CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN BARAK VALLEY

GEOPOLITICAL HISTORY OF BARAK VALLEY

The geopolitical history of Barak Valley has been subjected to changes at the coming of the colonial British. Prior to its annexation to the British territory, which had taken place on 14th April, 1832, however, Cacher was an independent kingdom ruled by the royal family of the Dimasa (from 1745). Having the kingdom annexed to the colonists had placed Cacher under Dacca Division of Bengal Presidency in 1836. Initially Cacher, the core area of the present Barak Valley, emerged as a Province to be degraded to the status of a district under Bengali Presidency. When Assam was constituted into a separate state in 1874 Cacher was transferred to it along with Sylhet, to meet the revenue deficit of the newly formed province, although geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically and socially the valley is an extension of the eastern Bengal. The twin districts were then placed under a Commissionership and came to be known as Surma Valley Division. In 1947, the major part of the Sylhet district was transferred to erstwhile East Pakistan. The remaining part of the Surma Valley Division is now known as the Barak Valley which has since been reorganized into three districts of Cacher, Karimganj and Hailakandi within the state of Assam. But for all Practical Purposes, the Surma Valley i.e. the pre-independence of Sylhet and Cacher form a single cultural unit since time immemorial.
“The Barak Surma Valley is nothing but the northern extension of the Meghna Valley (Dacca-Mymensing-Comilla). There is nothing like a natural boundary between these two valleys and that is why, the traditions and culture of these districts of East Bengal so easily spread into Sylhet-Cacher in ancient and medieval periods. Even now the society and culture of the Hindus and Muslims of Sylhet-Cacher is bound with the eastern districts of Bengal in one thread.”

Barak Valley is situated in the southern part of the Indian state of Assam. The main city of the valley is Silchar. The place is named after the river Barak. Barak Valley at present mainly consists of three districts namely Cacher, Karimganj and Hailakandi, a geographical area of about 6922 sq. km. The valley is set between longitude 92°15’ and 93°15’ East and Latitude 24°8’ and 25°8’ North. The valley constitutes 8.9 percent of the geographical area of Assam, contains 11.22 percent of the population. It is surrounded by the North Cacher Hills and the Khasi Hills in the north, hills of Manipur in the east and Mizo hills in the south. The only opening it has is the western direction where lies the district of Sylhet connecting the valley with the plains of eastern Bengal. The region thus demarcates the natural border between the reverine Bangal and hilly northeast. This geographical factor itself has a major historical significance. “The Indo-Aryan settlement extended from Bengal in early times in its spontaneous eastward march to the farthest limit of the plains land. They moved along the familiar terrain and stopped at the foot of the hills, which enriched the valley from three sides, as these hills are not suitable for settled cultivation.”

The valley has an undulating topography characterized by hills, hillocks, wide plains and low-lying water bodies, locally known as “Beels”, some of which however, dry up in the winter, termed as “Howers”. Most of the hills have a north-south spread interspersed by the strips of plains. The land is alluvial and naturally fertile.
The major river, Barak, originates from Angami Naga Hills in Manipur, and travels in a curved route passing through the middle of Cacher District, reaches Haritikar in Kathigora revenue circle to be divided into two branches, Surma and Kushiara to flow in Bangladesh in separate streams. Kushiara, however, flows in Karimganj and forms the natural border of India-Bangladesh. Jiri Chiri, Madhura, Jatinga, Dhaleswari, Ghagra, Katakhal, Longai, Shingla, Sonai are the major rivers in the Barak Valley. Barail, Bhuban, Panchgram, Chatachyra, Mohanpur, Saraspur are the major hills with numerous hillocks in their vicinities.

The plain track of Barak Valley is a geographical extension of Gangetic Bengal. The valley is predominantly inhabited by the Indo-Aryan population and the demography is formed in early times by integrating the Indo-Mongoloid, Austric and other non-Aryan ethnic groups in a long historical process.

**POLITICAL HISTORY OF BARAK VALLEY**

There is nothing unusual if socio-cultural boundary of a region does not confirm to the political identity imposed on it at a given point of time through a trick of history. Barak Valley, three southern Assam districts of Cacher, Karimganj and Hailakandi is a pointer to this fact. Politically it is a part of Assam but in reality it is an extension of Bengal. It was because of the geographical region that the valley became a social and cultural extension of Bengal.

There is lack of any direct evidence to reconstruct the political history of the valley during the Mauryas or even the early Gupta period. The Nalhenpur Copper Plate of Bhaskara Varman is the first authentic material evidence of the socio-political Aryanisation of the Surma-Barak Valley. The inscription reveals that a part of the Valley was known as “Chandrapuri Vishaya” in late 5th or early 6th century A.D. The region was under the rule of the successive “Bhauma-Naraka” rulers from...
Bhutivarman to Bhaskara Varman. The “Kalapur Inscription of Marundanatha” which was issued in late 7th and early 8th century admitted that other regions of the Valley were under the “Samatata” rulers. Lokanatha, an ancestor of “Marundanatha”, conquered “Joytungavarsha” Nahnikanta Bhattashali identifies “Joytungavarsha” with the Jatinga Valley of Cacher and North-Cacher districts. The region often played a dominant role in the political developments of eastern India as the core zone of the famous “Harikela Kingdom” between the 8th and the 11th century. The Kalapur copper plate of Marundanatha (7th century A.D.) also suggest that the valley was included in Samatata during his reign. In 8th and 9th century the valley formed a part of Harikela kingdom. It is known from the literary works, Chinese account and a large number of Harikela coins with ‘Vereka’ or ‘Vireka’ (Identify with Baraka) legends. The ‘Paschimbhag’ copper plate of ‘Srichandra’ of East Bengal also mentioned Srihatta as a ‘Mandala’, means division, of Paundravardahana Bhukt means province, of the Chandra dinesty. According to this inscription, the ‘Srihatta-Mandala’ included three ‘Visaya’-Chandrapur, Pagora and Garala. Two ‘Bhatera’ copper plates of 11th and 12th century A.D. of Govinda Keshabodevo and Ishandeva recorded the existence of a sovereign ‘Srihatta Rajya’ which covered the entire geographical area of the Barak –Surna Valley.

The numismatic, epigraphic and literary evidence prove in to the political organizations in the Barak Valley during the fifth to twelve century A.D. The formation of Tripuri state which started in Cachar claims in 5th century A.D. gradually covered modern Shylet or Western part of the undivided Barak Valley and ultimately moved to modern Tripura region. The existence of independence Srihatta in the 7th century A.D. was noticed by Hieun Tsang.

In the 10th century, Srichandra of the renowned Chandra Dynasty of the eastern Bengal, incorporated a major portion of the region within his kingdom. In this period “Chandrapura Matha” or monastery, situated near “Panchakhanda” area in the pre-partition sub-division of Karimganj, became a center of learning of same repute. The remains of “Bhuban Hill” further reveals that the region around Silchar came under the “Pala” influence but it is not certain whether this cultural influence was backed by the political domination of the “Pala”.
During this period the political organization were in Brahmanical model of state formations. The epigraphic records mentioned above the persons belonging to various caste and sub-caste with titles like Bhatta, Bhati, Sharma, Dam, Bhosh, Das, Deb, Sen, Dhar, Kar, Pal, Palit, etc. The foundation of the local society was laid in that period.\textsuperscript{13}

The fall of the Srihatta Rajya in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. marked the beginning of the medieval period in the History of Barak Valley. It is not known the causes of the decline of powerful sovereign kingdom ruled by the Deva family of Bhattera. It is evident that Srihatta Rajya was the last autonomous indigenous kingdom which covered the entire geographical area of the Barak-Surma Valley under a single political unit. The fall of this kingdom was followed by an era of political disintegration and the rise of petty states in the valley. The ruler of the Tripuri state taking the advantage of such situation, revived his control over a portion of the valley bordering his state, particularly the southern and eastern sectors. The western portion of the valley witnesses the rise of three local kingdoms-Gaur, Laur and Jayantia. These four states coexisted in the valley at least for next 300 years.\textsuperscript{14}

It was in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the army of Cooch Behar under the command of Chila Roy, the brother and general of the Koch King Naranarayan, invaded Tripura from the north. The army under Chila Roy came to Cachar plane and in the war that followed the Tripuri army was defeated. The occupation of the Cachar plain by the Cooch army of Naranarayan (1540-1584) led to the emergence of the Kashpur state. The Koch had left behind an army garrison at a place called Brahmapur, which since then came to be known as Kochpur and ultimately as Khaspur. The administration of the Koch planes was looked after by the chief of the army garrison. After one or two years, Kamol Narayan (Gohain Kamal), a brother of the king Naranarayan, was sent to Cachar as the Governor. When the koches suffered a reverse in Chila Roy's invasion in Bengal, the tributary states in the neighborhood of Cachar reasserted themselves. Under such situation, Kamal Narayan also declared himself as an independent king and laid the foundation of Khashpur.\textsuperscript{15}

The Khashpur state, roughly the plains of Barak Valley, remained in existence till 1745 A.D. when it merged with the Dimasa state of Maibong. During this period the
terrestrial extent of the state underwent changes. Originally the state extended from the foot of the North Cachar hills to Longai Valley in Karimganj and headquarters was at Khaspur. In later years the area was ceded as a portion of the plains was annexed to Maibong state by Jasanarayana (1683 to 1613). During Mughal invasion of 1612 the Dimasa forts were founded at Pratapgarh (Now Patherkandi) and Asuritekar (Now Badarpur). Hailakandi valley continued to be a part of Tripura till 18th century when it was annexed to Cachar by a Dimasa king.16

The integration of Bengal with Delhi Sultanate led to the process of annexation of Barak Valley also, as the valley was a natural geographical division of Bengal from ancient time. Thus the extension of Mughal rule to this Valley was a natural Historical process. Alauddin Firoz Shah of the Tuglaque dynasty despach a strong army under Sikandar Shah. Against Raja Gaur Govinda of Gaur kingdom. The army was accompanied by the famous sufi saint Hazrat Shah Jalal and his 360 disciples. Gour Govenda was killed in 1384 A.D. and Sikandar Shah was appointed as the administrator of Gour. Shah Jalal made Shylet his new home and his 360 disciples engaged themselves to the spread of Islam in the Surma-Barak Valley and adjoining areas.17 The major portion of Barakk Valley thus came under the Turko-Afgan rule which preceded the mughal rule in Bengal. Srihatta was a frontier division under the sultans of Murshidabad and it was administered through a hierarchy of local officials like Nawab, Fauzadar, Amil, Qunungo, Talukdar etc.

Sylhet, present Barak Valley and adjoining area, passed under the Mughul rule with the rest of Bengal during the reign of Akbor in 16th century. Bengal became a province or ‘Subah’ of Mughal Empire, and Sylhet became a district or ‘Sirker’ in that ‘Subah’. A fouzadar was appointed for the administration of Sylhet. During this period Tudarmol divided Syleth in to eight ‘Mahals.’ Khaspur in the East remained outside the Mughal ‘Sirker’ of Sylhet.18

The Cachar planes became a part of the Dimasa state of Maibong when the Mughals were ruling in Syleth. The expansion of the ‘Heramba Rajya’ or Dimasa state in the Barak Valley started during the reign of Dimasa king Jasanarayana. He claimed himself as the ‘Conqueror of Srihata’. The Mughal invaded the Dimasa state in 1612 A.D. and the Dimasa king ceded the tract and paid tribute to the Mughal
authority. However, a small portion of tract was remaining under the Dimasa Raia. In course of time the Petty kingdom amalgamated with Heramba Kingdom through a matrimonial alliance. Since the Heramba Kings were also known as the Dimasa Cachari, the kingdom came to be known as Cachar. A series of Ahom invasion rendered this kingdom weak and disintegrated. The Cacharis were compelled to shift their capital from Maibong to Khaspur in early 18th century, there was a divorce between the monarchy and its tribal support base which intensified the process of decadence.

The ‘Sirkar’ came under the British dominion in 1765 with the grant of the Dewani of Bengal to the East India India Company by the Mughal Emperor Shah Alom. The Cachari King Govinda Chandra died in 1830 leaving no descendents to rule the country. The country was thus annexed by the British by a proclamation on 14th August 1832.

Cachar was then made a district with its headquarter at Silchar and was placed in charge of a Superintendent, who was sub-ordinate of the Commissioner of Assam. In 1836 the district of Cachar was transferred to the Dacca division and the title of the officer in charge was subsequently changed to Deputy Commissioner.

In 1874 Assam was created as a Chief Commissioner’s province out of the old Bengal Presidency. Two Bengali dominated district of Sylhet and Cachar along with Goalpara were transferred from Bengal to Assam to aid the creation of the new province. The creation of Assam was justified on the ground that the administrative unit would relieve the pressure on the over worked Bengal administration. The territories of the Cachar claims were often exposed to the raids and disturbances of the neighboring hills tribes. Sylhet which was also intimately connected with Cachar and was an important tea district was also exposed to the raids of the neighboring hills tribes. Sylhet provided the most important routes of communication to Cachar. It was also nearer to the proposed Capital of Assam, i.e. Shillong, than Dacca or Calcutta. Another reason for the incorporation of Cachar and Syleth district to Assam was to meet to the revenue deficit of the newly formed province. All these mentioned reasons made it imperative for the transfer of Sylhet to the New province of Assam.
This transfer was not welcomed by the people of Surnia Barak Valley. The people strongly protested against the decision of the colonial government although the government remained unmoved in the face of the strong protest organized by the people of the Valley. The history of the movement replete with instances of dislike, distrust, jealousy and rivalry and unfolded a current of thought and action that resulted in a permanent wedge between the two Valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak and two communities Hindus and Muslims.

