Chapter II

Official attitude towards the immigration issue in early years

(1826-1910)

British colonial policy was driven to a large extent by their own trading and economic interest and their policy towards Assam was also guided by the same principle. From the last part of the eighteenth century the East India Company was well aware about the political condition of Assam. Since 1826 the British colonial authorities initiated such a policy which was intended to transform the vast wastelands of Assam into revenue yielding through various economic activities. On the one hand British rulers imposed high rates of taxation on indigenous cultivators to extract more land revenues and on the other liberally allowed the British capitalist to use the wasteland for establishment of various industries in Assam. The establishment of tea and other industries opened up Brahmaputra valley for labourers outside the province and zeal for more revenue ultimately caused the immigration of East Bengal cultivators in Assam affecting a demographic change in the population structure of Assam.

The British policy of plantation in Assam was strengthened by the Charter Act of 1833 which authorized the East India Company to hold lands outside the Presidency town on a long term lease or with
free fold right. ¹Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam may be called pioneer in this direction, who first advocated for the settlement of English capitalists in the wastelands of Assam for the cultivation of sugarcane, indigo etc.²In the meantime considering good prospect of tea industry in Assam, the tea committee was formed in 1834 and tea was successfully manufactured in 1837. To facilitate British capitalists a set of wasteland rules were formulated in 1838 at extremely favourable rates which was further liberalized by the Settlement Rules of 1854. Since then about 0.7 million acres of land had been settled with the planters in Assam by 1870-71.³The most serious obstacles the tea company faced in opening up the tea industries in Assam was the want of labour as the indigenous population consists entirely of ordinary cultivators and no wage earning labourers. Therefore, the paucity of labour compelled the Assam Company to import Chinese labour to work in the tea garden of Assam in the very early phase. After their return the tea plantation in Assam from 1843 to 1859 came to be served by the local inhabitants mainly Kacharies. The Workmen’s Breach of Contract, 1859 offered the planters a breathing space to come out from the situation of acute labour scarcity.⁴ Therefore, the colonial authorities then decided to bring the immigrant cultivators from the provinces of surplus population like the plain districts of United Provinces, Bengal, SanthalParganas and the Central Provinces.⁵

¹Guha p.4  
²ibid  
³Ibid p.12,13  
⁴Ibid.p.16  
⁵Administrative Report of Assam 1911-12 p.51
The first Labour Act was passed in 1863 which was to regulate the transport of native labourers emigrating to Assam valley as well as their recruitment through *Arkattis* (licenced recruiters). Under the Amendment Act of 1870 the *Sardari* system of recruitment was also recognized. As reported by the Bengal Administrative Report for 1867-68, 22,800 were imported labourers and only 11,633 were local labourers.\(^6\) By 1880’s the immigration of plantation labourers was taking place on an extensive scale.\(^7\)

As E.A Gait, Superintendent of Census Operation, Assam observed that immigration of tea garden labourers was not only for the benefit of the tea industry for which the labourers were imported. But it was also intended to the general development of the province.\(^8\) So their settlements in Assam after their period of contract were treated by the planters and the Government as a purely economic ground.\(^9\)

However, those increasing number of tea garden labourers aggravated the situation and created the problem of food crisis. At that period Assam’s farming structure was not in the position to provide sufficient food crops required for increasing number of immigrant tea garden labourers. Hence, the colonial rulers had to import food grains from outside the province to meet the food crisis\(^10\) and table no. 2.1 depicts the real picture of the above statement.

---

\(^6\) Guha.p.18  
\(^7\) Nag.p.88  
\(^8\) Dhar.p.122  
\(^9\) Kar.p.7  
\(^10\) A.S.F No.Revenue.A, November 1898 Nos.128-138
Table No. 2.1 The net import of rice from Bengal into the Brahmaputra Valley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>411,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-82</td>
<td>422,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-86</td>
<td>421,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-96</td>
<td>714,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-97</td>
<td>963,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-98</td>
<td>694,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: A.S.F Rev. A October 1898, Nos.87-136

Therefore, to meet the food crisis, the colonial government as well as the planters encouraged the time expired tea garden labourers to settle in the adjoining areas of the tea gardens. The expired tea garden labourers are those labourers who were brought in Assam in a contract for a particular period of time. The Colonial Government of India considered the question of encouraging immigration and settlement of time expired tea garden labourers in 1888 and 1889.\(^\text{11}\) They were encouraged to settle down in Assam with their families and to cultivate land to meet the deficiency.

