APPENDIX 1

Assam’s Role in Freedom Movement

By Shri BISHNURAM MEDHI

Chief Minister, Assam.

Assam, situated in the North-Eastern frontier of the Indian Republic, and long known as the Cinderella State of India, came into prominence during World War II, when Japanese troops invaded India through Burma and set foot on the Indian soil at Kohima. Till then the world knew little about her and hardly took any interest in knowing the people that inhabit this State.

Simple and unsophisticated by nature, the Assamese people have always evinced keen interest in any matter that affects them and are always sincere in whatever they do. So, when the call for sacrifice in the freedom’s struggle of 1942 reached their ears, even village women- from sixteen to sixty – jumped headlong into the thick of the battle and laid down their lives for the freedom of their country. The names of Bhogeswari Phookanani and Kanaklata will ever remain written in letters of gold in the history of Assam’s part in the freedom struggle.

Grim struggle

Not only in 1942, but in 1921 and 1930-31, Assam’s part in the struggle for freedom was significant. The suffering and sacrifice during those years had been immense. But, for Assam, the struggle in 1942 had a significance of its own. The shadow of war was fast enveloping the State and all sorts or rumors made people panicky. On the other hand, the war had opened up good opportunities for businessman and contractors who were easily lured by easy money which was to be had in plenty from war contracts and supplies. It was very gratifying to find that Assamese people persistently refused to be tempted to go in for such work and most of the work concerning supplies etc., was done by the non-Assamese. The people of Assam chose a different path- the path of service to the country. They plunged into the grim struggle, better known as the August Movement of 1942. The motto of ‘Do or Die’ was echoed
and re-echoed from all corners of the State, and the war contractots did not get much help from the local inhabitants who rightly thought that those people were helping in fighting a war which was not their own.

With Japan’s sudden attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, began a new chapter in the war. This unexpected turn of events put India in a supremely strategic position and India’s help and co-operation in the war became indispensable. Another attempt therefore was made by the British Government to win over the Indian people by sending Sir Stafford Cripps to open negotiations with our leaders. The failure of the Cripps Mission and the quick fall of Singapore and Burma, made things worse for Britain and her allies, while raising the morale of our people. The people of Assam carried on their fight with renewed vigor, because they were disillusioned about the striking power of Britain and regained faith in the prowess of an Asiatic power. The Congress took time by the forelock and apprehending trouble, formed village vigilance committees, better known as “Santi Sena”, i.e., soldiers of fact. Side by side, the Congress chalked out programme of self-sufficiency and self-protection, and this programmed was carried out the Santi Sena organization. In Assam more than twenty thousand volunteers, both boys and girls joined that organization. Members of the Santi Sena guarded villages at night and rendered immense help in the movement of evacuees from Burma, particularly at railway sections.

People Set up Parallel Government

The alien rulers thought that the movement would fizzle out if the leaders were put behind the bars. But subsequent events proved how mistaken they were in their political strategy. Bereft of advice from the respected leaders, the struggle now took the shape of sporadic meetings, processions, boycott of educational institutions and picketing of bazaars and liquor shops. The then Government adopted various measures to put down the movement and did not hesitate to employ the police force extensively. But the determination of the people could not be cowed down. On the other hand repression only helped in stiffening the attitude of the masses. The people set up a system of village self-government. Village Panchayats were established in a large number of places and some areas like Bahjani in Kamrup district, Hatichung and Roha
in Nowgong district, Jamaguri and Chatia in Darrang district and Dhakuakhana in Lakhimpur District functioned as autonomous administrative units carrying on governance with laws framed by the people’s council of those localities. The Panchayats heard and disposed of cases and the ‘guilty’ persons were sent to jails established by them.

The Santi Senas were given training in First Aid. They carried on vigorous propaganda urging people not to help the foreign rulers in fighting their war in any way. They succeeded for some time in stopping supplies to the military personal and in closing down village huts and bazars from where the military generally used to buy their requirements. The military were on the track of the Santi Senas, who, mainly with the help of hoots from conch shells informed neighbouring villages about the movements of the military. It was not usual to hear all on a sudden and sometimes at dead of night the blowing of conch shells from nearby villages. Blowing of conch shells and beat of drums were the two principal signals evolved by the villagers.

The repressive policy of the alien Government helped ultimately in sending the movement underground. Provoked by the repressive measures of the Government, the people, without responsible leaders to guide them spontaneously resorted to ‘direct action’ such as cutting down of telegraphs wires, blowing up of bridges, removal of railway tracks and burning of military stores and Government buildings.