PARTITION OF INDIA AND ITS AFFECTS ON BARAK VALLEY

The ending of colonial rule and the beginning of a new era of independence from 15th August 1947, was a classic case of self determination but at the same time it raised more problems for the sub continent than it solved. Partition of the country and the consequent displacement of minorities in each half of the partition area who crossed over to the other side was one such problem. This displaced people even today memorizes the pain of partition rather that the joy of independence. This pain was of the breakup of families, the violence they faced and refugee hood. This partition was a ‘something of colossally horrible proportions and as one of the countries’ great tragedy’. It was aimed at the settlement of communal problem forever, but it increased the problem of minorities of either sides. The continuous persecution followed by the continuous movements of them across the border. Refugees whose numbers was estimated to be over eighteen million struggle to resettle themselves and the burden was shared by at least next two generation to rebuild the shattered lives cost by the violent uprooting due to partition. The North Eastern India witnessed a major vivisection in the region of Surma-Barak Valley and had a major problem relating to the refugees from the area.

The Partition of India was the result of the two hundred years of colonial rule and their divide and rule policy along with five decades of communal mobilization. However, there was also huge voluntary exchange of displaced population. Such movement of millions is an example of ‘Coerced Migration’
Partition of India marked the high point in the fragmentation not only of the countries landscape but also of the identities of its people. The people affected by the partition all of a sudden became homeless and were given the status of refugee and minority on numerical basis. The imposition of such status created enormous fear and compelled them to move across the border. As a result about 0.2 million displaced Hindus crossed over to Assam mainly in Barak Valley. The first wave of influx was witnessed in 1946 on the outburst of Noakhali Riots. This influx was intensified after the partition. These peoples were branded as refugee and gradually in course of time these displaced people began to stink to eyes of the locals. Though they migrated for their own safety and security it was a mighty struggle for these uprooted people to establish their foothold in their new homes and survive amidst adversities.  

The partition of India was an example of the consequence of the British policy of Divide and rule. The policy had been started to introduce after the 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857. As this was the last joint effort by the Hindus and Muslims to fight against the colonial rule. In 1885 attempt was made from the Indian leadership to form a common platform for strengthening the bond of Indian in the name of Indian National Congress. But the seed of separatism started to be sprouted and this unity was challenged within a little more than two decades of the foundation of Indian National Congress. When All India Muslim League as the separate body of the Indian Muslims was formed in 1906 to counter the effort of the congress.

The Muslim League started working to protect the political rights and interest and unifying the Muslim community. On behalf of the community representation was made to the government on matters of political interest. In doing so the congress was projected to be a Hindu organization.

The Muslims of India was already depicted by the Hunter Commission a minority and backward in terms of educational achievement and hence were unequipped for the government services. It was felt that the political representation would be poor and the civil services would be dominated by the Hindus unless there was reservation for Muslims. Hazi Mohammed Ismail remarked, "In a country where the Hindus and Muslims are in a ratio of five to one, Muslim
must go to wall if any representative system of government came to be established. This is not an imaginary bugbear presented to scare way the Muslims from the Congress campus but a fact as daily illustrated in the proceedings of the district and municipal board scattered all over the country.”

The recognition of the Muslims by the Congress in the later stages needs a separate electorate brought about by the unity of the two communities in 1916 by Lucknow Pact. But the Motilal Nehru Committee Report proposed an Indian Federation being based on the principle of linguistic provinces and provincial autonomy. Election would be held on joint electorate and reservation would be therefore religious communities for a period of ten years and this reservation was applicable only in the Muslim minority provinces. However, the congress members displayed the Hindu reviverist activities which enraged the Muslims more. Moreover, the ‘Pirpur Report’ of enquiry appointed by the Muslim League exposed that it was implied, if not definitely stated, the number of the Muslims killed or injured in communal riots exceeded the Hindus. The report also stated that while a Hindu could simultaneously enlist himself as a member of Hindu Mahasaba and the Congress, but, at the same time a Muslim could not become a member of both the Muslim League and the Congress. All these reasons stimulated the grievances of the Muslims and strengthened the foothold of the Muslim league. In October 1937 Mohammed Ali Jinnah in his presidential address to the Muslim League declared almost a war against the congress. Such communal separatism was intensified by the colonial rule that based on the policy of divide and rule.

The division behind the partition of Bengal in 1905 is a well known fact. The divide thereby weaken a solid body, which was a threat to the imperial regime, was the motive behind the division of Bengal. Fuller had played a major role in creating dissension among the two by favouring the Muslim in appointments in the province of East Bengal and Assam.

The election in 1936 to the provincial legislature under the Government of India Act 1935, brought a change to the league’s position and induced its demand for Pakistan. This Act was the first constitutional measures introduce by the British in India which envisaged that the party winning majority of seats in the legislature
would form ministry which would function on the basis of joint and collective responsibility. But both Congress and League were not satisfied with it. In spite of this, both Congress and the League decided to contest the provincial election. The result of the election that held in 1937 had gone in favour of Congress. Jinnah started to demonstrate a strategy for separate identities for the Muslims and also for his survival.

Under such circumstances on 23rd March 1940 the Muslim league passed its Pakistan resolution at Lohore. This was the first time that any Muslim political party had adopted ‘Pakistan’ for a policy. The resolution declared that geographically contiguous units were demarcated into regions which should be constituted with such territorial readjustment as may be required, that areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Indian states in which the constituent unit should be autonomous and sovereign. The notion of the Muslim homeland in this regions therefore, arouse due to the geographical conditions as in there happened to be four provinces in which Muslims were in majority otherwise more than sixty percent of them lived in the Muslim minority provinces.

With the onset on Quiet India Movement in 1942 Jinnah’s cooperation for British grew more. Linlithgow also encouraged Jinnah to come forward with some alternatives to federal principles which might free Muslims from the prospect of Hindu majority rule in India. League’s refusal to enter the constituent Assembly and to accept the Cabinet Mission plan of 16th May 1946 which declared the formation of a union government with a single Constituent Assembly, all signified its intent to achieve Pakistan and its anti attitude to remain in a united India. The Muslim League in his propaganda suggested that it would achieve Pakistan by shedding blood. The Bengal unit of Muslim League also started sending their volunteers to Assam. Its aim was apparently to capture power in Punjab, NWFP and Assam by force. They knew, if it could captured power in those provinces, it would get Pakistan as of right.

The entire sub-continent was swept with communal riots. Communal violence in Saran, Garmukhteswar and Noakhali and finally the Rawalpindi
massacres broken the last straw on the camel backs and partition become inevitable. The Congress Working Committee on March 1947 called for the partition of Punjab and Bengal as they saw it the best check on the growing communal violence.

The publication of the Mountbatten’s Plan on 3rd June 1947 brought the end of all hopes for preserving the unity of India. It was for the first time the Cabinet Mission plan was discarded and partition was accepted officially. Mountbatten clearly stated that he wanted the British to wind up the ‘Raj’ on 15th August 1947. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 was passed on 4th July 1947 which declared that from the 15th August 1947, two independent dominions should be set up and to be known as India and Pakistan.

The Pronouncement of Viceroy Mountbatten on June 3, 1947 laid down the system of the transfer of power from the British to the Indians. It provided for an independent dominion for the Muslim majority areas of India, if the population of such areas so desired and that there would be partition of Bengal and Punjab. The plan further provided for a referendum in NWFP and in the Sylhet district of Assam to ascertain whether the majority of the people in these two areas would decide to join Pakistan. According to the provisions of the Mountbatten plan referendum was held in Syleth on 6th and 7th July 1947.

It brought to an end, the speculation about the future of Assam and it was generally believe that since the viceroy could not bring the Congress and the League in to consensus the partition and referendum was inevitable. In early 1947 the District Congress Committee of Sylhet opposing the move for inclusion of Sylhet in Eastern Bengal. Before referendum, in various meetings that held in Surma Valley adopted resolution against the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal. However, the provincial Congress Unit of Assam welcomed the plan and satisfaction was expressed in Congress political circles over the fact that the viceroy’s announcement made the position of Assam clear. The then Governor of Assam Sir Akbar Hydari, in a letter to Mountbetten wrote that his ministers were pleased with the announcement. He further mentioned that the leaders of the Surma Valley were confident that Sylhet would elect to remain with rest of Assam. The provincial Congress Committee of Assam did not make its position clear on the question of referendum. However, some
Assamese leaders thought that the amalgamation of Syleth with Eastern Bengal would make Assam a homogenous province. Mr. Gopi Nath Bordoloi in a public meeting in Guwahati said that the decision now rested with the people of Sylhet. He however, exhorted the people of Sylhet to allay the fears of the Assamese that their continuance in Assam would no longer be a surface of exploitation. But there were differences between the leaders of Brahmaputra and Barak valley Congress. Mahendra Mohan Choudhry, Secretary, Assam Congress Parliamentary Party requested the Congress leaders of Surma-Barak Valley to abstain from the politics of referendum as it was a delicate one and need careful handling, unless the APCC decide on a course of action.

Preceding the referendum a number of protest meetings were held in the Surma-Barak Valley. While the Sylhet unit of Congress organized protest meetings at various places, the League also began their propaganda. They sent several telegrams to the viceroy for amalgamation of Assam in Eastern Pakistan. Attempts were made by the leaders of the Surma-Barak Valley to rectify the electoral roll which did not permit tea garden labour to exercise their franchises. Sardar Patel was informed about all these difficulties faced by the nationalist Hindus and Muslims of the valley. Meanwhile, the league continued with its propaganda in Sylhet. The Sylhet District Congress Committee appealed to the inhabitants of Sylhet to turn up at the polls in Sylhet during the referendum, as voting arrangements outside the district was not possible. The referendum campaign had taken to communal lines and it was felt that the antagonism between the Muslim League and Jamiat was even stronger than that of Muslim League and Congress. The Leagues activity in Sylhet was very organized and extensive in scale. While prominent League leaders visited Sylhet to act to the fervor in the campaign no prominent leaders of the congress, except Bordoloi, visited the district in those critical days. Although Patel sent a telegram to Bordoloi on 3rd June, 1947 stating, “You must all exert utmost securing referendum in favour of retention of Syleth in Assam.”

In order to carry on the referendum and to maintain law and order the provision of troops for the referendum was immediately sanctioned. Besides this a special force, named ‘Sylforce’, was created for the referendum. At the time of...
referendum the Muslim population of Karimganj was 47 percent and it was 55 percent in Sunamganj, 53 percent in Hobiganj, 67 percent in North Sylhet and 39 percent in South Sylhet.55

On 6th and 7th July 1947 the referendum was held. As soon as the referendum was completed, complaints on irregularities on its conduct began to pour in to the office of both the viceroy of the Assam governor. However, viceroy was satisfied by the report of the Governor of Assam, Mr. Hydari. To him, such a complaints were almost inevitable in such circumstances and so far as he could judge, the referendum had been efficiently and impartially run.56

A clear verdict in favour of amalgamation of Sylhet district with Pakistan came out from referendum. Only three and half police station, namely- Patherkandi, Badarpur, Ratabari and half of the police station of Karimganj - was retained in India. The result of the referendum was submitted to the viceroy on 13th August but it was not published till 17th August, 1947. Finally, with the declaration of Boundary Commission, the district of Sylhet with exception of some police stations, as mentioned, was transferred to East Pakistan. These three and half police stations were included with Cachar District.57

It was hoped that by the transfer of Sylhet Assam could emerge as a homogenous province. But this was not to be. A huge number of displaced Bengali speaking people entered Assam. The influx of refugees from Pakistan once again increased the Bengali population of Assam. A part of the Surma Valley i.e. Cachar and Karimganj remained in Assam. As a result inter-valley rivalry also did not end. There were language riots in the Brahmaputra Valley in Post partition period. The Bengali dominated Barak Valley also has been asking for autonomy and the Valley witnessed several movements. Thus it is rightly observed that the transfer of Sylhet, in broadly speaking the partition of India, was a relief not the remedy from religious or linguistic problems.
LANGUAGE POLITICS OF ASSAM STATE

Language is a prime factor in creating the sense of nationhood. In some cases the role of language is so significant that it proved to be an outstanding means of knitting together separate groups into a nation. However, in India the complexity and sublimity of ethnic and linguistic situation is most probably unparallel in any country in the world. The language issue emerged as one of the most intransigent problems in independent India. In wake of the reorganization of states on the basis of language in 1956, a number of unilingual state were carved out in India. But this operation could not solve the problems related to the linguistic issues. It is quite evident that even if the linguistic principles were applied very rigidly the problem of linguistic minorities will by no means be solved. It is true that the linguistic formation of states can be identified as a major gain of the people’s movement. It is thus said that the national problems remain unsolved leading to the emergence of various problems like communalism, separatism, secessionism and linguistic chauvinism both at the central and provincial level.