The following figures in connection with cultivation of land by time expired tea garden labourers are given for the five districts of the Brahmaputra Valley as follows:

\(^{11}\) A.S.F No.Rev.A Nov,11898 Nos.128-138
Table No. 2.2 The area cultivated by the time-expired labourer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>3,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-88</td>
<td>15,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888-89</td>
<td>17,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-92</td>
<td>27,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-95</td>
<td>37,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-96</td>
<td>42,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-97</td>
<td>46,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-98</td>
<td>55,929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: A.S.F Rev. A October 1898, Nos.87-136

As observed by B.C Allen that these tea garden labourers were helping the economic development of the province but the progress was slow considering the large areas of cultivable land still lying waste.\textsuperscript{12} Besides these, during the time of British annexation of Assam and first few years of the British rule, the revenue of Assam was rendered by payments in labour and by poll-tax. In 1832-33 a land tax and plough tax were introduced. The system of raising land tax was not introduced in five districts of Assam at the same time. In Kamrup it was introduced in 1832, Darrang and Nowgong in 1833, Sibsagar in 1839 and Lakhimpur in 1842.\textsuperscript{13} For the first few years the land revenue was collected from the ryots through the agency of officials known as the Chowdree or Mauzdarsetc. In the year 1842-43, the land revenue of the five valley districts was Rs.6,14,000. The cultivable land of Assam then classified as “roopit”, “bari” or “basti”, and “faringhatee”.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}Dhar.p.122
\textsuperscript{13}A.S.F.Rev.A,September,1890,Nos.9-14
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid
On the basis of data collected the total area under cultivation and land revenue derived from the five districts of Assam under *Ryotwari* Settlement between 1853 to 1897-98 are given in table nos. 2.3 and 2.4.

### Table No. 2.3 The total area under cultivation in the five districts of Assam under *Ryotwari* Settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of district</th>
<th>Total area of culturable waste other than fallow</th>
<th>Net area under cultivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total area</td>
<td>1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acres, Acres, Acres, Acres, Acres, Acres, Acres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>1,343,007, 359,680, 472,510, 491,738, 553,158, 559,463, 536,283</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>1,430,951, 221,920, 193,465, 192,708, 264,152, 263,838, 268,343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>1,467,674, 176,640, 233,117, 210,864, 257,168, 240,063, 218,502</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>940,605, 163,946, 295,978, 277,790, 434,076, 453,380, 459,020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>1,597,741, 85,760, 129,428, 85,177, 183,680, 188,052, 202,930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,779,978, 1,007,946, 1,324,498, 1,258,277, 1,692,234, 1,704,796, 1,685,078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *(A.S.F Rev.A October 1898, Nos.87-136)*
Table No. 2.4 Land revenue realized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the district</th>
<th>1853</th>
<th>1864-65</th>
<th>1874-75</th>
<th>1895-96</th>
<th>1896-97</th>
<th>1897-98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup...</td>
<td>2,95,993</td>
<td>3,63,032</td>
<td>8,01,906</td>
<td>13,19,092</td>
<td>13,92,129</td>
<td>13,54,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang...</td>
<td>1,52,795</td>
<td>1,65,282</td>
<td>3,39,368</td>
<td>6,70,347</td>
<td>6,72,670</td>
<td>6,77,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong...</td>
<td>1,30,437</td>
<td>1,77,907</td>
<td>3,56,339</td>
<td>6,54,814</td>
<td>5,39,066</td>
<td>5,23,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar...</td>
<td>1,19,032</td>
<td>2,10,064</td>
<td>4,80,433</td>
<td>11,59,207</td>
<td>12,47,147</td>
<td>12,32,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur...</td>
<td>43,714</td>
<td>77,157</td>
<td>1,53,962</td>
<td>4,66,790</td>
<td>4,31,608</td>
<td>4,31,511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total...</td>
<td>7,41,971</td>
<td>9,93,442</td>
<td>21,32,008</td>
<td>42,70,250</td>
<td>43,36,620</td>
<td>42,19,880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (A.S.F Rev.A October 1898, Nos.87-136)