**Memorable incidents**

When the then Government found other means at their disposal to be of no avail, they resorted to firings in Nowgong, Darrang, Goalpara and Kamrup districts on unarmed people, who in their patriotic zeal either tried to hoist the National Flag on Government buildings or took out processions in defiance of the existing ban, or tried to dismantle bridges or remove fish-plates from railway tracks in their attempt to hold up movement of essential military supplies, etc. Firings were resorted to in Dhekiajuli, Gohpur, Barapujia, Rangjuli and a few other places also and some of the incidents that led to such firings hardly justified such drastic action. Tilak Deka Barapujia who was guarding the village gate was shot through his head and his ‘offence’ was that he refused to carry out the order of the Military Officer who asked him not to blow his
horn to warn the villagers of the approach of military. What a ‘punishment’ for what an offence!

The tale of Gohpur in the Darrang district was sadder still. Here, a girl, in the prime of her life, was at the forefront of a procession heading towards Gohpur Police with the intention of hoisting the Congress Flag on the Police station building. Undaunted she proceeded and when the sentries at the Police station saw her paying no heed to orders, they fired at her and the brave girl with the flag in hand fell down dead. Similar tragedies were perpetrated in many other places. Bhogeswari Phookanani was also a victim of military firing.

No amount of repression could subdue the ardent zeal of those martyrs. We lost twenty-seven precious lives and as many as thirty seven people received injuries from gun shot wounds besides, quite a large number of persons were wounded by lathi charges which were made intensively in the localities of North-Lakhimpur, Bihpuria, Dikhowghat, Tezpur, Behali, Barpeta, Sibsagar, Nitaipukhurihat, Teok, Nowgong, Golaghat, Goalpara, Nowgong, Chatial, Sarbhog, Dhupdhara, Kharikatia, Roha, Chhaygaon, Panigaon, etc. Some persons were maimed and crippled for life as a result of injuries received from guns and lathi-charges.

**Ahom Youths' Sacrifice**

Sometimes even innocent persons became victims of repression. Kushal Konwar’s name will ever remain imprinted in the hearts of the people. This Ahom youngman, it is truly believed, had to face the gallows for no fault of his. He was implicated in a train derailment case. Though there was no conclusive proof of his complicity in the incident, yet relying on the statement of an approver, Kushal Konwar was charged. As Sarupathar, where the incident happened, was at that time included administratively in the partially Excluded Areas, the High court had no jurisdiction over it. The trial preferred by Kushal Konwar was heard by the Governor of Assam and he confirmed the judgment of the District Magistrate who had sentenced him to death by hanging. Another young man of the Plains Tribal Community whose name cannot be forgotten was Kamala Miri who went on a hunger-strike in jail in sympathy with Mahatmaji’s historic fast in February 1943. He refused to obtain release by signing a
bond of good conduct. All persuasions to make him desist from continuing the hunger-strike failed and he died in jail on April 23, 1943. I mention only these two instances to show that people from all communities joined Assam’s struggle for freedom and made the supreme sacrifice for the country’s cause.

**Attack on Prisoners**

Another incident which would never be forgotten was the one which happened in Jorhat Jail. It was alleged that somebody attempted to set fire to a ward. Nobody knew who spread that unfounded rumor. But somebody had to be punished in order to strike awe in the minds of the people and the political prisoners and under-trials were made the scapegoats for the purpose. It was dusk and the political prisoners were indoors. All of a sudden the alarm bell was sounded and some policemen and warders entered the Wards and beat up the prisoners and undertrials indiscriminately with bamboo lathis and batons. It is still believed that the story of the attempt to set fire to a ward was a hoax and that the assault on the innocent prisoners and under-trials was premeditated. About 90 persons received severe injuries in that assault.

The students of Assam made common cause with the patriotic people and took glorious part in the struggle. Hundreds of students were arrested and convicted. Sometimes the students were taken in batches in prison-vans and police-lorries to far off places and were released there.

Forced labor was taken recourse to in those days as one of the methods to punish the participants in the freedom movement. Villagers residing near railway lines were compelled to guard the lines for more than a year. No honorarium was paid to the people for such work. Generally persons of ages varying from 16 to 55 were forced to do this kind of work. It is easy to see how cultivation suffered, as the cultivators after the night vigil over railway tracks and bridges had not enough energy to work in the field during the day. Those who refused to do that kind of work were either fined or jailed.
Abnormal flays

Yet another form of punishment meted out to our people in the course of suppressing the movement was the punitive tax. The properties of people who could not pay the tax were attached and sold in auction to realise the amounts due. Even utensils and clothings were not considered unworthy for such attachment. It was estimated that more than two lakhs of rupees were realized as punitive tax from the different district of the State. This amount, of course, does not include the value of property otherwise lost by the people owing to repressive measures.

People were sent to prison, in some cases, with just a show of judicial trial. It was a common practice at that time to make a man a security prisoner after the expiry of his term of imprisonment.

Those were abnormal days and there had been cases where, in their overzealousness to place their foreign master, some of our own men belonging to the military and Police forces overstepped the limits and indulged in acts far in excess of what were actually warranted by the situation. But our brave people, imbued with the grim determination of freeing our country from bondage at any cost, bore the brunt of such action unflinchingly.