The British colonial policies not only affected the politics, economy and other aspects of Indian society, it also effected the local language. Assam was annexed by the British in 1826. Even before they had formally announced the annexation of it, they tried to impose their view about the official language of Assam upon the local inhabitants. It was during the Ahom rule Persian was used to conduct foreign affairs while the medium of communication was Assamese. The government of Bengal in April 1836, declared Bengali as the court language. This was began to be taught in the schools of Assam. Inspite of the clear provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code that the language of the soil is to be used in revenue and judicial proceeding. It was in 1838 Bengali was introduce as the official language of Assam.

During the time of Francis Jenkinns, the Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General of Assam and Nort-East of Rongpur, Bengali was formally made the official language of Assam. When he assumed office in Assam he found that almost all officials were Bengalis from Sylhet, Dhaka and Mymensing. The other district like Goalpara and Kamrup were also filled with Bengalis who had mostly accompanied David Scott from Rangpur. The judges and officers were mostly
Mahamedai of Bardwaman while the revenue and treasurers were Bengalis of Rongpur and Mymensingh or Brahmin of Santipur. Thus it can be said that almost all the Government offices were filled by members of the Bengali Community of Bengal. These functionaries did not understand any other language except Bengali.

Jenkins observed that, "The business of the court was almost entirely run in Bengali. The exception were of some papers in Persian which was the language best known to Mr. Robertson, for his use and that of the Sedder Court." 61

According to Jenkins, the Bengali was essential because the proceedings of the lower courts, written in Assamese court scarcely be read and very imperfectly understood by the Bengali officers of the higher court. The language problem would become obstacle in the way of proper functioning of government officers, thus Jenkins thought of a solution and was to legalize the prevailing practice by formally announcing Bengali as the official language of Assam. This he did in 1838. His aim was to ensure the smooth functioning of the state machinery. This policy, as Jenkins himself wrote was also, “Expedient under every circumstances for the amalgamation of the people with our subjects in Bengal.” The observation was followed by the declaration of Bengali as the medium of instruction. The British Government insisted that this would enabled the people of Assam to make themselves acquaint with Government rules, regulations, orders and other documents which were written in Bengali. It was also felt that, “To convey instruction through the medium of Assamese dialect would have been most ruinous to the people, if not impossible.” The learning of Bengali, on the other hand would enable them to be, “Enlightened by the progress in Science and Arts with their brethren in Bengal.” 62

“No one besides, can doubt that the progress which had been hitherto working slowly in one old province (Bengal) will henceforth advance at a greatly accelerated rate. All the elementary and preliminary steps towards the education of Bengalis have been successfully over come and they now possesses in several colleges and the government and religious associations their own numbers. There are vast numbers of educated individuals who had made themselves master of the western world, the means of publishing forward their intellectual improvement at almost an equal pace with the most favoured countries of Europe. They are in fact
independent of foreign aid and nothing could impede or prevent the full development of the native mind.”

Apart from this, it is possible that the policy of divide and rule had much to do with it. This decision of introducing Bengali in Assam struck a severe blow to the nascent Assamese nationalism and even to the survival of the Assamese nationality. The realization of threat to the linguistic identity of the Assamese people brought about a new way of consciousness among the educated youth of the state. The enlighten group of the Assamese people strongly resented the use of Bengali language in Assam. The demand of the making of the Assamese as the medium of instruction and the court language was for the first time came from Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. His ‘A few Remarks on Assam’, affirmed the separate identity of the Assamese language against the expansionist claims of the Bengali.

Other then the Assamese the American Baptist Missionaries working in Assam were in the forefront of the those who opposed the language policy of the colonial Government. They played a significant role for the introduction of Assamese and initiated efforts to establish its separate identity. They were working in the hills as well as in the planes of Assam. The introduction of Bengali was a stumbling block in the way of preaching Christianity in Assam plains and hills, without the use of local languages. The missionaries, therefore, took up the taste of establishing a separate identity for the Assamese language. They moblize the public opinion against the British policy and became successful to some extent in Nowgaon and Sibsagar. Their work was expedite in 1839 when Jaduram Baruah, working as an officer under the Company, by introducing an Assamese Bengali Dictionary to Jenkins who handed it over to the Baptist Mission. Jaduram was regarded an authority on the system of Assamese orthography which was used by the Baptis Missionaries in “Orunodoi”, a journal they published in 1864. In 1853, AJM Mills, A judge was deputed to Assam to enquire into the condition of the province. The report of Mr. Mills after enquiring the administrative condition of Assam had strong views on the language question, “The people complain and in my opinion with much reason, against the use of Bengali for the vernacular Assamese. Bengali is the language of courts not of their popular books and Shasters; and there is strong
prejudice to its general use. It is because instruction is imparted to the youths in a foreign tongue that they look to the government for employ.

... A number of Bengalis came to Assam when we took the province and due to the uneducated state of the Assamese it was necessary to give them service; but there are now many who have qualified themselves for employ it is most discouraging to see most of the high and even some inferior offices filled by foreigners.

... Assamese is described by Mr. Brown (Nathan Brown) the best scholar in the province, as a beautiful, simple language differing in many respects than agreeing with Bengali and I think we made a great mistake by directing that all business should be transacted in Bengali and the Assamese must acquire it.*

‘Orunodoi’ played a significant role to get support of the local people and succeeded in doing so. Letters opposing the language policy of the British Government and recommending the reintroduction of Assamese were published in ‘Orunodoi’. Gunibhiram Barua in Dec. 1885 published an article in which he compared Assamese with Bengali language. ‘Asomiya Bhasar Kotha’, an article of Purnanada Sharma published in March 1856 and ‘Matri Bashar Sakti’ of Gunabhiram in 1857 all reflected the sentiment of the local people. On 25th May 1855, Miles Bronson of the American Baptist Mission published a letter in favour of the Assamese language. Anandaram Dekiyal Phukan, educated in Hindu College of Calcutta and a Government official, in a memorandum to A.J.M. Mills regretted that education in Assam under the colonial rule was in a ‘retrograde state’. He mentioned the education and schooling system during Ahom rule which was much better than the Raj’s policy of Education. He stated that for more than ten years after the annexation of the province Assamese was used as the language of the court. He wanted to know on what ground Assamese language was replaced by Bengali.

William Robinson, the Inspector of School, in 1854 discouraged the attempts to revive Assamese language in place of Bengali. In a memorandum to Fort William Robinson Opines that there was no difference between the Assamese and the Bengali
language and that Assamese was a dialect of the Bengali language. Thus Bengali should continue as the official language.

The emerging Assamese educated middle class now had to establish an independent identity for their language. On the advice of Bronson, Dekiyal Phukan wrote ‘A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language’ and published by the Baptist Mission. In his writings he controverted the idea of Robinson and stated that Assamese had literature of its own and showed that prior to the 19th century, Assamese literary tradition was extensive. A list of sixty-two religious works and Puranas and over 40 dramas based on subjects from Ramayana and Mahabharata were mentioned in his writings.68

The British Government did not pay any attention to the protest and appeals of the Baptist Missionaries and Assamese people. Henry Hopkinson, the successor of Jenkins, supported the continuance of Bengali as official language and propagated Robinson’s theory that there were no difference between Bengali and Assamese. Dekiyal Phukan wrote, “The people of Assam do not understand Bengali. They would be in a hopeless state if they did not understand it; for there is no other language that they are known to understand.”69 The Government made every possible attempt to prove that Assamese was a dialect of Bengali and it was not the language which was brought by the Ahoms. It was rather a local language of Assam which the Assamese had developed through intercourse with Bengali language.

However, Missionaries continued their effort to give their Assamese a separate identity. Books related to their preaching had begun to publish in Assamese version. A small vocabulary in Assamese and English was compiled by Mr. Wood in 1864. In this he wrote, “The languages (Assamese and Bengali) are quite distinct. No better proof is needed than the fact that a Bengali does not understand Assamese and vice-versa. Officers who understand Bengali are quite at a loss when they hear Assamese, pure and simple spoken by a villager.”70

Responding to the protest of Assamese and Missionaries the Government asked the provincial authorities why Assamese should not be reinstated as the official language in Assam.71 Reports were collected from District Commissioner, Assistant
Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, Teachers of Guwahati High School and memorandum was submitted from Miles Bronson, Residents of Nowgong and lower Assam, along with Hopkinson's own report. The suggestion that reported was diverse. Campbell then suggested that the existing language policy should continue unless the Assamese were assimilated with the Bengalis.

However, on 6th March 1873, the High Court passed an order which virtually made the use of Assamese mandatory in petitions and such documents. It was in July 1873 an order from the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal came,

"Under the provision of Act 29 xxix of 1837 and section 337 of the Criminal Procedure Act, it is hereby notified that Assamese Language be used in Judicial and Revenue Proceedings and is the ordinary language of the five valley districts of Assam, viz. Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaonj, Sibsagar and Lakhimpore."

Hopkinson promptly wrote against the decision but the Government did not respond to his appeal. To encourage Assamese, the Lt. Governor of Bengal announced prizes for the best primary text books. Accordingly, 58 books were selected and out of this, books written by Hemchandra Sarma, Tulsiram Das and Reverend Clarke stood first, second and third respectively.

In this stage also attempts were made to change the decision of the Government by some pro-Bengali British officers but this was not done by the Government. Assamese language thus, began to make slow but steady progress. But this reinstatement failed to bring the end of the controversy.

All these language related controversy and its solution was not the aim of British Government. Their goal was to rule and to exploit as much as possible. On doing so they follow the policy whatever was suited to them. Thus it is not right to say, in context of Assam, that they were anti-Assamese or Pro-Bengali. They were simply imperialist out and out.

It was during 1870s the colonial government, for their smooth conduct of work, decided to reorganize territorial units into smaller one. Above all the separation of Assam was important for the investment in the growing tea industries.
It was also thought that Assam would not be able to bear the expenses of its maintenance. Thus when Assam was finally made a Chief Commissioner’s Province in 1874, the Sylhet district of Bengal and Cacher and Goalpara were also transferred to it. There was strong opposition for the transfer of Sylhet. The people of the district opposed such amalgamation with Assam and its people with whom they did not have any social or linguistic similarities. Memorandum was submitted to the Governor General protesting against the transfer of Sylhet to Assam.

There were also attempts to destroy the Bengali Nationality. In doing so, the British Government first separated Sylhet from Bengal in 1874, then in 1903 attempts were made to transfer Chittagong, Dacca and Mymensing to Assam from Bengal. In the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the Bengali Hindus would be a minority and the Muslims would co-operate with the Government. The province would continue to be riven by growing Bengali–Assamese mistrust and jealousy. This amalgamation of Assam with Eastern Bengal sowed the seeds of religious and linguistic division. Thus when the proposal of the partition was announced a vigorous anti-partition movement was started in Bengal, but the Assamese had little involvement in it as it was thought by them a Bengali movement. The Bengali, therefore, became suspicious of their Assamese neighbors. This suspicion became confirm when Manik Chandra Baruah and Jagannath Baruah, two Assamese leading personalities, had gone ahead and supported the partition plan of Bengal by Lord Curzon.

Subsequently when the partition was annulled in 1911, Assam was reverted to a Chief Commissionerate with a legislative Council of its own at Shillong. While the restoration was welcomed in Assam, it was considered in Sylhet as “deep injury and deep wound”. However, in a very short interval of time some Muslims of Sylhet thought it better to remain with Assam. It was most probably to place the Muslims in Brahmaputara and Surma-Barak Valley in a privilege position. It was till 1947 Syleth and Cachar remained a part of Assam, though there were some attempts both inside and outside the council to curve out Sylhet from Assam. From the second decade of the last century, the demand for the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal was raised more by the Assamese then the Bengali. It was most probably to reduce the Bengali
population into an insignificant linguistic minority and the Assamese became a solid body of unchallenged nationality. The hope of the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal of the Assamese people embodied with partition of India in 1947.77

The Assamese leaders after independence became more vocal about the position of their language and culture. The demand for the declaration of Assamese as the state language and medium of instruction in the state started gaining momentum.