From the above tables (table nos. 2.3 and 2.4) it can be said that in 1853 out of almost 6,78,000 acres available for cultivation, about one millions of acres were cultivated and the revenue derived therefrom amounting to Rs. 7,41,971 which, in the eyes of Colonial authorities was unsatisfactory.\(^{15}\) The Government officials in Assam therefore took steps to increase land revenue. In 1866 the area brought undercultivation was 1,324,498 acres and revenue amounting to about ten lakhs of rupees was realized. In 1868-69 the land revenue was increased by Colonel Hopkinson but the area of cultivation began to decrease in 1874-75.\(^{16}\) The figures from 1895-96 onwards are based on cropped area, and include tea, of which the cultivable area in 1897-98 was 178,000 acres. Excluding 178,000 acres of tea cultivable lands

\(^{15}\) A.S.F Rev-A, October 1898, Nos.87-136

\(^{16}\) ibid
and 86,000 acres of lands discovered by more accurate survey, the
total increase of ordinary cultivation between 1876 and 1898 was
162,801 acres. Between 1866 and 1898 it was only 96,580 acres. The
average area of fully assessed Ryotwari areas in the five upper districts
of the Assam valley in 1896-97 was 2.40 acres. On account of
fluctuating cultivation there was no actual increase of cultivable area
as newly areas were taken up for cultivation and old ones were
abandoned and relapsed into jungle.

According to George Campbell, Assistant Commissioner, Assam, under the Ryotwari system, cultivation has extended to some extent but the total cropped area in the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley did not increase satisfactorily. The government admitted that the slow agricultural growth was due to devastation by a black fever or Kala-ajar particularly in Nowgong, the disastrous earthquake of the 12th June 1897 and the subsequent floods. These were considered responsible by the colonial officials in Assam for the reduction of nearly 68,000 acres of ordinary cultivation in the last decade of 19th century. The colonial rulers, therefore, thought it necessary to bring more lands under cultivation and produce more to overcome the food deficit. In this direction more farmers had to be brought and settled on wastelands in Assam to produce deficit crops.

In 1897, Patrick Playfair informed H.J.S Cotton, Chief Commissioner, Assam that the Government of India would carefully consider any well-thought out scheme for the emigration of large bodies of agriculturists to Assam. The Maharaja of Durbhanga had

17 ibid
18 Rev.A Progs.Nov.1898 Nos.128-138
19 Ibid.p.7
20 Sajal Nag, op.sit, p.89
expressed his willingness in the Imperial Council to take up a large tract of land in Assam and settle people upon it under permanent settlement. Woodburn, member, Imperial Council, appreciated the suggestion of Maharaja and sent it to H.J.S Cotton, Chief Commissioner, Assam for further consideration.\textsuperscript{21}

The colonial officer like Charles Elliot, in the Report of the Administration of Assam, mentioned about the “large areas of wasteland-good flat alluvial-waiting the sickle and the plough to produce crops”.\textsuperscript{22} Denzil Ibbeston, Secretary to the Government of India wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the subject of colonization of waste-lands in Assam which was addressed by Playfair in the Budget session in the Imperial Legislative Council. On the basis of the report of Dennis Fitzpatrick in 1888, regarding the obstacles on the way to reclaiming the waste lands in Assam, he apprehended that the climate, language and the risks to health might be a major obstacle in way to reclaiming lands in Assam. Hence, it would be unwise to hasten the process of development of Assam wastelands which were already being opened up under the influences of European capital and improved communication.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, it became a major concern for the authorities to check the initial mortality rate of the new settlers in Assam, who were willing to emigrate from the overpopulated areas outside the province.

The approaching completion of the Assam-Bengal Railway would offer facility for colonization which had never been
existed before, and this is appropriate time for the reconsideration of the subject.  

Besides these, Ibbeston, Secretary to the Government of India, also sought suggestion of Chief Commissioner, Assam to be settled in discussion in connection to settlement of Wasteland. He wanted to know whether to admit capitalist element in the proposed scheme of colonization or not. Secondly, whether Ryotwari settlement, already been introduced in temporary settled portions of Assam should be considered further or not, or the colonists be settled directly as cultivators without the intrusion of middleman. The Government of India had no hesitation in expressing the desire that the settlement of Assam wastelands should be similar to that of Chenab Colonisation Scheme and for which the stout and fanatical Muhamedan of East Bengal may possibly be better material.