Death, injuries, humiliation, and all sorts of sufferings are the price of liberty and the people of Assam, like those of the other parts of India paid these in full in order to free their motherland from the shackles of foreign bondage.

APPENDIX 2

ASSAM REJECTS COMPULSORY GROUPING

Assam, the Eastern gate-way of India, to-day invites the serious attention of every right-thinking Indian. For the lack of proper publicity, Assam has remained always a Cinderella-province though she was always in the forefront of Indian Politics. But to-day, at this crucial moment, when her very existence has been threatened, she deserves sympathy from her more fortunate sister provinces of India.

Historically speaking Assam came under the British domination in the year 1826, and thus was the last province to lose her independence. She has a glorious tradition of civilisation and culture of her own as old as the days of the Mahabharata. During the 600 years of the Ahom rule, she could preserve unimpaired the distinct cultural homogeneity of her own. Even she could successfully resist eighteen onslaughts of the mighty Moghul Empire. Harmonious fusion of diverse Tribals and other Communities constitute the virility of the Assamese people—which has been praised by no less an eminent personality than Pandit Nehru.

Casting her lot with the rest of India, Assam has so long stood at the front line of India’s battle for progress and freedom. She has passed through all the phases of Indian National Movement identifying herself with the aims and ideals of the Indian National Congress. In 1942, when World War II had been fought in the soil of Assam and when she was overwhelmed by the presence of white troops, She had contributed a major share to the Glorious August Revolution in which many brave sons and daughters of Assam shed their blood as the valiant fighters of Indian Freedom, thereby proving to India in particular and the World in general, Her burning love for an Independent India.

Considering the tremendous sacrifices she has made for the cause of India’s progress and freedom, should she now be sacrificed at the altar of Pakistan? It should be borne in mind that as late as 1942, Assam was not included by Mr. Jinnah in his Pakistan Scheme. He even went to the length of allowing Assam a small corridor in the North of Bengal to enable her to maintain direct contact with the Hindu India. But seeing that his Pakistan ‘Utopia’ is not possible without Assam’s potential natural resources and that the Eastern Pakistan may be financially and strategically sound he
has now changed his tune and harps on a new one for including Assam in his scheme. What is the logic behind this claim of Mr. Jinnah? Assam has ever been a Hindu majority province, the Muslim population never exceeding 33.7%. The results of the last Election which also undoubtedly prove that the Assamese people are at the back of the Indian National Congress, and are against Pakistan in any form. The recent proposals of the Cabinet Mission have denounced Pakistan on paper but in reality Pakistan is there under the camouflaged form of Compulsory-grouping.

The Cabinet Mission’s recommendations have placed Assam in group “C”. In para (15) they say that the provinces will be free to join any group. But in para (19), they have made grouping of Provinces compulsory. These two provisions only contradict each other. This provision is against the basic principles of Democracy and has negatived the autonomy of the provinces. The significance of grouping will be evident from an analysis of the party position in the Constituent Assembly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since these Delegates will be elected by the present Legislative Assembly by a single transferrable vote, the strength of different parts will be as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Muslim League</th>
<th>Nationalist Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 34       | 35      | 1             |
Thus 35 Muslim Members will be matched by 35-General-cum-Nationalist Muslims. The Muslim League sees in this, the possibility of Pakistan and secession by winning over some from the General seats. The rest might delude them by thinking that they will frustrate it by similarly winning over from the Muslim Group.

The Europeans have been given, votes for electing their delegates. They are less than 3000 in Assam and less than a lac in Bengal and therefore do not get a single representation on that basis. But the result of giving the right of vote to existing European members of the Assembly will be that under the guise “General” they will get representation in the Constituent Assembly as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the General representation hides within itself the Six members of the most reactionary and non-nationalist Europeans who will utilize their votes for bargaining for existence and dominance. This will create such a degrading position that in effect the constitution of Group “C” will be dictated by the Europeans.

**Position of Assam under this Grouping**

Out of the 3 Muslim representatives at least 2 will be elected from Bengali Muslim Leaguers of Sylhet. Sylhet is already placed with Bengal on linguistic ground by the Congress. Similarly 2 Bengali Hindus will be elected from Surma Valley. So Assam proper will be represented in the Constituent Assembly as follows:
Thus Assam proper will be represented by 5 delegates out of 70. Now the provincial Constitution for Assam will be framed by Group “C” consisting of 70 Delegates the 5 Assamese members will be simply submerged there. In result the Constitution for Assam will be dictated by the European-Bengal Muslim-League Alliance.

The plan of Bengal-Muslim League is well known First (I) to convert Assam into Muslim-majority province by Muslim immigration and (II) to win over the Tribals by giving them Separate Electorate. So the Hindu representatives will be subdivided till the Hindus are converted into a minority. Thereafter the right of opting out will be an illusion, for the New Legislative Assembly will rule in alliance with the reactionary elements both Indian and European, and therefore making secession of Group “C” inevitable and unopposible because of the party position.