Soon after the partition of the country large scale migration of Hindu Bengalis to Assam began. This was probably because of the apprehension of the Hindu minorities about the security of their lives, property and livelihood. The problem of immigrants in this period was further complicated and became acute by the coming of a large number of Hindu refugees in to Assam from the East Pakistan. The number of refugees went up from 2.62 lacks in 1951 to 6.0 lacks in 1961.78 A section of Assamese middle class raised their voice for an early solution of the refugee problem. Such pleas from the Assamese people probably led to the enactment of 'Immigrants Expulsion from Assam Act.' in February 1950 by the Indian Parliament. Although the Act in reality remained a show piece and subsequently went into disuse by 1957. The Assamese people apprehended that since the Bengali population had already constituted a sizeable section in Assam, the Bengali refugee would strengthen the cause of the Bengalis posing a severe threat to Assamese language and culture. It was thus obvious that the Assamese middle Class began to agitate over the refugee issue. Out of Assam’s total population of 9044000 in 1951 as many as 1344000 constituting 14percent were born outside Assam, compared to 6 percent in West Bengal and 5 percent in the case of Bombay.79

There was a mass discontent amongst the non-Assamese people when the Census Report was published. This census report became popularly known as 'Biological Miracle'. On seeing this report R.B. Vhegiwala I.C.S., the then Superintendent of census operation, Assam Manipur and Tripura expressed his views in this way, “A comparison with the percentage of population speaking these different languages in 1931 for which alone figures are available, reveals and interesting tail. There was no tabulation in 1941 as a measure of war economy.
Hence we have no figures regarding the distribution of Assam’s population according language for 1941. There is a striking increase in the percentage of people who speak Assamese in 1951 (56.7%) over these of 1931 which was only 31.4%, there is an equally striking decrease in the percentage of people speaking Bengali in 1951 which is only 16.5% against 26.8% in 1931. With the solitary exception of Assamese every single Language or Language group in Assam shows or decline in the percentage of people speaking the same. All this decline has done to swell the percentage of people speaking Assamese in 1951. The figures do not failed to reflect the aggressive linguistic nationalism now prevailing in Assam, coupled with the desire of many persons amongst the Muslims as well as Tea Garden Labourers, emigrants to adopt Assamese as their tongue in the state of their adoption. It is not unlikely that some amongst the persons who have returned their mother tongue in Assamese have done so from devious motives, even though there knowledge of Assamese may not amount to much. The phenomenon is also coupled with the genuine increase in the number of people speaking Assamese with the introduction of more schools in Tea-Garden areas in the Assam Valley where the medium of instruction is naturally Assamese. These factors partially accounts for the decline of the percentage of people speaking Hindi which has fallen from 7.6% in 1931 to 3.8% in 1951. The accuracy of language statistics in Assam has suffered to a certain extent on account of the census of indigenous persons of Assam and their land holdings being taken along with the main population census. An indigenous person in Assam was defined as a person belonging to the state of Assam and speaking the Assamese language or any tribal dialect of Assam, or in the case of Cachar, the language of the region. The definition gave rise to some apprehension among some section of the people of Goalpara and Cachar where it was vehemently resented by certain other sections of the people in the Assam Valley. This was due to the clarification given by the state government that indigenous persons will not merely include persons who speak Assamese at home. The word “At home” was deliberately omitted by the state government to expand the scope of the definition. All assurances to the effect that the collection of this statistics will not be a bar to any rights of any citizen or national of India failed to assuage this apprehension or resentment. On top of it all some people on Goalpara insisted on retaining their mother tongue as Goalparia. I pointed out that
on this analogy some people in Kamrup may insist on returning their language as Kamrupi and those in Nogaon as Nowongian and that the census cannot take cognizance of such idiosyncrasies. When some of them insisted on recording their mother tongue as Goalpara in spite of the explanation, the census staff has no option except to record the answer exactly as given by the citizens. As a result, 4088 persons (2562 males and 1526 female) returned their mother tongue as Goalpara. There being no such language in existence, this persons were included under Assamese as directed by the registered general after consulting the state government.

The Bengali medium primary schools were directed to introduce Assamese as medium of instruction and take permission from local board otherwise the recognition would be withdrawn. The result was that within three years only in Golapara 250 numbers of Bengali medium schools came down to three only. The statistics of the Primary schools of Goalpara districts is as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assamese Medium School</th>
<th>Bengali Medium School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947-48=348</td>
<td>1947-48=250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948-49=582</td>
<td>1948-49=130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-50=773</td>
<td>1949-50=45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51=833</td>
<td>1950-51=03-fill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 1950 onwards the Assam Sahitya Sabha started systematic campaign for the recognisation of Assamese as the official language of Assam. Demands was placed before the Assam government. The 16th July 1951 was observed as the state Language Day by the Shitya Sabha. The Sabha appealed people to help the Government in introducing Assamese in all educational Institutions. Processions, meetings etc. had been organized in different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley and in some places some unhappy incidents had taken place.
The language policy of the Assam government led to the call of a convention under the banner of “Assam-Tripura-Manipur Bango Basha Sahitya Sammellan”, which had taken place on 19\textsuperscript{th} June 1954 at Karimganj town. The convention succeeded in establishing a co-relation amongst all non-Assamese groups mainly Manipuri, Dimasa, Bishnupriya Manupari, Mizo, Khashi, Garo and others. It was discussed in the conference that to make the non-Assamese people free from the hegemony of Assamese people the demand for “Purbachal” was justified.

Like the Assamese leadership national leaders of Indian National Congres were also aware of the situation of this Valley. Pandit Jwaharlal Nehuru on November 1937 expressed his views in the following way, “The future of Surma Valley is a living question in Assam, and the Assamese are keenly desirous that Sylhet should be transferred to the administrative province of Bengal, so as to leave them an area which is linguistically more homogeneous. The people of Sylhet, I found were equally in favour of this change, and, on the face of it the desire is reasonable.”

Again in 1955 Assam became a hot bed when State Reorganisation Commission published its report. On the proposal of creation of new province, the Commission on language question expressed its view by saying, “we do not desire to make any recommendation about the details of the policy to be followed in prescribing the use of the minority languages for official purposes. However, we are inclined to the view that a state should be treated as unilingual only where one language group constitutes about 70 percent or more of its entire population, when there is a substantial minority constituting 30 percent or so of the population, the state should be recognized as bilingual for administrative purposes.”

On the question of State Language of Assam the Commission remarked, “The linguistic complexion of the existing state establishes very clearly its composite character in spite of the very interesting past 1931-spread of Assamese according to the census figures. It is not surprising that the rapid increase in the past two decades in the number of persons speaking Assamese has been disputed and the veracity of 1951 census figures has been questioned in certain quarters. We have not deemed it necessary to enter in to this controversy but we would like to draw attention to the
fact that in spite of this rapid increase, the Assamese speaking population still constitutes only about 55% percent of the population of the state.

Situation in Assam further deteriorated for not getting State Reorganisation Commission report in favour of the Assamese language. The crops of non-Assamese people, mainly Bengalees, were burnt down, houses were destroyed by using elephants. By introducing “Line System” torturing was started irrespective of Hindu Bengalee and Muslim Bengalee and forced to make them identified as Assamese. Leaflet, notice, order, circular everything was written in Assamese and distributed in the entire state. There was an unwritten ban on the appointment, transfer, getting higher education and scholarship of the non-Assamese people mainly on Bengalees. Notices of evictions were issued to some families of Nowgaon district, who had been living there from generation after generation. Bengali medium schools were demoralized and controlled by the Assamese people. In Cacher district 90 percent gazetted officers were Assamese speaking and even the grade iv employees were also appointed from the Brahmaputra Valley. As a result a discontent, amongst the Bengali, Mizo, Khasi, Garo, Naga, Manipuri, was gradually started rising. In the tribal areas autonomy movement in different forms started and the process of disintegration was thus moved forward. In 1955, Assamese nationalist movement took violent shape though it was mainly concentrated in Goalpara District.

The then Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Bimala Prssed Chaliha on 3rd March, 1960, in the Assam Legislative Assembly remarked that unless the non-Assamese people of Assam came forward with the demand of making Assamese as state language the decision would remain pending. He justified his comments by saying that Assam is a multilingual province so the government should wait till the proposal raised by the non-Assamese people. There might have some democratic thinking behind such view but this was ultimately resulted in vein. In the same year the Assamese people launched a vigorous language movement to make Assamese as the official language of Assam. As a result in a meeting of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee in Shilling on 21st and 22nd April it was resolved that Assamese would be the state language of Assam. In order to execute the decision it was resolved that a Bill would be placed in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Assam ministry was
also directed to implement the decision. All the members from Cachar-Mainul Haque Choudhury, Nibaran Chandra Laskar, Jyotsna Chandra, Nanda Kishore Singha, Baidyanath Mukherjee, Munindra Kr Das, Hem Chandra Chakraborty, Ram Prasad Chaula, Arunlal Roy and Altaf Hussam Mazumder—behemently opposed the proposal Nanda Kishore brought an amendment proposal which was rejected.

On 10th Oct, 1960 Mr Chaliha delivered a long speech in the Assembly in favour of making Assamese as official language. The Chief Minister Chaliha later on placed a modified proposal in the house. According to it, “Assamese and English, to be replaced by Hindi, should be declared the Official Languages for the state, have Assamese for district administration in the Brahmaputra Valley. Bengali for Cacher and leave the option of selecting whatever language to respective District and Regional councils choose for district administration in their respective districts, continue English in the Secretariat and Heads of Departments Offices.” Mr. Chaliha then remarked. “It therefore Assamese has to become the official language in any part of India, where else can it so become if not in Assam?”

It was thus on 24th Oct, 1960 Assam Official Language Bill was passed into law declaring Assamese as the state official language of the province.

The plains as well as the Hills tribals were badly resented at this enactment. The immediate effect of this law was the separation of Nagaland from Assam in 1963. The resentment of the Bengali people took an organized shape. On 6th and 7th November 1960 a convention was called in Hojai under the banner of ‘Nikhil Assam Banga Bhasa Bashi Samiti.’ In this convention it was resolved,

“This convention of the Bengali speaking people, while expressing its fullest sympathy with the natural aspiration of the Assamese people for the development of the Assamese language, places on record its dissatisfaction at the Assam official language Bill in the shape it has finally emerged from the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Bill as adopted besides being discriminatory and unconstitutional has practically failed to fulfil the aspiration of any section of the people of Assam. If
the Bill is assented to it, it would lead to inevitable dismemberment and ultimately will retard the progress and development of this frontier region.

This convention notes with deep regret that Bengali which is the mother tongue of a vast popular of Assam, mostly inhabiting Cachar and the Brahmapurta valley, has been denied its legitimate recognition as one of the official language.

This convention, therefore, appeals to all section of people of Assam to see that the Bill is so amended as to fulfill to legitimate demands of all section of people and to prevent disintegration of the state which should be the paramount consideration of all concerned.

This convention demands that Bengali should get and equal status with other official language or languages throughout the state and authorizes the Working Committee of the Nikhil Assam Banga Bhasa Bhasi Samiti to take such steps as are considered necessary and expedient for the purpose.92

It is said that the declaration of Assamese as the state language of Assam was also against the provision of the State Reorganization Commission. According to the opinion of SRC language should be spoken by 70% or more to be recognized as an official language of a state. In Assam the biggest linguistic group has Assamese which could only claim 54%. Under such circumstances the enactment of official language Bill, which declared Assamese as official language, meant the imposition of Assamese language on the people of other linguistic group.93

There was wide spread expectation in post independent area that the principle of linguistic division of province would be implement shortly. In this regard the Government of India constituted a commission under the chairmanship of S.K Dar. The commission in its reports opposed the reorganization of provinces immediately. The Congress Party's high power linguistic provinces committee which included – Jowharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Pattavi Sitarmiya also did not agree on the question of the formation of linguistic provinces on administrative and financial ground. However, the 56 days hunger strike of Pottu Sriramulu which cost is death and led the movement for separate Talegue state more acquire and massive, compelled the union Government to accept their demand and the first linguistic state
Andra Pradesh was formed in 1953. The creation of Andra Pradesh inspires other nationalities like Malayalee, Tamil, Gujrati etc. However, Nehru finally announced the appointment of a commission to examine the question of reorganization of Indian States.

DECLARATION OF ASSAMESE AS THE STATE LANGUAGE.

The language tangle is one of the most critical and sensitive problems of Assam. In spite of the linguistic reorganization of states linguistic minorities remains everywhere in the country and Assam is no exception to this. In April 1959 the Assam Shitya Sabha became vocal that considerable time had been wasted over the declaration of Assamese as the State language of Assam. The people of Assam could no longer wait and that within 1960 the Assamese language must be declared as the State language of Assam. To make acceptance of this demand and to spread the news of their movement 9th September, 1959 was observed as the State Language Day throughout Assam. Several members of Assembly of different Political parties raised the issue during the budget session of the Assembly. But the All Party Hill Leader’s Conference (APHLC) and All Tribal Organization voiced against the introduction of the Assamese Language as State language. The main causes which they put forward against the declaration of Assamese language as the official language were, firstly, the position and the condition of the Hill people in Assam were such that the acceptance of the Assamese language would place the Assamese in a more dominant position, leading to assimilation of all hill people into the community of Assamese, thereby gradually leading to the disintegration of their identity as distinct communities. Such disintegration and assimilation militated against the deepest sentiment of the Hill people and thus were detrimental to the composite culture of India. Secondly, the adoption of Assamese as official language of the state would adversely affect the prospect and opportunities of the Hill people in government services and other avocations not withstanding any amount of safeguards which could always be circumvented. Thirdly, there is no justification for Assamese as the official language even from the population point of view, as this is the mother tongue of less than 50 percent of the population. Lastly, Assam been
inhabitant by people of diverse language cultures and races deserves to have Hindi as the official language. Meanwhile, English should continue as the official language until such time as the people of the state are ready to adopt Hindi as the official language.

The then Chief Minister of Assam Mr Bimal Prasad Chaliha followed a very cautious policy in regard to the state language policy. He stated, “Perhaps there are two important reasons which warrant enactment of a state language. The first is to make the official communication easily understandable to the common man and the second is to break the barrier of language which now separates the diverse population of Assam. I highly appreciate the zeal and enthusiasm with which the demand for declaration of Assamese as state language has been made more particularly by the Assamese speaking section of our population. However, government would prefer to wait till they get the same demand for the non-Assamese speaking population for declaration of Assamese as the State language. Government feels that this question should be judged more from the point of view of appreciation and acceptance than from the point of view of majority or minority. If this issue is decided only on the basis of majority or minority government is afraid that its object would be defeated.”