The Government of India always strongly held the view that in province like Burma and the temporarily settled portion of Assam, where a Ryotwari tenure already prevails, the greatest care should be taken to prevent middlemen from intruding between the Government and the cultivator. The province was already being gradually colonized by a slow but steady process of settlement from Behar and Bengal. Meanwhile, the Government of India had already decided to reduce population from some of the most crowded districts of Bengal which had been suffering from poverty and starvation.

---

24 Rev-A, Progs, Nov 1898, Nos. 128-138
25 The most successful scheme of colonization of wasteland was carried out during nineteenth century by the colonial Government in western Punjab (now in Pakistan), where peasant cultivators from the congested districts of Punjab had been settled in uncultivated land on the bank of river Chenab.
26 ibid
27 ibid
28 ibid
However, it was absolutely necessary to frame a proper Tenancy Act for the protection of tenants before the capital landlordism was introduced. There was no such law, because, outside the permanently settled tracts, there were practically no tenants, except occupants holding direct from Government. But for maintenance of proper relation between landlord and tenant large scale, protection must be provided in advance. However, the Government was of opinion that in the initial stage the protection might not require as there were plenty of lands lying vacant, but in future it might pose a problem. It was also proposed to fix the rent of the tenure which should not exceed a certain percentage of the full revenue.  

Land revenue system, therefore, became a major concern among British officials as it was argued that under Ryotwari settlement it would be difficult to convert Assam’s wasteland into rich crop producing areas.  

The solution of the problem of obstacles to progress of Assam valley was to bring the extensive areas of cultivable land under the plough. While the millions of acres of land suitable to the cultivation of rice were laying waste alongside the tea gardens, the tea industry was hampered by a vast expense annually incurred in importing rice for the maintenance of its labour force.  

The interesting features of land settlement prevailing in Brahmaputra valley till then was a kind of fluctuating cultivation- the system under which every field was relinquished after it had been cultivated for two or three years and the *Ryot* taking up and cultivating new land elsewhere. Therefore, where this practice prevails under a

---

29 ibid  
30 Das &Saikia p.76  
purely *Ryotwari* system of settlement, the assessment of the revenue becomes a matter of extreme difficulty, as it involves practically the re-measurement of the whole of the cultivated area every year.\(^{32}\)

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Maxwell, Commissioner of the Assam valley in a letter to the Chief Commissioner, Assam, expressed his view that the proposed exclusion of middleman in connection to the land settlement policy for extension of cultivation would not be a wise one. F.J.Monahan, Officiating Director, Department of Land Records and Agriculture, Assam also expressed his opinion in similar fashion. According to him, if a system of progressive assessment was to be tried in Assam where there were plenty of unoccupied lands and the system of fluctuating cultivation prevails, the settlement must be made with middleman. He also argued that the agreement with the middleman would be for a long terms without the right of relinquishment. The middleman should be allowed to make profit by settling sub-tenants on the lands and bringing the lands under cultivation.\(^{33}\)

The indigenous Assamese middle class was also opposed the Government of India’s decision to abolish middleman in all future settlements of wastelands in Assam and to settle directly with the cultivator. Jagannath Barua, President Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha while submitting a memorandum to the Secretary, Chief Commissioner of Assam, argued that the middleman was not only politically important, but also necessary for the extension of cultivation. Since the advent of the British rule in Assam the landholders had been exercising the

\(^{32}\) ibid
\(^{33}\) ibid
rights of inheritance, sale, gift, mortgage and subletting of land in Assam and by the new law they would be deprived of it. It was also argued by Jagannath Barua that class of middleman was necessary in the interest of the cultivators themselves as they had prevented money lending classes in Assam. Therefore, the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha appealed to the Government of India not to apply the policy of preventing the subletting system in the province of Assam.  

Gunjana Barua, Secretary to the Committee of the Assam Association, Sibsagar submitted similar memorandum that welcomed the decision of the Government to encourage the settlement of cultivators on favourable terms in Assam, where 70.15 percent of land lying waste. But at the same time he appealed to the Government not to apply the proposed land settlement rules in Assam which he apprehended, would lower the value of land and deprive the landholders to possess the land as permanent and heritable property.