In short, this combination of Muslim League British Trading interest will mean a sure way to Pakistan.

If on the other hand, Assam is not grouped with Bengal, Bengal cannot secede, for only frontier provinces can, practice secede. Thus in short, the surest way to defeat Eastern Pakistan is

(I) to save Assam from being grouped with Bengal.

(II) to see that Assam constitution is not dictated by the Muslim League of Bengal.

To save Assam from the Pakistan octopus will mean the preservation of our own national existence unimpaired. The cardinal principles of the Constitution of Indian National Congress are, “that the Federation of India must be a willing union of its
various parts and that the culture, language and script of the minorities and of the
different linguistic areas shall be protected.” Thus it is evident from the above facts that
this opposition to grouping does not in any way mean that we the Assamese people bear
any hatred or ill-feeling towards our neighbors. A Free Assam in a Free India- that is
our demand- not more nor less.

Certain Press Statements issued by Sir Md. Saadullah to the effect that he has
the mandate of certain sections of the tribal people have been given a direct lie by more
accredited leaders of these communities. As for instance, the statements issued by Mrs.
Bonily Khongmen, Deputy-Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly and Rev.
Nichols Roy, member of the Cabinet, show that the Khasis vehemently oppose the
compulsory grouping. Similar sentiments have been voiced by Mr. Rupnath Brahma.
Ghanashyam Das and Sjt. Beliram Das M.L.A., the Schedule caste, representatives.
Even Assamese Muslim Leaders, like Mr. Herasatullah have vehemently protested
against this grouping.

The people of Assam are already seething with discontent and are determined to
resist the grouping and dictation by the Muslim League at any cost. The Anti-Grouping
Day was observed throughout Assam on the 5th June, 1946 and the people irrespective
of caste, creed, community and organization have taken united stand against this League
Imperialist conspiracy.

In the circumstances, the Assamese people are looking forward with hopes that
whole of India will extend to Assam its helping hands in her life and death struggle for
her very existence, and thus enable her to thwart this nefarious imperialist game…….The only alternative to this is TOTAL ECLIPSE OF Assam for ever-

Will then other provinces let her down?

- Voice of United Assam:

On Behalf of Assam Students, Publicity Bureau Published by Sri Pramod Burman, 44,
Colootola St. Calcutta, and Printed by N.N. Hazar at BOSE PRESS, 30, Brojo Mitter
Lane, Calcutta.
Source: S.M. Saadulla, Printed Material, File Number 6, APCC Papers, Institutional, List Number 28, NMML, New Delhi.
SECRET

Mr. Bardoloi said, in reply to a question from the Viceroy, that he was prepared to make a statement of what he regarded as the best method of bringing about a political settlement, but he desired to make it plain at the outset, that the Congress President alone was competent to speak on the general question, and he could only give his personal opinion. He felt that under a Constitution of the United States type, a real adjustment between the Muslim League and Congress would be possible. The Centre would have to retain responsibility for communications, etc., defence, foreign relations, special powers for emergency measures together with the right to tax for these purposes. But to secure this, the complete separation desired by Mr. Jinnah was not necessary, and it would be sufficient if more power were given to the units. He felt that Mr. Jinnah should accept this point of view. He considered the two-nation theory to be fallacious: if Mr. Jinnah pressed it unreasonably it would be necessary to proceed without accommodating him. The process of giving the Muslims a share in the administration must, he felt, be a democratic one.

In his view Mr. Jinnah’s stand would, if acceded to, result in civil war, but if he refused to come to an agreement, independence must nevertheless be granted, and given if necessary without him. No one should be allowed to arrest the process.

If Mr. Jinnah agreed to Provinces based on linguistic divisions (and this was what Congress had desired for many years) the Provinces should have greater autonomy than under the 1935 Act. The Centre’s powers should be limited, and the residual powers should rest with the Provinces. A United States of India was the ideal, the main executive function remaining with the Provinces.

As regards what was immediately possible, he pointed out that if Mr. Jinnah reached some agreement with the Congress, it would be easy to effect a settlement. He
stressed that a near failure of agreement [sic] on account of un-reasonableness must not stand in the way of a transfer in power. A Government should immediately be set up at the Centre, by asking Provinces to nominate persons to a panel from which the Viceroy could choose his Interim Government. Even if Sind and Bengal stood out, 27 out of India’s 32 crores would be represented. In his view the Punjab would come in. The Provisional Government summoned in this way would have the function of setting up a Constituent Assembly, negotiating with Mr. Jinnah if necessary, drawing up a Constitution for the new India, and conducting negotiations with the States. The British Government would have to make it clear that power had really been transferred to this Provisional Government, and any delay in the transfer would be highly dangerous.