This statement of Mr Chaliha in the Assembly set the Brahmaputra Valley on fire. On the other hand, it encouraged Bengali speaking people of Barak and Brahmaputra Valley and the People of Hill districts to object to the adaptation of Assamese as the State language of Assam.

There were meetings in Brahmaputra Valley and resolution were adapted on the issue of the official language of Assam. Different organizations submitted memorandum on this issue. It was demanded that the issue of official language should not be mixed up with the rights and facilities in respect of linguistic minorities. In the constitution of India and the recommendation made by the State Reorganization Commission (SRC) safeguard for the linguistic minorities are provided. Thus there should not be any doubt of suppression of linguistic minorities, tribal or otherwise. They cited the examples of other state where linguistic minorities did not stand before the way of the main regional language being declared the
official language. The Official Language Commission have remarked in this regard. On the question of the tribal areas of Assam the Commission observed, “While the children from tribal areas must receive a medium of instruction in the union language (i.e. Hindi) as in case of other children of the country, obviously it is necessary in their own interest that they should acquire a knowledge of Assamese language also.” However, the particular demands of the linguistic minority continued. The Bengal Sangram Parishad continued to insist on having Bengali as the second official language of Assam and also as the official language of Cachar at the district level. Propaganda and counter propaganda over the declaration of Assamese as official Language was carried on in the press both inside and outside Assam. The involvement of mass people on the language controversy, politics of the state easily made its foothold on it.

On the Chief Minister’s statement the opposition parties of Assam reacted sharply. The leader of the communist party of India, Gouri Shankar Bhattacharjee, pointed out that the Chief Minister’s statement might provide a convenient weapon to be used against the minorities. The executive of the Communist Party of India stated that it stood by any resolution of that sought to declare Assamese as the State language of Assam without compulsion to any minority in the hills and the Cachar districts. Assamese should be introduced in a phase manner. The linguistic minority in the whole state would have their full right of petition, appeal education in their own mother tongue. In the State convention of Proja Socialist Party a resolution was adopted demanding immediate declaration of Assamese as the State language. The statement of the Chief Minister that the demand for making Assamese as the State language should come from the linguistic minorities, criticized by the local news papers. Violence spread all over Sibsagar and Lakhimpur district in the middle of June 1960, the storm thereafter shifted to Guwahati and lower Assam.

The Government of Assam, on APCC’s resolution examined the legislation of different states on official language and also the recommendation of various organizations and had decided to introduce a Bill. Chaliha said, before bringing the Bill, that the language Bill would be more or less on the lines of APPCC’s resolution.
On 10th Oct, 1960 Mr. Chaliha delivered a long speech in the assembly in favour of making Assamese as official language. The Chief Minister Chaliha later on placed a modified proposal in the house. According to it, “Assamese and English, to be replaced by Hindi, should be declared the Official Languages for the state, have Assamese for district administration in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bengali for Cacher and leave the option of selecting whatever language to respective District and Regional councils choose for district administration in their respective districts, continue English in the Secretanate and Heads of Departments Offices.” Mr. Chaliha then remarked. “If therefore Assamese has to become the official language in any part of India, where else can it so become if not in Assam?”

On 24th Oct. 1960, Assam Official Language Bill was passed into law declaring Assamese as the soul official language of Assam.

Participating in the debate on Language Bill Sri R.M. Das, M.L.A. (Congress) from Karimgaj on 24th October, 1960 said, “Assam is a multilingual state, there are three linguistic groups. One group is Assamese speaking, the second group is Bengali Speaking and the third group consists of tribal people. There are many languages amongst the tribal people and English is their medium of instruction. The Hill people therefore demanded Hindi as their State language.” The Bodo Sahitya Sabha expressed its view points on the issue of language Bill by adapting a resolution, which is as follows; “The unity of India has to be maintained in order to preserve the newly owned independence. The issue of the Official Language issue in Assam as threatened the unity having given rise to fissiparous tendency which is harmful for Assam and for India as a whole. To put an end to this tendency the best course is, in the opinion of the Bodo people, to accept ‘Hindi’ as the official language of the state of Assam placing there by every linguistic group in the state on the same footing; that way putting the people of the state of Assam one step forward towards learning Hindi.”

Mr. R.M. Das also said in the Assembly, “I have read very carefully some of the speeches made by different members including the Chief Minister about the question of Official Language in the state. I am sure nobody would deny that the Assamese should be one of the State Language of Assam. But the question before us
is, whether Assamese should be sole official language of the state or the state should be declared a multilingual one; It is naturally depends upon the nature of the population of the state. It putting arguments for and against the bill one should consider the geographical and as well as historical position of the state as it stands now.\textsuperscript{106}

The then Chief Minister Mr. Chaliha on 3\textsuperscript{rd} March, 1960 made a statement on the Assembly, "Government would prefer to wait till they get the same demand from the non-Assamese speaking population for declaration of Assamese as the state language. Government feel that this question should be judged more from the view of appreciation and acceptance than from the point of view of majority or minority. If this issue is decided only on the basis of majority or minority the government is afraid, that its object would be defeated."\textsuperscript{107}

The same Chief Minister with in a very short time changed its entire policy and issued another statement on 23\textsuperscript{rd} June, 1960 declaring that government had than decided to introduce a Bill on official language for the state more or less on the basis of the recommendation of the resolution of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, which recommended Assamese as the sole official language of the state.\textsuperscript{108}

On these two quick contradictory statements of the Chief Minister Mr. Chaliha, the M.L.A. from Karimganj Mr. R.M. Das said, "... I want to know from the Chief Minister in clear terms, if he has changed his earlier policy under pressure, or he has changed his own conviction about the language policy or the state? As a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi, was it not his duty to stand alone with the principle and policy which he considered to be right, just and honest even when the whole country goes against him."\textsuperscript{109}

In the newly formed state, on the basis of language, like Andhra, Gujrat etc. minorities who speak other language lived comfortably without any sense of fear and hesitation. In these states the language and culture of the minorities were adequately safeguarded. In case of Assam the picture was totally reverse. There were great killings that had taken place in Assam in the name of language. The Governor and Chief Minister of Assam immediately after the partition of the country remarked,
"The natives of Assam are now the Masters of their own house. They have a
government which is both responsible and responsive to them. They can take what
steps are necessary for their encouragement and propagation of Assamese
language and culture and the languages and custom of the Tribal people, who are
their fellow citizens and who also must have a share in the formation of such
policies. The Bengalee has no longer the power, even he had the will to impose
anything on the peoples of these hills and valleys which constitute Assam. The basis
of such feelings against him as exist in fear but there is no cause of fear. I would
therefore appeal to you to exert all the influence you possess to give the stranger in
our midst a fair deal, provided of course he in his turn deals loyally with us."110

All the members from the undivided Cacher district, except Sri Gopesh
Namasudra, C.P.I. M.L.A., walked out from the house with Ronendra Mohan Das,
M.L.A. from Karimganj, in protest against the introduction of Official Language
Bill. Party loyalty could not stop Congress M.L.A. from Cacher to oppose the Bill.
Not only this, the M.L.A.s of Khasi Jayantia Hills, Lusai Hills, Garo Hills and the
M.L.A.s from North Cacher Hills and Mikir Hills too opposed the spirit and
condemned of the Bill. All the non-Assamese language groups began voicing their
reservation and resentment in the Assembly and beyond. The joint struggle against
the imposition of Assamese language as official one brought the leaders of the pre-
reorganisation Assam Hills together and All Party Hill Leaders Conference
(APHLC) was formed in 1960.111

The role and activities of R.M. Das in regard to the Language Bill was not
liked by the state congress leaders. This was established by a letter issued to Mr. Das
from the then Chief Minister Mr. Chaliha. In the letter he wrote, “The Assam
Congress parliamentary Party discussed about the speech which you delivered on the
floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly on the 24th October last. The party desire
me to ask for an explanation as to why in spite of the decision of the Party on the
previous day to the effect that only one statement would be made on behalf of the
Cacher Congress Member explaining that it was not possible for them to associate
themselves in passing of the Assam Official Language Bill because it fell short of the
desire of the people of Cacher district you made a statement of the kind which made
in the house. I hope, you would appreciate the Party’s point of view and let me know what you have to say in the matter so that I may inform the Party.”

After getting the letter Mr. R.M. Das brought the matter before the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The Prime Minister in his reply wrote, “I have your letter of 30th November. As I wrote to you previously, I think that it was open to any member from Cachar to speak in the Assembly on the language question and even to criticise the Official Bill. This is not usually done, but on the special occasion we ourselves permitted this, of course, what ever speech might be delivered should be in restrained language.”

Before this the Prime Minister in another letter wrote that under a very special circumstances in Cacher no disciplinary action would be taken to any members of this Valley. The main content of the letter was like, “the speech might have been worded a little more moderately. I can not say if all the facts contained there in are correct. But I would not have said that in the peculiar circumstances of the case this matter should be considered as a formal breach of discipline.”

In spite of all these protest from inside and outside the Assembly the Language Bill was accorded. Finally, the Chief Minister Mr. Chaliha tried to moderate the Act with little change. In this respect the proposal which was produced before the house was as follows:

“Assamese and English, to be replaced by Hindi, should be declared the Official Language for the state, have Assamese for district administration in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bengali for Cacher and leave the option of selecting whatever language the respective District and Regional Councils choose for district administration in their respective districts, continue English in the Secretariat and heads of departments offices.”

**Bengali Response to the policy in Barak Valley**

All possible democratic attempts inside the assembly to stop the process of passing language Bill were in vein. The Bill was accepted by majority vote in the Assam legislative assembly. After that ‘Sangram Parisad’ took its birth from this shadow of agitation. Anti Congress attitude got a flaming turn in Barak Valley, than
Cachar District, after the official language Bill was passed in the assembly. There developed a common idea in the common mind of the people Cachar that the congress leaders of Cachar failed to tackle the political situation. Spontaneous agitation started in the whole district of Cachar. Youths, students, and many people took part in the agitation. On the other hand, in every corner of Assam Bengali speaking people became united against this Bill. Conference of all Assam Bengali language speaking society was held at Hojai in Assam on November, 1960. In this conference resolution was adopted against the language Bill passed by the Assam Government. In this conference an executive council was formed which was as follows:

Patron: Sri Baidyanath Mukherjee,

President: Smt. Jyotsna Chanda,

Vice-President: Sri Ramani Kanta Basu (Dhubri), Hurmat Ali Barlaskar (Silchar), Dr. Hemchandra Das (Tejpur), Sri Anath Bandu Das (Tinsukia),

Secretary: Sri Santi Ranjan Dasgupta,

Joint Secretary: Sri Mohit Ranjan Das (Karimganj), Sri Subodh Roy (Sapat Gram), Sri Subodh Bhowmik (Jorhat),

Assistant Secretary: Sri Binoy Sarkar (Lumding), Sri Dakhina Ranjan Deb (Karimganj), Sri Kalipada Ghatak (Dhubri),

Treasurer: Sri Ganesh Chandra Sen (Guwahati),

Members: Sri Kali Krishna Banerjee (Guwahati), Deboprasad Sen (Guwahati), S.K.Bhattacharjee (Barpeta), Sukhendu Bikash Sengupta, Akhil Dutta, Paresh Choudhury (Silchar), Rathindra Sen (Karimganj), Tajamul Ali Barlaskar (Silchar), Dinesh Singha (Silchar), Paritosh Paul Choudhury (Silchar), Niranjan Biswas (Digboy), Swarnakomal Dutta (Jorhat), Amar Bhowmik, Khirod Ranjan Nag (Tejpur), Ajit Sengupta (Tejpur), Akhil Chandra Bhattacharjee (Silchar), Sudhendra Bhusan Choudhury (Shillong), Sachindra Binod Sengupta (Shillong), Sadhan Ranjan Sarkar (Hojai), Abdul Khalek (Hojai), Sudhir Kumar Bhadra (Hojai),
Dr. Gopal Paul (Lumding), Kalika Ranjan Roy (Hojai), Panchanan Mazumder (Lanka), Nagendra Nath Dey (Hojai), Paramesh Bhattacharjee (Lumding), Altaf Hussain Mazumder (Silchar), Nalini Kanta Das (Karimganj), Rakhal Kumar Mazumder (Barhapjan), Bhupendra Sankar Guha (Guwahati) and Monoranjan Banerjee (Guwahati). \[116\]

After prolonged discussion on the Language Bill the following resolution was adopted by the All Assam Bengali Language Speaking Society. “This convention of the Bengali speaking people, while expressing its fullest sympathy with the natural aspiration of the Assamese people for the development of the Assamese language, places on record its dissatisfaction at the Assam Official Language Bill in the shape it has finally emerged from the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Bill as adopted besides being discriminatory and unconstitutional has practically failed to fulfill the aspiration of any section of the people of Assam. Is the Bill is assented to it, it would lead to inevitable dismemberment of this frontier region.

This convention notes with deep regret that Bengali which is the mother tongue of a vast populace of Assam, mostly inhabiting Cachar and the Brahmaputra Valley has been denied its legitimate recognition as one of the Official Language.

This convention, therefore, appeals to all section of people of Assam to see that the Bill is so amended as to fulfill to legitimate demands of all sections of people and to prevent disintegration of the state which should be the paramount consideration of all concerned.