In response to the Government of India’s letter for any scheme of colonization of wasteland in Assam, H.J.S Cotton the Chief Commissioner expressed his own view that a Ryotwari settlement in Assam was impossible. The principles on which the government of India corresponded with the Commissioner of Assam in 1895 were that, under all circumstances the middleman should be kept out from intruding between the Government and the cultivator. The Governor General in Council was of opinion that the settlement of ordinary cultivation should always be made with actual cultivator, who would not be allowed to possess land more than he could cultivate.

35 ibid  
36 ibid
Accordingly the following proposals were approved by the government of India in January, 1896

(a) to issue executive instructions that grants of wasteland are not to be made unless District officers are satisfied that the applicant intends to cultivate it himself;

(b) to issue executive instructions that annual settlement-holders are to be excluded at the next annual settlement if they are found to have sublet, the settlement being made with the actual cultivators;

(c) to amend the lease of permanent settlement-holders so as to prohibit subletting without special permission, and to eject for breach of this condition.

Again, to the Colonial Government, no country could be in an advantageous position with only petty agriculturists whose rent increased only with increased production. Under such circumstances the agriculturists would labour “neither for the improvement of the land nor for the extension of cultivation.”

It is interesting to contrast the policy employed for the reclamation of wasteland in the Brahmaputra valley with that followed in the districts of the Surma Valley, where the methods of Bengal revenue settlements were prevalent. In the Brahmaputra valley districts whenever a Ryotwari settlement was made direct for each separate holding with the actual occupant at full rates, there was no subletting and no extension of cultivation. But there were some exceptions with some of tenures like Chamuas and Khats who were allowed to sublet for the interest of the extension of cultivation. In the Kamrup district subletting system was not unknown where more than

37 ibid
150,000 acres of land formerly granted by Ahom Kings revenue free for religious and cultivable purposes.\textsuperscript{38} These lands, known as \textit{Nisf-khiraj}, comprises a good deal of waste, which is lightly assessed and is sublet by \textit{Nisf-khirajdar} for cultivation. Unlike the Brahmaputra valley there is no discouragement of subletting in the Surma valley which resulted in the extension of cultivation.\textsuperscript{39}

For the extension of cultivation in Assam some Colonial officials once attempted by issuing orders that all the garden labourers would be granted revenue free land for three who would settle in the province when their terms of agreement would be over. The object of these orders was to encourage immigration by offering land for cultivation for favourable terms to intending immigrants. But the tea planters raised a storm of protest as they apprehended that such an attempt would be at the cost of the tea industry. Therefore, in face of strong protest the plan was to be abandoned.\textsuperscript{40}

Again, the health issue moulded the situation as the ordinary indigenous cultivators in Assam suffered severly from malaria fever. While constructing the Assam Bengal Railway it appears that the sickness and mortality among the labourers as well as the European staffs had been terrible in those parts of Assam which had passed through uninhabited jungles. So, according to the colonial officers, as soon as the jungle would be cleared off and the land would be planted out and exposed to the action of the sun and air, the unhealthy effects would soon pass away. Many of the flourishing tea gardens in the province were those which only a few years ago had very heavy death rates. The fact that the opening out of new land was attended

\textsuperscript{38} ibid
\textsuperscript{39} ibid
\textsuperscript{40} A.S.F Rev-A Progs, November 1898 Nos.128-138
with many difficulties but the Government had to take precautionary measure to overcome such obstacles and under no conditions the extension of cultivation should be prohibited.\textsuperscript{41}

The Colonial officials like Louis Myline advocated that the settlers should be carefully selected and must be chosen from purely agricultural castes, and not from among those who look for their means of livelihood to paid labour. He stressed on genuine and bonafide emigrant cultivators for the settlement upon a waste land grant.\textsuperscript{42}

In fact, under the order of Stewart Bayley in 1880 some \textit{Sonthals} were allowed to settle in Assam on easy terms followed by \textit{Meches} and \textit{Rabhas} and total area of cultivation by them at the end of 1896-97 amounted to 4, 867 bighas.\textsuperscript{43}