**Conditions in Assam**

He then described the situation in Assam. The Province (with Sylhet included) had been a unit for about 3,000 years. The Assam kingdom had been maintained until the British arrived. At that time the district of Sylhet was a part of Bengal, and though there had been several attempts by the Muslims to conquer the Province, in 1901 there were only 7% of Muslims in the population excluding Sylhet. The juncture of Assam with Bengal in 1905 led to a large infiltration of Muslims with the result that the Muslim population had grown from 3 lakhs to 13 lakhs in the Assam valley proper. Only Muslim immigrants had entered, and in Assam with Sylhet district combined there were now 33.7% of Muslims. It was preposterous for Mr. Jinnah to say that the whole of Assam should be included in Pakistan.

In reply to Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr. Bardoloi said the Congress would not object to the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal, as its people and culture were predominantly Bengali. Before 1874, the district was administered by a Commissioner. In 1874 it was decided to include the district as part of Assam. In 1924 and again in 1926 the Assam Legislative Council passed a resolution that the district should be transferred to Bengal and a similar resolution was passed by the Bengal Legislative Council in 1926. Now, however, the Muslims of Sylhet opposed the separation of the district from Assam, as they gained advantages in the way of representation in Government services etc, and Sylhet being a permanently settled deficit district, which had to be maintained by the
people of Assam valley, the relations between the two regions were liable to be strained. This was the main argument for cutting off Sylhet from the Province.

It was a Province with considerable resources, but the Government of India by absorbing the royalties on oil had taken a great deal of money out of it. About 260 million lbs. of tea were produced every year, 90% of which was exported, but the export duty was realised by the Government of India in Calcutta, and the revenue lost to the Province. In return the Province, though one of the poorest got only 30 lakhs subvention from the Central Government. To enable Assam to utilize its resources in its own interest, he felt that the possible autonomy should be given to it.

In reply to a question from the Viceroy, Mr. Bardoloi said he could not agree that there was a large area of uncultivated land in Assam; this was Muslim League propaganda. The Muslim League had been sending in Muslims to occupy grazing areas, and these Muslims from Bengal were maiming and killing cattle and oppressing the inhabitants. On account of this, Sir Mohammed Saadullah had agreed that they should be evicted, but until now nothing had been done, and the present Government intended to carry out his policy in accordance with the agreement. It was incorrect to say that there was vacant land available. Much of the land was underwater for a large part of the year. It was true that in the hills there were undeveloped areas, but one had to avoid denudation, and most of the land would be required to make up economic holdings. In the valleys also, once land had been provided for those with uneconomic holdings (e.g., with less than one acre) there would not be enough land to go round. It was untrue that Congress was preventing the export of grain from the Province.

*The Hill Tribes.*

As regards the position of the hill tribes, he wished to produce a memorandum by the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, a Khasi Christian, and a Minister in the present Assam Government. The hill people were also anxious for some degree of autonomy, and although the tribes in the north of Assam were generally still somewhat savage, the relations between the hill people in the South and those in the Assam valley were friendly. The Khasis have an advanced form of democratic self-government. The Jaintias were also in an advanced state of civilization. He had no doubt that these tribes
would be willing to be associated with the Assam Government, though they would desire a high degree of autonomy. He would like Manipur State to be in a similar position and he said he hoped the Ruler would agree.

The tribes in the country north of the Brahmaputra would be administered by the Provincial Government as at present. Part of the cost was now being met out of provincial revenues, and the expenses of the Assam Rifles were shared between the Central and Provincial Governments. Some provision for external defence would be necessary, but he felt sure the Provincial resources were adequate to pay for administering this area. Sir Stafford Cripps pointed out that the matter would be one for arrangement between the Centre and the Provinces, and Mr. Bardoloi concurred.

The Secretary of State said that the Delegation wished at this stage to explore the situation. If there were to be a Pakistan region, including Eastern Bengal, Sylhet might go with Eastern Bengal. Did Mr. Bardoloi agree that on this hypothesis, the remainder of Assam could unite with the main part of India? Mr. Bardoloi replied that the loss of Sylhet would not make much difference to communications between Assam and the rest of India.

Mr. Bardoloi said that he was definitely against Pakistan, but the land tenures, etc., in Sylhet were similar to those in Bengal, and if there were a hypothetical United States of India, the district should form part of the Bengal area rather than the Assam area. He had no doubt that the Congress would be willing to meet the expenses of the tribal areas, though external defence would have to be paid for by the Centre.

The Constitution-making Body.