This convention demands that Bengali should get an equal status with other official language or languages throughout the state and authorizes the working committee of the Nikhil Assam Banga Bhasa Bhasi Samiti to take such steps as are considered necessary and expedient for the purpose.”\[117\]

The society also worked to expedite the enquiry of ‘Goreswar Enquiry Commission’ in order to rehabilitate the victims of language riot in Brahmapurta Valley. Two memorandums were submitted to the Commission, one from the Society and one from the victims of Goreswar riot. On behalf of the victims Mr. N.C.
Chatterjee and on behalf of the society Mr. Siddhartha sankar Roy pleaded the case before the Commission.

The All Assam Bengali Language Speaking Society (Assam Bangobhasabhasi Samiti), however, failed to continue their movement because of some adverse situation and economic crisis and above all internal quarrel. As a result the society did not became a society of the whole of Assam and failed to take any effective step to continue their struggle. Annual conference of “Cachar Yogi sammilen” was held at Silchar on November of the same year. President of this conference was Rajmohan Nath. In this conference also resolution adopted by opposing the language Bill of the Assam Government.

As the government of Assam was Congress led government and most of the members from Barak Valley were from congress, so it was decided to start language movement from the valley. With this view of giving an organized shape a meeting was convened at Silchar with the members of three district Congress Committee and other persons on 26th December, 1960. The conference was presided by Mr. Santosh Kumar Roy of Hailakandi. In the conference two resolutions were adapted. According to the first resolution, it was demanded that as per the Article of 347 of The Indian Constitution the Bengali language should also be declared as the Official Language of Assam as there were not less than 30 lacs Bengali speaking people were residing. The proposal was raised by Mr. Sarat Chandra Nath and seconded by Mr. Hurmat Ali Barlaskar. On the second proposal it was decided to make clear before the people of Cacher the stand of the members of the Assembly from Barak Valley in regard to Language Bill. Relating to this it was decided to publish a book under the title “Language Bill Controversy and Cacher”.

On 20th, January, 1961, the Congress President Mr. Nilam Sanjib Reddy visited Cacher with a view to inspecting the then situation of Assam. On his visit a memorandum was given to him describing the situation that arose after the passing of Language Bill in Assam Assembly.
The Congress leadership from Cacher failed to take any strong step to organize a mass movement in the Valley. Rather they followed the policy of petition and prayer which caused the rise of internal discontent amongst the Congress members.

It was then decided by the leaders of Barak Valley to organize a massive gathering at Karimganj. With this aim a committee was formed in which Sri Surendra Nath Chaudhury became the president and Sri Nalini Kanta Das as Secretary. Accordingly on 5th February, 1961, under the presidentship of Sri Abdur Rahman Choudhury of Hailakandi, Cacher district level public meeting was held at Karimganj. In this conference four hundred delegates from all over the Valley were attended. It was demanded in the meeting to accept Bengali as one of the Official Language of Assam along with Assamese. Otherwise from the next Bengali New Year, a district wise non-cooperation movement would be started. Most of the speakers like Mr. Anil Barman, Mr. Surendra Nath Chaudhury, Sarat Chandra Nath and other expressed their discontent against the Assam Government for passing the Language Bill by setting aside the demand of other non-Assamese people. They also brought the example of co-existence of difference language groups in other states of India and abroad. Most of them suggested to follow the path of active resistance.

In this conference all most ten thousand people were present and under their presence some resolutions were adopted. The meeting by adopting a resolution requested the Union Government to discard the Official Language Bill of Assam and requested to declare Bengali as one of the Official Language along with Assamese. It was also decided in the meeting to start non-cooperation Movement in order to paralyze the government machinery from the coming Bengali new year if the government would not take any step immediately.

In order to execute the above discussion a committee was formed under the title “Sangram Parisad” by taking members from the three Sub-divisions – Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi.
It was also resolved to organize a meeting of “Sangram Parisad” at Hailakandi on 8th February, 1961. Three Sub-division “Sangram Parisad” committee was also formed in the public meeting of Karimganj.122

The victims of Language Riot were still not settled, the panic was prevailing, the burnt houses were not reconstructed, under such circumstances the census of 1961 was again started. “Nikhil Assasm Banga Bhasa Bhasi Samiti” protested against the census and demanded to declare Bengali as one of the official language of Assam. The “Samiti” sent a 12 members delegation to Delhi on 4th April 1961 to meet the then Home Minister Lal Bhdhur Shastri and the Register General of India. These delegates placed the documents against the census before Mr. Shastri and the RGI. They then met with the president of India on 5th April and demanded that as per Article no. 347of India Constitution Bengali also should be declared as the official language of Assam. In the memorandum it was written “Special provision relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a state on a demand being made on their behalf, the president may if he is satisfied that a substantial portion of the population of a state desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognized by the state, direct that such language shall also be officially recognized throughout that state or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify.”123 Members against this representative are Smt. Jyotsna Chandra, Romani kanto Basu, Sri santi Ranjan Dasgupta, Sri subodh Roy, Sadhan Ranjan Das, Paritosh Paul Choudhary, Rathandra Nath Sen, Nilkaml Dutta, Miton Chakraborty, Dwipendra Coudhoury, N.H.Ghose.

On the other hand a meeting of Cachar Distric Gana Sangram Parisad had taken place on 9th April 1961. In that meeting it was decided to launch mass movement in the form of procession, protest meeting, long march etc. The meeting was presided by Mr. keshab Chandra Chakraborty. It was also resolved to observe “Sankalpa Dibas” on the 1st day of Bengali new year(14th April 1961). For conducting and organizing next phase of movement a sub-committee was formed with Mr. Nalini Kanta das as convenor. The other members of this sub-committee were Bidhu Bhusan Choudhury, Keshab Chandra chakraborty, Abdur Rahaman Choudhury, Jitendra Nath Choudhury, Satyadas Roy And Rathindra Nath Sen.
Accordingly, as per the earlier decision the 1st day of Bengali new year i.e. 14th April, 1961 was observed as “Sankalpa Dibas”. People of the entire valley came and taken oath not to leave their demand of making Bengali as one of the official language of Assam at any cost. By observing this day the message of “Sangram Parisad” reached to every door of the valley. The entire Barak valley was thus boiling like anything.

**Mass Movement in Barak Valley**

A vigorous language movement of the Assamese people, of 1960 to make Assamese as the official language of Assam finally resulted in the enactment of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 by the Assam government. By this Act Assamese language was declared as the official language of Assam. The plains as well as the Hills Tribal’s were badly resented at this enactment.

Failing to resist the Bill in the assembly the people of Barak Valley started to think for mass movement. Immediately after the passing of language Bill “Sangram Prasiad” was formed to lead the movement. Anti-congress attitude got a flaming turn in the valley after the language Bill was passed. The people of plains started to think that the Congress members from Cachar failed to make any obstacle in passing the language Bill in Assam assembly. Thus the people of Barak Valley became adamant to protest the Language Bill. Spontaneous agitation started in the whole of Barak Valley.

On 5th February, 1961, under the presidency of Sri Abdur Rahaman Choudury of Hailakandi a huge public gathering was held at Karimganj. In that meeting 400 delegates, from different corners of the Barak Valley, were attended. It was resolved in that conference that if Bengali language would be not recognized as one of the official language of Assam, non-cooperation movement would be started in the whole of Cachar District. In that meeting it was decided to form “Sangram Parisad” by including delegates from Silchar, Karimganj, Hailakandi.

On 8th Feb, 1961, in the meeting of Sangram Parisad at Hailakandi an executive committee was formed with a view to starting a mass agitation. In three Gana Sangram parisad of Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi sub-division three
secretaries namely Paritosh Paul Choudhury, Nripati Ranjan Choudhury and Haridas Deb were elected respectively.

In a meeting of ‘Cachar District Gana Sangram Parisad’ it was decided to launch mass movement in the form of protest meeting, long march, procession etc. It was also resolved to observe ‘oath Day’ on the day of Bengali new year i.e. 1st Baishak 1368 Bangla (14th April, 1961). The meeting also resolved to start mass movement from 15th April, 1961 to 15th May 1961.

As per the decision of the “Sangram Parisad’ the 1st Baishak 1368 Bangla i.e. 14th April 1961 was observed as ‘oath Day” in the entire Barak Valley. People of the whole Valley came out and taken oath not to give up mother tongue at any cost. The observation of the ‘Oath Day’ helped to reach the message of “Sangram Parisad” to each and every door of the people of Barak Valley.

From 19th April, 1961 to 2nd May 1961 a group of volunteers of Sangram Parisad started a long march from Karimganj and travelled from village to village. Prominent amongst them were Rathindra Nath Sen, Arobinda Dutta Choudhury, Bidhan Bhushan Choudhury, Byomkesh Das, Annadamohan Kr, Premanda Mukherjee, Swadesh Ranjan Bhattacharjee, Nirmal Das Purkayastha, Mohitmohan Das, Nalini Kanta Das, Bhanu Das Gupta, Naligopal Swami, Nripati Ranjan Choudhury, Narendra Singha and others. In their way of marching they organized meeting in different places and tried to explain the significance and objectives of their movement.

The volunteers travelled almost all the villages of Karimganj sub-division. The places they travelled were Nayabari, Chandsrikona, Girishganj bazaar, Sadarashi, Kakhibazar, Sutarkandi, Fakirabazar, Latu, Mohishasan, Balicherra, Baepunj,Brahmansashan, gandhai, Niklambazar, Kayasthagram, Patherkandi, Baraigram, Kanaibazaar, Achimganj, Duhalia, Bazartghat, Kazirbazar, Anipur, Dullavcherra, Vidyanagar Tea Estate, Ramkrishna Nagar, Suruchiganj, Paddarpur, Singla, Dholai, Kalibaribazar, Kalyanpur, Sonbil, Samridhipur, Durgarbond, Anandapur, Sripur, Singua, Dewdar, Tulakona, Chandrapur. They visited about 225 miles and organized hundreds of meetings. Everywhere they were greeted by the
people. On 2nd May, 1961, after completion of 14th days march the Satyagrahis reached to Karimganj town. In order to welcome them a meeting was organized at Karimganj town Bank Ground. The meeting was presided by Sri Indra Kumar Dutta, the District Congress Committee President Mr. Ranendra Mohan Das, M L A, welcome all the volunteers by garlanding them.

Prominent speakers of that meeting were Ranendra Mahon Das, Kumud Ranjan Saha, Sunirmal Dutta, Sukhomoy Dutta, Nalini Kanta Das, Biswanath Upadhayay (M L A.) Arobinda Choudhury, Bhupendra Singha, Nanigopal Goswami, Mohit Mohan Das, Sri Nripati Choudhury and others.

The leader of the pedestrian volunteers Mr. Rathindra Nath Sen after his speech declared the next phase of movement. He announced that a total strike would be observed in the entire Barak Valley on 19th May, 1961. He also appealed to the people of Karimganj town to boycott the forth coming Karimganj municipal election.

It needs to be mentioned that on 18th April, 1961 a meeting of the “Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahamandal” was held at Patherkandi under the presidency of Samarjit Singha. In that meeting it was decided unanimously to support the activities of Sangram Parisad. Not only this, the Manipuri Mahamandal decided to continue the struggle until its end unless the demand of the “Sangram Parisad” was fulfilled.

Being influenced by the example set by the Karimganj Sangram Parisad, Silchar and Hailakandi unit also decided to launch pedestrian march from 24th April and 10th May respectively. Before this on 21st April, 1961 Silchar Sub-division Samgram Parisad gave a call for strike of educational institutions. The strike was observed by the students of different institutions.

As decided by the Sangram Parisad of Silchar a group of Satyagrahi under the leadership of Sri Paritosh Paul Chaudhury, Secretary Silchar Sub-division Sangram Parisad, started their march from 24th April, 1961. Each group of volunteer consisted of 25 members. Prominent amongst them were Sri Monindra Roy, Mrinal Kanti Roy,
Influenced by the long march of the Satyagrahi of Karimganj the 25 members group of Silchar Sub-division Satyagrahi touched almost every corner of the Sub-division on foot. The places they visited were Sonabarighat, where they were welcomed by the Muslim students and youths, Narshingpur, Kabuganj, Chandpur, Sonai, Kaptanpur, Lakkhipur, Phulertal, Pailapul, Labak, Dewan, Jaipur, Bartal tea Estate, kumbha, Salganga, Udharbond, Madhuramukh, Haticherra, Dolu, Barkhala, Jarailtala, Bihara, Kalain, Panchgram, Katakhal, Salchapra, Srikona, Masimpur.

After completing their march when they reached Silchar the people of Silchar town came down to road to receive them. Prominent personalities who greeted them were Sri Mohitosh Purkayasta, on behalf of Silchar Municipality, Sri Binoyendra Kumar Choudhury, on behalf of journalist forum, and dhirendra Mohan Deb ,on behalf of Red Cross Society. On that day,i,e, 2\nd May, 1961 a public meeting was held at Silchar Norsingtola Ground under the presidentship of Sarat Chandra Nath.¹³³

The Hailakandi Sangram Parisad also started their march from 10\th May, 1961. Three groups of volunteers of Sangram Parisad under the leadership of Abdur rahman Choudhury, Keshab Chandra Chakraborty, Haridas Deb, Rathindra Karsen, Nripendra Choudhury started their march from Hailakandi Town Hall and travelled almost the entire area of Hailakandi Sub-division. On their way they explained the situation and the Language Policy of the Government, the position of non-Assamese people of Assam and appealed to the people to make success of the Language Movement.