Meanwhile, H.J.S Cotton, the Chief Commissioner, Assam was convinced that if the Government officials tried to colonise the province directly without any planned measures, there is little chance with any prospect of success. He argued for such type of rules which have been sanctioned by the Government of Bengal for the lease to large capitalists of Wastelands in Sunderbans or similar rules those have been framed by the Government of Burma for the grant of land in Burma to approved applicants who are willing to undertake the introduction of cultivators from certain parts of Bengal.\textsuperscript{44} Accordingly, Cotton drafted some proposals for the recommendation of Government of India for adoption in Assam in connection with Colonisation of waste lands. But the sharp differences of opinion

\textsuperscript{41} ibid
\textsuperscript{42} ibid
\textsuperscript{43} ibid
\textsuperscript{44} ibid
between the Government of India and the Chief Commissioner led to the abandonment of the plan.\textsuperscript{45}

In spite of this the Government of India was well convinced that for the prospect of Assam the colonization by the immigrant cultivators was extremely needed under liberal rules. In the meantime with the opening of twentieth century the jute cultivation and factory production of jute products increased worldwide which necessitated the expansion of jute cultivation in Assam from Bengal.\textsuperscript{46} There was plenty of land in five proper districts of Brahmaputra valley mainly Naogaon, Lakhimpur, eastern part of Darrang, as well as eastern Duars region of Goalpara, and Barpeta division of Kamrup that was found to be ideal for jute cultivation.\textsuperscript{47} F.J. Monahan, the Assistant Director of Assam Land Records and Agriculture Department prepared a detailed report on the prospect of jute cultivation in the Brahmaputra valley and recommended immigration and settlement of peasants from East Bengal.\textsuperscript{48} The Calcutta Chamber of Commerce put stress on starting jute cultivation in Assam immediately by importing cultivators from Bengal.\textsuperscript{49}

The “Gazette of India” of 1899 published the opinion of Patrick Playfair, who said “closely connected with the prevention of famine lies the question of the movement of the people and their distribution for employment. In this connection I would call attention to the advantages that might be gained by the movement of the people to the province of Assam, and to the benefit that the Government of India would confer in bringing this about.........There is an enormous

\textsuperscript{45} Kar.p.8
\textsuperscript{46} Nag.p.89
\textsuperscript{47} Das & Saikia p.76
\textsuperscript{48} ibid
\textsuperscript{49} Nag.p.90
tract of land quite distinct from that suitable for tea, which is well adapted to the cultivation of cereals, jute and other crops……..It is remarkably free from drought, and should now be pouring supplies of grain into Bengal, like the neighbouring province of Burma….“.50

While the immigration policy and settlement rule in wastelands of Assam was officially being planned a steady inflow of agriculturists from eastern Bengal to Assam had begun which was partly due to the completion of the Assam-Bengal railway.51 Soon, immigration began to affect the existing population composition.52 According to B.C .Allen, among three principal types of immigration namely tea garden labourers, Nepali grazers, and Bengal cultivators particularly Mymensinghias, it was with the last one that the conflict of interest with the Assamese cultivators had arisen.53 It should be mentioned here that with the official encouragement and due to absence of any restrictive laws the Bengal cultivators of Mymensingh, Bogura, Pabna and Rangpur, entered Assam on account of overpopulation, land shortage, abnormal price hikes in food grains and to save themselves from Zamindari oppression. They wanted an outlet for survival from all these hardship and found Assam suitable for the purpose.54 As eighty five percent of Bengal cultivators particularly Muslims came from Mymensingh, the term Mymensinghia became synonymous with the immigrants.55

The reason behind the movement of the Bengali cultivators written in “The Bengalee” that the density of the population in

---

50 ASFRevenue-A Progs.March 1899 No.55
51 ibid
52 Das & saikia.p.77
53 Encyclopedia of north east India.p.7
54 Nag.p.97
55 Kar.p.8
Eastern Bengal was remarkable and had reached the stage that the emigration was solving the question of acute congestion. The rich virgin tracts in Goalpara and Kamrup in Assam had been penetrated by the pioneers, who had sent back reports of their richness to their friends in Bengal, with the result that there is an ever increasing stream of families going over the border.