The Secretary of State informed Mr. Bardoloi that one purpose of their visit was to accelerate the setting up of a Constitution-making Body. What were Mr. Bardoloi’s views on the best method of selecting such a body? Mr. Bardoloi replied that he thought it was unnecessary to delay for adult franchise, and that representatives should be sent to sit with people from other Provinces. The selection need not, however, be limited to people with seats in the Legislature. The best people would be wanted, and there should be power to send names from any part of India and for the Constitution-making Body to co-opt in case of need. All communities should as far as possible be represented.
Even if Mr. Jinnah did not agree to the Interim Government, the Provinces should have the right to send in a panel of names not necessarily from the Province itself. Panels of names could be submitted by each Government as responsible to the Legislature, i.e., they would be selected rather than elected.

In conclusion, Mr. Bardoloi asked whether he could take any message from the Delegation. Sir Stafford Cripps said that he felt that it was for Indians to help at this stage, and the Secretary of State added that their cards had been placed on the table. They intended to make the independence of India an accomplished fact, and were whole-hearted and sincere in this attempt.

APPENDIX 4
REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSAM P.C.C.
Since June, 1948 till July, 1949

The Assam P.C.C., since its reorganization in June, 1948 last under the provisions of the interim proposals set forth by the AICC is strong for the furtherance of the Congress programme in two distinct spheres—organizational and constructive.

In the organizational sphere a long stride was made in the inclusion of five new districts in the Assam P.C.C. viz. Silchar, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Lushai Hills, Manipur state and Tripura state. The President, Sjt. Debeswar Sarmah, who is also a member of the Working Committee has toured, over and above the first three districts mentioned above, in the old districts of Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Dhuburi and Goalpara. The two Secretaries Jogen Saikia and Sri Sriman Prafulla Goswami have also taken extensive tours in almost all the districts in the province between them. Shri Prafulla Chandra Barooah, G.O.C., Assam Congress Seva Dal has also visited many districts organizing District Seva Dal Boards.

During this period of a year the P.C.C. held three sittings and the Provincial Working Committee was held six times. All timely and important subjects including administrative ones were discussed in these sittings. The last of the three Assam P.C.C. meetings held on 18.06.49 was by far the most important. The Committee in this session passed seven resolutions the first three of whom are as follows:--

1. In view of the affinity of the people of Assam with the people of Cooch Behar in their speaking language, customs and manners and their association as part and parcel of the old kingdom of Kamrupa (Assam), the people of Assam would welcome the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam, if the people of Cooch Behar so desire.

The Committee further request Government of India not to merge the state with any other state without ascertaining the will of the people by
democratic method, and request the President, to take up the matter with the Working Committee of the AICC.

2. With a view to ameliorate the condition of the large number of landless people and to Grow More Food this Committee request Government of Assam to expedite the matter of settlement of available lands with the landless people of the province and take necessary steps for growing more food.

3. The Assam Provincial Congress Committee is of the opinion that introduction of permit system to regulate and control entry of Pakistani citizens into Assam is essential to prevent mass infiltration of Pakistani citizens into this province. The Committee requests the Central Government to extend the act and take necessary steps for regulating the entry of Pakistani citizens to this province.

By the fourth resolution the Committee decided to have a standing army of 50 Seva Dal volunteers for every district and by another the Committee decided to open a Congress Workers’ Training Camp in the near future.

The District Congress Committees are now busy organizing ad-hoc Committees for new Congress Panchayats and enrolling members of the Congress. We have altogether 25 districts (every administrative subdivision being a district under the Assam P.C.C.) in our province, in 20 of which District Congress Committee are functioning. No Congress Committee could be formed in the other 5 districts all of whom are from excluded (Hill) areas as there were heavy restrictions against the entry of people from the valley to these areas and they are still lingering to a certain extent.

In the constructive sphere it can be said that the Government and the Congress are working hand in hand. Five basic schools under the compact area scheme are being run by the Constructive Work Department of the Assam P.C.C. Besides, the individual Congressmen are running 44 Constructive Work Centers in the province. Shri Nabin Chandra Kalita, Secretary of the Constructive Work Department, Assam P.C.C. has visited all these institutions and advised the workers of the line of action they are to follow.

The Assam P.C.C., moreover, is cooperating with and helping the Government in all their constructive activities. In organizing the co-operative societies under the cooperative scheme of the Government everywhere Congressmen are taking the lead
and taking the scheme to a success. Every Congressman is helping the formation of Rural Panchayats, 15 of which either have already been organized or being organized in the province this year.

Congressmen have also taken all pains to collect contributions for the Gandhi Memorial National Fund.

Assam being the frontier across which Communists activities are growing by leaps and bounds she has now assumed an importance which was never before felt. After the Communist Party of India has shifted their headquarters from Bombay to Calcutta there is the least possible doubt about the concentration of communist activities in this part of the country. Troubles and disorders created by the Communists are already raising their heads. To combat their propaganda and to give the publicity to the activities of the Congress, Assam P.C.C. has decided to bring out a monthly bulletin, the first issue of which is expected before the 15th of August next.