On 13\th May, 1961 after completion of their march they reached Hailakadi and were warmly welcomed by the people of Hailakandi town. The Chairman, Hailakandi Municipal Board, Sri Promod Ranjan Bhattacharjee, the Chairman Cacher District Gana Sangram Parisad Sri Abdur Rahman Choudhury received Satyagrahis by garlanding them. Other prominent personalities who greeted them were Sri Nimai Chand Debnath, President Displaced Society, Amir Ali from Bar
Association and Nabendu Dutta from Rickshaw Puller Association, Sri Shakti Dhar Choudhury from Cacher District Press Club. On that day a public meeting was held at Hailakandi Kalibari Ground under the presidency of Abdur Rahman Choudhury. The prominent speakers of that meeting were Nripati Ranjan Choudhury and Nisith Ranjan Das, Mahmud Ali Barbhuuya, Abhijit Dutta Roy. All of them explained the need of such movement before the public. Amongst the Satyagrahi Sri Haridas Deb, Nripendra Choudhury, Rabindra Nath Sen and Biswajit Chakraborty spoke on their experience during their march and appealed to the people to join in the Language Movement.134

On 5th March, 1961, Achariya Vinoba Bhave reached Assam on foot. On his arrival representatives of “Nikhil Assam Banga Bhasa Bhasi Samiti” met him on 26th April at Rupahi of Nowgaon District. After describing the prevailing situation of the state they had given three books namely – ‘Recent Tragedy in the District of Nowgaon’, ‘Malpractices in the Assam Census 1961’ and ‘A Case for the Bengali in Assam’- to him. The reply of Achariya Vinoba Bhave, after listening the representatives, shocked them. That interview with Vinoba Bhave was printed and distributed amongst the members of the Samiti. It was as follows : “On 26th April 1961 we had an interview with Acharya Vinoba Bhave at Rupahi in the district of Nowgong. We had handed over to him 3 books

1. Recent tragedy in the District of Nowgong.


3. A case for the Bengali in Assam. (Memorandum submitted to the President of India under Article 347)

In course of talk we placed before him that though the disturbances have been over ten months ago, even now there is no sincere effort on the part of the Assam Government and the political leaders to have an affective rehabilitation and to tour over the effected areas to grow better relationship among the different sections of the people. We further stated that He has possibly witnessed that in hundreds of villages of Assam and even in district towns the Bengali people are living in a very panicky condition and has also surely witnessed the apathetic attitude of the Assamese people
towards the Bengali people. So kindly let us, in such an atmosphere, how we can live as a free citizen of India and carry out our normal avocations freely without having any fear.

In reply he stated that his first suggestion would be Assamese should be the only official language.

His second suggestion is that the Bengali people should not object to recognize the Assamese as the official language.

His third suggestion is that the Samiti should immediately withdraw the petition they have filed with the President of India under article 347.

His fourth suggestion is that when the petition under article 347 will be withdrawn he will see that the education in Bengali as medium of instruction is restored by the Govt. of Assam throughout the state.

His fifth threatening was that, even if, we do not withdraw he will request the President of India to reject our petition.

His sixth suggestion is that it was better for the Bengali people to withdraw that to be rejected.

His further points were that the Bengali people were neither liked by the Assamese nor by the Biharis and Orissa people and every where they are having bad treatment rather they will be completely extinguished if they do not change their approach and behavior.

Sri Bhaveji told in Nowgong public meeting that he was a Vedantic and did not care who died in last language riot, as to him the death was meaningless. ¹³⁵

The remark of Achariya Vinoba Bhave created anger in the minds of Bengali speaking people. Acharaya Bhabes’ comment was anti Bengali and provocative.¹³⁶

The government of Assam and state Congress leadership made all possible effort to stop the Language Movement. Show cause notice were issued to the District Congress Committee President and members of Barak Vally. Even All India
Congress Committee President wrote to the District Committee of Congress of then Cacher. He wrote, “Congress and Congress committees cannot participate in Sangram Parisad Movement stop issue instructions accordingly.”

On 16th May, 1961 a meeting of the Communist Party of India was held at Karimganj. The Secretary Cacher District Communist Party Mr. Achinta Bhattacharjee and Yogesware Das extended their support to the movement and made appeal to the public to come forward to join in the movement. Immediately after the meeting two police came and arrested Ramendra Kumar Sharma, Secretary CPIM, Mudaris Ali Laskar, Secretary Krishak Sabha, Mussaddar Ali and Moib Ali, Sri Sadhan Das, Nasir Ali, Haru Das, Mukunda Bhattacharjee, Bijoy Krishna Sen, Rakesh Chandra Deb, Pratul Das and Shyam sundar Deb. Though all of them were released in the next morning on bail. In protest against this arrest an open meeting was held at Karimganj Town Bank Ground on 17th May, 1961 under the presidency of Sri Nirod Bhusan Dey. Speakers like Kumod Ranjan Lui, Yogeswar Das condemned the act of police and appealed to the people to make success of the movement. Sri Achinta Bhattacharjee opposed the role of Congress led Assam Government that tried to suppress the movement.

By the instruction of the government the Inspector of Schools of South Assam Circle by issuing a circular on 17th May, instructed all the teachers and students of the schools not to participate in the movement. But the circular made no effect on the students and teacher as they whole heartedly joined in the movement.

On April, 1959, a “Student Committee (Chatra Samiti) was formed at Silchar by making Kalyan Brata Bhattacharjee as president and Sukesh Ranjan Biswas as Secretary. In protest against the riot of Brahmaputra Valley, that started on 4th July, 1960, a meeting was held at Karimganj under the presidency of Nisith Ranjan Das and “Chatra Sangram Parisad” was formed. By making Sri Biswait Choudhury as president and Asim Sen as Secretary a sub-division based committee was formed. Strike was observed in the Karimganj sub-division on 11th July, 1960 in protest against the government policy on language and language riot. On 13th July, the All India Congress committee president Sanjib Reddy along with Assam Pradesh
congress Committee president Siddhi Nath Sharma came to Cacher. The people of Cacher did not give him pass to enter Silchar and he was thus compelled to return from the bank of the Barak river.139

In order to make people aquinted with the situation “Sangram Parisad” distributed one pamphlet on 18th May, 1961. In which the “Parisad” described that how the state and union government rejected and dishonor the demand of the people in spite of repeated prayer and petition. To make their demand embodied the “Parisad” appealed to the people to participate in the non-cooperation non-violent movement that would be started from 19th May, 1961.

On 18th May 1961, near about fifteen hundred students joined in a protest procession at Karimganj and gathered in a meeting at Town Bank ground. All the speakers condemned the language policy of the government and appealed people to participate on 19th May’s movement.140

On seeing the preparation of the movement the administration became afraid of. They made all possible attempt to suppress the movement. The leaders of Karimganj “Sangram Parisa” like Rathindra Nath Sen, Bidhu Bhusan choudhury and others were arrested and put to jail before the dawn of 19th May appeared.

EVENTS OF 19TH MAY 1961

On 19th May, 1961, the entire Barak Valley, then Cacher, observed total strike. Thounds of Bengali people came down to street. In the morning of that day Karimganj Railway Station had gone under the control of picketers, train could not move from the station. After that people voluntarily started to get them arrest. All temporary and permanent jails became packed up by the volunteers. The administration was totally collapsed. The states police then started “Lathi charging” and used tear gas to control the movement. More than three hundred volunteers became injured. In some places rails were removed from the track. Everywhere in Karimganj Sub-division strike was observed and it was spontaneous.141 In
Badarpur, Bhangabazar, Kaliganj, Nilambazar, Patherkandi, Bazaricherra, Rajbari, Ramkrishnanagar and other places the strike was observed.

In Hailakandi also total strike was observed. Here also the police tortured the volunteers of “Sangram Parisad.” All most one hundred and fifty satyagrahis were injured and one hundred and thirty four were arrested. From the very early morning the strike was started and it was observed by the people of the whole Hailakandi Sub­division. The people of Lala Bazar, Katlicherra, Manipur Tea Estate, Katakhal, Jhaporbonda and other places responded to the strike. In some places spontaneous procession was started and the state police mercilessly beaten the volunteers and as a result some were wounded.\(^{142}\)

In that time the D.I.G. of police Lala B.K. Dey was the in-charge to tackle the situation. Except one train, from Silchar to Karimganj, all others were cancelled. Before the sunrise the picketers took over the control of Silchar Railway Station. Here also the administration failed to ran the train in spite of lathi charge and other repressive measures.

At 2.30 P.M. the police started open firing and nine people were killed on the spot and two others breathed their last in the hospital. The name of these demonstrators who lost their lives were (1) Sachindra Paul, (2) Chandi Charan Sutradhar, (3) Hitesh Biswas, (4) Tarani devnath, (5) Kumud Das, (6) Sukomal Purkayasta, (7) Sunil Sarkar, (8) Kanaial Neogi, (9) Kamala Bhattacharjee, (10) Satyendra Deb and (11) Birendra Sutradhar. Curfew was imposed at Silchar and the state police gradually tightened their control over the town.

The then D.I.G. of police Lala B.K. Dey stated the situation of the day in following way: “According to our information it was the programme of the Sangram parishad to commence the hartal at 7 a.m. and to end at 4 p.m. So, all other trains except the morning trains scheduled for the day, were cancelled. This arrangement possibly leaked out and so the Volunteers started to squat on the railway line from 4 a.m. When the time for departure of the train was over the Volunteers were asked to clear the line but they refused. At this time about 10,000 persons had collected within the railway percents. Attempts were made to disperse the squatters but yielded no
results. So the mildest weapon in the hand of the police, tear-gas was used but this also was ineffective as the wind was unfavorable and the Volunteers were ready with water and handkerchiefs. At this stage the volunteers started throwing back the tear-gas shells. A mild lathi-charge had to be resorted to. When the lathicharge was going on one rifle from one of the Policeman was Snatched away. A demand was made to return the gun but with no result. The train also could not move as the Volunteers did not leave the track. At this time Mrs. Jyotsna Chanda arrived. She was told about the snatching away of the gun and was requested to ask the Volunteers to allow the train for which no ticket was sold to move empty. She apparently failed to persuade the Volunteers. Several attempts were made to search out the lost gun but it could not be traced.

At this stage, I saw elders like Mr. Biresh Misra, Mr. Achinta Bhattacharjee and some others. They were called and inquiry was made of them as to the possibility of any resistance if arrests were made. After a discussion a sort of truce was agreed upon. A line was fixed beyond which the Volunteers agreed not to squat except those offering Satyagraha. These leaders agreed to send Satyagrahis by batches of eight to court arrest. This was later reduced to four to which also we agreed. When arrests were started they offered young children as substitute to which also no objection was raised. This proceeded peacefully. The arrested boys were detained in the Normal School and were later released. Finding everything otherwise peaceful, I left the railway station.

I got a message at about 2 p.m., that a truck carrying some arrested persons had been set on fire and the prisoners' had been forcibly rescued by overpowering the escorting police. I immediately rushed to the scene found that the fire had been extinguished but a very large crowd had collected on the road. There were some Assam Rifles men. I ordered them to disperse the crowd. No use of gun was necessary and the police succeeded in dispersing the mob. Some moved westward while others started rushing towards the railway station by the approach along the side of the railway running room.

Finding that the mob was dispersing from the road I rushed towards the railway platform. There I found a very large congregation- about 8,000 strong. I
ordered their dispersal and the Assam Rifles’ men made the charge. The mob started moving at this stage. I found five unarmed constables surrounded by a big crowd. They had gone in search of the lost gun leaving their own arms in the custody of the men in charge. So I ordered the Assam Rifles’ men to fire two rounds. This made the crowd to start moving and the surrounded constable were rescued. At this stage the crowd started pelting stones. Thinking that instead of Khaki-clad police if green uniformed army men were made to take position this might have a salutary effect on the crowd. I requested the officer-in-charge to order his men to take position. He refused until his command was signed. I told him, I did not mean actual firing and wanted the men to take position only to terrify the mob and again asked him to take position for God’s sake. At this he agreed and his men took position. At that time the Jemander of the police force asked me about the steps to be taken. I gave permission to fire and it was done in my presence. In all seventeen rounds were fired.”

The bloodshed and acts of state repression only aggravated the situation. The eleven dead were started to seen as language martyrs and the day has been observing as Language Martyrs Day since then.

REPRESSION OF THE PEOPLES MOVEMENT BY THE STATE MACHINERY

The language policy of the Assam Government led to the rise of a mass movement in Barak Valley which ultimately resulted in the death of eleven protesters on 19th May, 1961 in Silchar of Cacher District. Following the enactment of Language bill the situation of Barak Valley was gradually deteriorating. Under the banner of Sangram Parisad preparation for a mass movement was going on. It was decided by the Parisad to observe total strike in the Valley on 19th May, 1961. To make people acquaint and to get support of the people protest movement in various form was started immediately after the enactment of the Bill. Realizing the scale of the movement and the sentiment of the people the police and civil administration left no stone unturned to suppress the movement.

