her language and literature. 187 Last but not the least Sylhet appeared to be a potential threat to the national identity of the Assamese. 188

The above survey reveals the chequered process through which the special identity of the valley evolved. The process had been strenuous, worrisome as well as stake creating.

185. ibid., p. 640
186. Assam Tribune, June 24, 1947
188. ALCD, 1932, vol. XII, p. 659