The ‘Bengalee’ also depicted the conservative nature of the Bengali immigrants, to whom the village was their life and who seldom went beyond it. Only the most pressing economic conditions could drive them from their house. When a Bengali cultivator found him in a difficult position to support his family with small a part of land received as a share then only he preferred to go outside his ancestral village. Moreover, ‘Bengalee’ also reported that Bengal cultivator had already affecting the output of jute from the districts in which he had settled in Assam, thereby contributing to the material benefit of the whole province.

It was generally considered that the emigration had solved the problem of over population in many parts of the world. In other provinces of India also emigration had been occurring for many years from the effected zones due to famine. But in case of Bengal cultivators it was not famine but scarcity of land which induced them to move out of their villages in search of new unsettled lands.

The western part of the district of Goalpara including South Salmara, Lakhipur and Bilashipara was the earliest and most affected. Since 1901 onwards these cultivators advanced to Goalparain

56 Report of the Bengal Agricultural Journal published in Bengalee"stream of immigration in Assam"
57 ASF Rev-A, September 1926, Nos-1-22
58 Ibid. p.6
59 ibid
large numbers. The decade witnessed a natural population growth of 15.6% and number of immigrants rose from 49,059 to 1,18,233 forming 19.7% of the actual population of Goalpara. The Census Report of 1911 was the first document which showed the influx of immigrant cultivators from adjoining Bengal districts of Assam to the chars of Goalpara. These immigrants mainly Muslims spread to other districts of lower and central districts of Assam during the next decades.

It is to be mentioned here that the Assamese speculators sold lands to immigrants with the hope of making money out of new comers as well as corrupt practices by land record staffs in their dealing with the settling of land and altering lines and giving pattas.

The sudden influxes of immigrants also have some political motives. By the partition of Bengal in 1905 a new province was created namely Eastern Bengal and Assam, and Lord Curzon who was instrumental behind the partition gave it a political colour by stating that the Muslims would get a province where they would be a majority. His motive was to weaken any nationalist tendencies by making the province a Muslim majority. According to P.G.Melitus, Revenue Member that the Province of Assam would provide a home in the future for the surplus population of Bengal and SanthalParganas and Chota Nagpur plateau where population was increasing very rapidly.

Therefore, the Colonial Government was strongly in favour of immigration from the areas of surplus population in Assam particularly to the chars of Goalpara which were properties of private

---

60 Kar.p.11
61 Ibid
62 Ibid,p.13
63 Ibid,p.13
64 Kar.p.16
zamindars as well as to Government lands in the Eastern Duars. Khan Bahadur Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury of Dacca urged the Government to encourage cultivators from Mymensingh, Pabna and other districts to migrate to Assam’s extensive virgin tracts.\textsuperscript{65}

The impact of Colonial encouragement of Immigration in Assam resulted into demographic transformation of the population structure of Assam. The Muslim immigrants came with their families and thereby began to consolidate in the permanent nature of the population of Assam.\textsuperscript{66} In 1911, the total Muslim immigrants numbered 2, 58,000 in the Brahmaputra valley and 6,000 in the Hills.\textsuperscript{67}