Source: APCC Papers, Institutional, List Number 28, Packet Number 5, File No. 1.
APPENDIX 5

A SHORT NOTE ON THE SUPPLY POSITION OF RICE AND PADDY IN THE YEAR 1950-51

1. The total quantity of rice procured in the year 1949-50 was 1, 69,177 tons. Out of this quantity, an amount of 10,300 tons rice was exported. After the earthquake due to the difficulties created in the affected areas, we had to ask for help from the Govt. of India and a total quantity of 4,500 tons rice was received by us from them as special help. Besides this, another quantity of 723 tons was received for supply in the affected areas as free gifts from East Pakistan, Kashmir, Patiala and others. A quantity of 500 tons of rice was also purchased from East Punjab and we were also allowed to procure and dispatch about 34000 maunds or rice from the surplus available in the Manipur State. In addition, to meet the emergent food situation with which the ITA was confronted, a special permission was also given by the Government of India for the supply of 20,000 maunds of rice on a barter system in exchange for Assam coal on the boundary of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills and the Sylhet districts.

2. As the rice position of the Govt. of India was not satisfactory and our commitments were, much greater than what could be allotted under the different heads detailed above, the Govt. of India also allotted us a total quantity of 16,500 tons of wheat for the first time to cope with the shortage of rice rations in the rationed areas and in meeting our Govt. commitments. Supply to the consumers was given in terms of both rice as well wheat and that is still continuing. In spite of all these additional help, the food position in the State was far from satisfactory and in the rural areas, people suffered enormously for lack of adequate supplies. Prices everywhere rose to phenomenal heights and they continued to be extremely high for months together. In many areas, at times the quantity issued was far less than the demand. Although people generally in the state, were not accustomed to consumption of wheat, still difficulties were so great that in spite of some difficulty at the beginning, all people including
labourers of the tea gardens started taking wheat under compelling circumstances, at varying proportions.

3. To meet with the great shortage of supplies in meeting Govt. Commitment, stocks of rice and paddy supposed to have been hoarded by speculators in the rural areas were subjected to seizure operations on a mass scale in certain specified localities known to be surplus and the whole administrative machinery was mobilized to near possible hoarded stocks. But the total quantity which could be actually recovered was far from being substantial.

4. The Kharif year 1948-49 was much better from every point of view and sufferings of the people were very much less than what they were in the year 1949-50. In that year the total procurement in terms of rice was 1,46,342 tons. This quantity was more or less sufficient to meet Govt. commitments and there was no export from this State. No special allotment was also made in that year by the Govt. of India.

5. It will, therefore, be seen that in spite of an increase of 22,835 tons in procurement in the Kharif year 1949-50, the food position was much worse than what it was in the year 1948-49. The reason is that though Govt. procurement improved, Govt. commitments showed a greater increase comparatively and the gap between Govt. procurement and Govt. commitments was much wider than it was the case in the year 1948-49. There was considerable loss of food crops in the earthquake and flood affected areas for which special help became necessary. The communal disturbances in the early part of 1950 also accounted for substantial loss of foodgrains in the effected districts. But it is to be noted that we received from the Govt. of India a total quantity of 21,000 tons in rice and wheat, as a special supply to meet with our difficulties. Even making allowance for the quantity of 10,300 tons of rice exported by the State in the early part of 1950, still the special additional help from the Govt. of India in the year 1949-50, there was undoubtedly shortage of supplies everywhere which has special significance of its own. Procurement in the year 1949-50 could be satisfactory because the crops were excellent and there was no unusual natural calamity like flood, drought etc. Govt. commitments in the year 1949-50, however, increased so much that inspite of much heavier procurement and
special help from the Govt. of India, there was acute shortage and high price everywhere and we had to live from hand to mouth without any reserves whatsoever.

6. Another significant factor in the food situation in the state in the year 1949-50 was that there was hardly any smuggling of rice and paddy from Assam to any part of East Pakistan which even in the year 1948-49 was a great head-ache for the supply Department. Prices on the Pakistan side were all along lower than our prices in the year 1949-50 and we can even take into account that in the border areas some rice and paddy did actually come to our side of the state by smuggling from East Pakistan.

7. The reasons for this phenomenal increase in Govt. commitments in the year 1949-50 are mainly influx of Hindu refugees much more than the registered number which alone is 5,25,000, return of large numbers of Muslim immigrants who abandoned their lands in the early part of 1950 due to communal disturbances and went away to East Pakistan and special demands created in the areas affected by earthquake and subsequent floods.