In Karimganj and Hailakandi the police arrested all important leaders of the Sangram Parisad before 19th May. In order to suppress the movement a huge number
of police force was deployed in the three major town of Barak Valley. The administration simply created a war like situation and created panic in the minds of the people. However, all these measures of the administration could not stop the movement rather intensified the scale of the movement.

In Karimganj the volunteers took control of the town. The government offices were closed, educational institutions participated in the movements, railway services were disrupted. Thousands of people joined in the movement. The police in some places of the town used tear gas shell and lathi charged over the picketers, and started arresting. Temporary jails were opened to keep the volunteers.

In Hailakandi the state police also lathi charged over the picketers. Near about one hundred and fifty volunteers were injured one hundred and thirty four were arrested. In some places of the Sub-division police attacked procession shouted against the language policy of the State.

In Silchar the situation gradually deteriorated with the passing of time on 19th May. As stated earlier in railway station the picketers did not allow any train to move. The result was the death of eleven people by police firing. The DIG of police in his report tried to defend the cause of firing but it is said that the police was determined to take such action on the volunteers.

Immediately after the firing curfew was imposed in Silchar and police patrolling was intensified. Though the people violated the imposition on the next day when a huge number of people came down to street and started procession with the dead bodies of yesterday. The district administration compelled to withdraw curfew.

It was reported in the press, “This is the first time in free India people courted death for Bengali Language and that too at a time when India and the world have been celebrating the birth centenary of Rabindranath. ... It was not difficult for us to understand why in this town (Silchar), where the curfew is on round the clock and where the armed Platoons of the constabulary and the army have been asked to adapt an intimidating pose against an unarmed peaceful populace, the unanimous demand has been going up in what might be said a mute roar; “we demand justice; we ask for the trial of those who indulged in gross violence.”
R.M. Das by a telegraph message requested for central intervention. He wrote, "Mass resentment against brutal killing. Large scale police repression, specially by the Border Security Force, Assam Rifles and Governmental Railway Police manned by Assamese personnel."\(^{145}\)

The All Party Hill Leaders Council by adapting a resolution expressed their sorrows in the following way: "this Council expresses shock at the barbarous police atrocities perpetuated on unarmed man, women and children in different parts of the district and reminded that these actions will drive them inevitable reaction and urge upon the Government to stop forth with this reign of terror and meet on exemplary punishment to person responsible for the black deeds."\(^{146}\)

Like this, many other organizations condemned the police firing which caused eleven deaths. The statement of various organizations, individuals, and press make it clear that the police brutally tried to suppress the movement. The deployment of huge force everywhere in the district created a situation of terror. However, the movement lost its scale with the passing of Language Bill in amended form and the rise of anti-Bengali movement in some places of the Barak Valley.

**AFTERMATH OF THE MOVEMENT**

The language movement of Barak Valley which was started immediately after the independence of India in 1947 culminated on 19\(^{th}\) May 1961 resulted in the death of 11 protesters by police firing. The repressive measures of the state machinery could not stop the movement but aggravated the situation. There were continuous protest in the form of procession, rally, blackout, non-cocking etc. All section of the people, political parties, organizations related to Bengali community came out against the Government policies and the police atrocities. The movement continued up to 29\(^{th}\) May 1961 in which people participated voluntarily and expressed their discontent in all possible forms. The wave of the movement reached up to Delhi. Failing to tackle the situation the state Government deliberately misinterpret the situation that arouse for state language policy, to Union Government with the view of bringing the central leadership within their side.
On realizing the need of the hour the Union Home Minister Lal Bahadur Sashtri reached Silchar on 3rd June 1961. To give him honour Sangram Parishad temporarily withdrew the movement from 30th May to 5th June 1961. The Home minister met with the leaders of the Valley except the leader of Sangram Parishad, discussed with them but fail to bring about any solution. To protect the interest of language minorities in the state proper measures would be taken, remark by Mr. Sastri. He also assured that in the Gauhati University Bengali as one of the medium of Education would be introduced.

The Home Minister then reached Gauhati and met with the members of APCC and then went to Shillong where he discussed with the Chief Minister Mr. Chaliha and brought out a plan acceptable for Assam and Barak Valley. On 6th May 1961 the Government of Assam by a press release published the ‘Sastri Formula’ which is as follows;

1. “The Assam Official language Act may be amended to do away with the provision relating to Mahakuma Parishads.

2. Communication between state head quarter and Cachar and the Autonomous Hill Districts to continue in English until replaced by Hindi.

3. At state level English will continue to be used for the present. Later, English will continue to be used along with Assamese.

4. The linguistic Minorities in the state will be accorded the safe guard contained in the Government of India’s Memorandum dated Sept 1956.

5. Clarification may issue that under the provision of Act348 (3) of the constitution all Acts Bills Ordinances, Regulations and Orders etc, will continue to be published in the Official Gazette in English, even where these are published in Assamese under the second provision to section 3 of the official Language Act.

6. Some arrangements to be considered for effective implementation of development schemes at the district level.
7. The agitation in Cachar should be withdrawn.

8. The Assam Government may consider the release of all prisoners detained in connection with the Movement, except those charged with crime involving violence and sabotage, as soon as they are satisfied that the movement will not be resume. 148

In the above statement Mr. Cahliha assured, "Having taking into consideration the feeling in Cachar against the provision concerning Mahakuma Parishad in Section 5 of the Official Language Act, and the advice of the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister, the government have decided to sponsor an amendment to the Act deleting this provision. This should allay the apprehension in the minds of Cachar people regarding the use of Bengali Language at district level in Cachar.

The rules consistent with the basic principles of the Act will be so framed that the correspondent with Cachar and Autonomous District Administration from the Secretariat and the Heads of the Departments would be in English and when replaced in Hindi

Of the qualification for recruitment to the Assam Civil Service all allied provincial post the knowledge of Assamese or Bengali or a Tribal language of the State is essential. This is proposed to be continued even after the enforcement Assam Official Language Act. There is no intension to make the knowledge of Assamese compulsory for recruitment to service. In this connection attention to proviso (c) to Clause 7 of the Assam Official Language Act is also drawn. 149

Immediately after the publication of Sastri formula resentment of the people of Barak Valley again took the shape of protest movement everywhere in the Valley. It is true that in proposal of Lal Bahadur Sastri the right of Language Minority of the state was neglected. The proposal was not intendent to solve the main problem of state of Assam. As a result, again from 6th June 1961 to 12th June 1961, the second phase of the movement started. It is need to be mentioned that in some places in Barak Valley mainly in Hailakandi some people started to raise and anti-Bengali Language movement and demanded Assamese as the State Language of Assam. 130
The Assam Government appointed a Judicial Enquiry Commission by making Mr. Mehrutra, a justice of High Court as the Chairman. It was directed to the commission to submit its report within 31st August 1961. The Commission would conduct their enquiry into the following matter:

2. The picture of the movement in Hailakandi, Karimganj and especially surrounding area of Silchar on 19th May 1961.
3. Whether administrative measures were taken to provide security to the common people.
4. Police firing that caused 11 deaths was justified or not.
5. The number of rounds of firing were proper or not.
6. And the other related matters.\textsuperscript{151}

On the other hand, on 12th June 1961 the report of six members Civil Enquiry Commission headed by N C. Chattarjee was published. The report condemned the rule of Assam Government and the police firing. This Commission alleged the Government and Assamese leadership fully responsible for the incident. It also reported that the Language Movement of the minority people was justified and Government had no right to suppress the movement by using state machinery. Though the N C. Chattarjee published its report in due time, due to some unknown reason the Meherotra Commission failed to do so in stipulated time and even after.

On a request from the then Home Minister Mr. Lal Bahadur Sastri the leaders of Sangram Parishad went to Delhi to meet him. On 2nd and 3rd July 1961 a meeting was held with Sastri in Delhi. The members of Parishad submitted a memorandum describing the condition of Assam from the time of Independence and also the rule of Assam Government towards Linguistic minorities. In Delhi they also met with the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and discussed the
development of Barak Valley after the passing of the Official Language Act and
the attitude of the Assam Government towards the Bengali Speaking people and
other minority groups. After prolong discussion with the Prime Minister and the
Home Minister it was assured that the interest of the linguistic minorities would
be protected. The Union Government agreed to give direction to the State
government in regard to Cachar and these were to withdrew the provision
concerning Mahakuma Parishad. Assamese language was not compulsory in case
of Cachar, all correspondence would be made on Bengali, the interest of the
linguistic minority would be protected and Bengali student could study in
Guwahati University in Bengali. But all these were assurance not Act.

In the forth coming session of the Assembly the Government of Assam
declared to bring Language Bill in amended form by accepting Bengali as
Official language of Cachar and withdrew the provisions concerning Mahakuma
Parishad. This attempt of the Government was not accepted by the Sangram
Parishad. Reacting on it a meeting of the Parishad was held on 1st October 1961 and
it was resolved, "The path of infiltration of Assamese language in Cachar has
been made more smoothened by replacing the word ‘Notwithstanding anything
contained in Section 3’ by the words ‘Without prejudice to the provisions of
Section 3.’" 152

In order to give honour to the assurance given by Lalbahadur Sastri the
movement was temporarily withdrawn for three months. But no proper imitative
was taken neither by the Central nor by the State Government to solve the
language problem of Assam. The Sangram Parishad thus started to think for
further movement. It was decided to challenge the amended version of the
Language Bill in the Gauhati High Court and for this a seven members
committee was constituted. On 14th October 1961 the Language Bill in amended
form was passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly by majority votes.153

On the other side ‘Nikil Assam Banga Bhasabasi Samiti’ (All Assam Bengali
Speaking People Organisation) on 5th July observed ‘Dabi Divas’ (Right Day) in
protest against the Sastri Formula. It is need to be mentioned that due to the
disunity amongst the members of the ‘Samiti’ it was difficult for them to carry
out the movement. In the general election of 1962 the people of Barak Valley decided to give the reply to the Assam Government in ballot papers. However, the movement practically came to an end with the passing of amended Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly in which the demand of the people of Barak Valley was partially fulfilled, but the linguistic minorities living in other district of Assam did not get their right though living in a democratic country.

The Assamese Bengali rivalry on the question of official language for the time being came to an end with the passing of amended language Bill in the Assam Assembly. After an interval of nine years the language controversy again became a burning question in 1970s. In this year the Gauhati University decided to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in all colleges under its jurisdiction with some exception. This decision would come into force from the academic session 1972-73. The exception that was included in the provision was for Cacher and other non-Assamese areas of the state, that English could be an alternative medium of instruction in those non-Assamese areas.\textsuperscript{154}

Barak Valley, thus, again became a hot bed of language politics. Protest meetings, processions etc. again started. Members of the Assembly from Cacher threatened to resign if Bengali was not recognized as a medium of instruction along with Assamese and English. However, on June 6, 1972 Academic Council of the Gauhati University made two concessions, firstly, English was to be retained as the medium of instruction for a period of time and secondly, students would be allowed to answer their examination questions in Assamese, English and Bengali. There was immediate protest came from the Assamese students in Guwahati demanding the withdrawal of Bengali as one of the medium of instruction. The Assam Sahitya Sabha passed a resolution that Assamese alone should be the medium of instruction in the Brahmaputra Valley and the English for the other non-Assamese areas for some few years.\textsuperscript{155} Subsequently the movement for medium of instruction took violent shape. The agitation along with political pressure compelled the Academic Council of the Guahati University to review its earlier decision and withdrew the option of answering question papers in Bengali Language.
The review of decision by the Academic Council was vehemently opposed by the leaders of Cacher Congress and its youth wing Chatra Parisad and obviously by the Sangram Parisad from Gurucharan College, Silchar. A petition was filed in the Supreme Court against the decision of the Guahati University which was a violation of Article 30 of the Indian Constitution. The Supreme Court immediately issued a stay order on the Academic council's decision. All these led to the rise of a period of fresh bitterness between the Assamese and Bengali speaking people.\(^{156}\)

In the meantime, the Chief Minister of Assam announced that a separate university would be established in the district of Cacher. A resolution to this effect was passed unanimously in the Assam Assembly on September 23, 1972 and that the Government India be moved in this matter. Public opinion in the Brahmaputra Valley was opposed to it because it would for all practical purposes, reduce the state into a bilingual one. Public opinion of Cacher also not totally in favour of this decision of establishing separate university, for what the leaders of Sangram Parisad demand was to accept Bengali as an alternative medium in the whole of Assam.\(^ {157}\)

All Assam Students Union had given a call for Assam Bandh on 5 October, 1972 in protest against the Assembly resolution. This strike was followed by large scale violence in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Bengali populated areas of Brahmaputra Valley were badly affected by this. The riot affected areas were Dhang, Doboka, Loharighat, Morigaon, Nowgong, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Kharupetia, mongoldoi, Hojai and some other places. Curfew was imposed in Nowgong, Dibrugarh and Guwahati. According to official report in all 33 deaths, including 3 of police firing, took place in course of the disturbances. Assam Sahitya Sabha took a decision to broaden the student agitation into a 'popular movement'. Their demand was not to establish separate university in Cacher. The Teacher's Association of Guahati University and the Lawyer's Association also opposed the decision of a separate university.\(^ {158}\)

Subsequently the Chief Minister of Assam issued a statement announcing that this government had no intention of implementing the Assembly resolution since it had proved unacceptable to the people of both the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley.\(^ {159}\)
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