In Goalpara nearly 20 percent of the population is made up of these settlers. The next favourite district was Nowgong where they formed about 14 percent of the whole population. In Kamrup wastelands were being taken up rapidly, especially in Barpeta subdivision. In Darrang, exploration and settlement by the colonists in an earlier stage, they have not yet penetrated far from the Brahmaputra banks.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.p.17
\textsuperscript{66} Dhar.p.130
\textsuperscript{67} Kar.p.11
\textsuperscript{68} Census of India,1921,Vol.IIIp.41
Table 2.5 POPULATION FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thanas and Mauzas</th>
<th>Area, square miles</th>
<th>Population 1931</th>
<th>+Variations % 1911-21</th>
<th>+Variations % 1921-31</th>
<th>Density 1931</th>
<th>Density 1937</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOWGONG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong Town..</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10,413</td>
<td>+26.7</td>
<td>+51.2</td>
<td>3,471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakhimoria…</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13,339</td>
<td>+10.1</td>
<td>+17.4</td>
<td>476</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kondali…</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6,872</td>
<td>+4.3</td>
<td>-8.3</td>
<td>275</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SingiaPotani…</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9,267</td>
<td>+3.9</td>
<td>+9.6</td>
<td>515</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NijSahar…</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10,573</td>
<td>+7.6</td>
<td>+34.6</td>
<td>705</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Hatischang…</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16,303</td>
<td>+15.4</td>
<td>+14.6</td>
<td>652</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kachamari…</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14,326</td>
<td>+57.9</td>
<td>+26.2</td>
<td>512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUPOHIHAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Juria…</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36,781</td>
<td>+527.4</td>
<td>+100.7</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Laokhowa…</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35,663</td>
<td>+118.8</td>
<td>+140.5</td>
<td>648</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Khatwal…</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20,068</td>
<td>+69.0</td>
<td>+47.0</td>
<td>528</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAHORIGHAT…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Bokani…</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17,940</td>
<td>+61.2</td>
<td>+294.9</td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Lahorighat…</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>31,173</td>
<td>+61.2</td>
<td>+163.3</td>
<td>332</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*MikirBheta…</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13,156</td>
<td>+14.2</td>
<td>+44.3</td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Dhing…</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40,456</td>
<td>+114.1</td>
<td>+126.4</td>
<td>519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORIGAON P.S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mayang…</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>9,714</td>
<td>+0.8</td>
<td>+81.3</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMUNAMUKH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garubat…</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9,621</td>
<td>+4.7</td>
<td>+80.9</td>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamunamukh…</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12,203</td>
<td>+59.8</td>
<td>+37.6</td>
<td>321</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katiatali…</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6,337</td>
<td>+37.1</td>
<td>+24.4</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampur…</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9,268</td>
<td>+21.0</td>
<td>+27.8</td>
<td>463</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Nomati…</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>17,486</td>
<td>+63.6</td>
<td>+108.0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rongkhang…</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>21,870</td>
<td>+10.5</td>
<td>+15.2</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mauzas where Bengali immigration has been extensive
K.R.Choudhury, Superintendent of Police, Nowgong, 27th October, 1937

But as the inflow continued and their number increased, they expanded further up the valley and away from the river. After Barpeta the Darrang district had started being taken up by the immigrant cultivators. Sibsagar had till then been untouched but could not expect to remain so as a number of them had already settled in North Lakhimpur. Thus, this peasant migration was a slow but steady process covering the Brahmaputra valley.  

Taking up their new lands these immigrant cultivators had cleared the jungles. Besides it, their railway or steamer fares, some house building materials and possibly some land price paid to local people or unauthorized fees to subordinate revenue officials, constituted their only expenses in opening the new life. They erected their own characteristic type of house, and their villages could be distinguished from those of the Assamese.

Their trends of these new migrants and its consequence have been described by Deputy Commissioners of Nowgong and Kamrup. In the words of Higgin, Deputy Commissioner, Nowgang “…They do better cultivation than the local people and as such they are certainly beneficial to the country; since their advent the local people seem to be shaking off their old lethargy and they have created a novel sphere of competition…..”

Bentick, Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup not only appreciated the skill and industry of these peasant immigrants from East Bengal but considered it an object lesson to the local cultivators. He observed that these immigrants had reclaimed and brought under permanent cultivation thousands of acres of land which the local cultivators had

---

69 Kar.p12  
70 Census of India,1921,Vol.IIIp.41  
71 ibid
for generations failed to produce. In late March and early April the char lands had been finely tilled and sown by the immigrant cultivators which were quite unaccustomed to ordinary Assamese cultivation. Besides their industry the immigrants had shown examples of new crops and improved methods. Bentinck noticed that these immigrants had yet to mix well with the local population, who sold the immigrants government lands at rates which was considered profitable to the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{72}

Immigration became a major problem in the twentieth century. As a result of their settlement, the homogenous nature of tribal population of the nineteenth century very soon shifted to heterogeneous population of non-tribal complex with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences mainly in the Brahmaputra valley.\textsuperscript{73} These diversities were the seeds of tensions sown in economic, social, and political life of Assam.\textsuperscript{74} With the course of time as their numbers increased the issue of immigration become politicized which received new interpretation. The Colonial government tried to find out a solution by introducing a device called the Line System but it failed to solve the issue of immigration.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} ibid
\textsuperscript{73} Dhar.p.18
\textsuperscript{74} ibid
\textsuperscript{75} Kar.p.14