8. Procurement prospects in the year 1950-51 are extremely dark. Large scale destruction of foodgrains during the communal disturbances in several districts and loss of foodgrains in the granaries and fields in the earthquake and flood affected areas will make their full impact felt only in the current year. The total amount of foodgrains lost due to these reasons as ascertained from the district officers comes to *80,582 tons (vide statements at flags “F”, “G” and “J”). Due to the communal disturbances, an area of 49,790 acres remained uncultivated, inspite of special arrangements for cultivating lands abandoned by Muslim migrants with the help of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan on a temporary basis. Standing crops in different districts of the State adversely affected by unusual drought and insects and loss of foodgrains on this account is estimated at 1,05,89 tons (vide flag J). Large tracts of cultivable lands in the areas affected
by the earthquake have been rendered completely unsuitable for any kind of
cultivation and this has happened in such wide area scattered over entire Upper
Assam and the large areas covered by the hills of the frontier that it will take
quite a long time to accurately assess the total loss sustained by the State in that
respect. Even preliminary surveys carried on by local officers in the affected
areas became impossible and the large number of families which are necessary
for Govt. to resettle in other areas of the state away from the original villages
will indicate that the total area affected by the earthquake, at least for some time,
is colossal. Areas like North Lakhimpur Sub-Division, which used to be heavily
surplus in the normal course and which used to feed the deficit areas in the
Dibrugarh sub-divisional and the frontier tracts have themselves now become
liabilities for the supply Department. The year 1949-50 was especially attractive
for jute cultivation, as the price of jute all along remained at a level much higher
than it was at any time before in the past. Areas which are suitable for paddy
cultivation are also fit for jute and as such larger areas in the districts of
Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Cachar and Nowgong, where it was usual to grow
paddy, were converted into field for growing jute. Due to the control measures
adopted by Govt. for the procurement of foodgrains, Muslim migrants settled in
the State have naturally found it more attractive to direct their lands to jute
cultivation in place of paddy. Although a detailed accurate survey in that respect
will take some time to be completed, still the figures collected, so far and other
in the process of collection will indicate that loss of foodgrains due to the
extension of jute cultivation in preference to paddy has also been a very vital
factor in affecting the total food resources of the State. All these factors make it
definite that our total procurement in the year 1950-51 will be much less than it
was in the year 1949-50 and even on a most optimistic calculation, the total
procurement is not expected to exceed in any case 1,35,000 tons. As against that,
our commitments in the year 1950-51 are definitely higher than what they were
in the year 1949-50. We shall have to feed large numbers of people affected by
the earthquake and floods for the whole year instead of supplying their
requirements only for a limited period, as was the case in the year 1949-50. The
refugees who came in 1950 have mostly remained and it is only reasonable to
expect that most of them will not be able to grow any foodgrains for themselves till at least the next harvest. Due to the seizure of foodgrains on a large scale in the surplus zones and release of hoarded stocks in the market under stress of high prices coupled with intensive requirement, reserve stocks in the rural areas have been very considerably depleted and it is perfectly certain that our commitments in the rural areas will be a major factor in the year 1950-51. As Procurement policy in the 1950-51 envisages strict control of movement of foodgrains from one Zone to another, deficit areas of the State will be more dependent upon Govt. resources which was never the case in the past.

9. At least 1,50,000 people living on the Pakistan border areas of Garo Hills, K & J Hills, Lushai Hills districts and the Karimganj Sub-Division, who normally depend upon supplies of rice and paddy from the adjoining districts of East Pakistan are being fed by Govt. and they will continue to be the sole responsibilities of Govt. in the year 1950-51.

10. Due to all these factors, Government’s monthly commitments in the year 1950-51 will be 18,750 tons. This makes a quantity of 2,25,000 tons necessary to be procured by Government in the year 1950-51 for meeting their commitments. As against that, our estimated procurement is 1,35,000 tons only in the maximum. There is, therefore, a shortfall of 1,13,000 tones in our supplies in 1950-51 including 28,000 tons as closing reserve and 5,000 tons as carry-over and if this gap is not made up by supplies from the Govt. of India, it is certain that the food situation in the state will be beyond any one’s control. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that this state receives an allotment of at least 75,000 tons of rice from the Govt. of India in the year 1950-51 the rest of the deficit being met by the allotment of 24,000 tons wheat already made by the Govt. of India and severe austerity measures which will be undertaken under compelling circumstances. We have at present in our stock only 6178 tons (vide statement at flag-N) which is sufficient to meet our requirements only for 10 days. The prices of rice and paddy inspite of the new harvest are unusually high in several districts and
unless we can reduce our pressure on the market for at least a month, the price level will not come down to reasonable limits, to make Govt. procurement at controlled price possible. The present rate of procurement is extremely unsatisfactory and there is no prospect of any improvement in the position unless we can slacken our purchases in the market for some time at the very beginning. A comparative statement of procurement in the months of November and December in the year 1948-49 (vide flag L) will explain the position more accurately. This slackening on our present hapless stock position is impossible and it is, therefore, absolutely essential that we start the year with some reserve stock from the Govt. of India. We started the year 1950 with a stock in hand amounting to 15,723 tons. Unless therefore we urgently receive at least 25,000 tons of rice from the Govt. of India in one installment with which we can start our procurement in the current season, there is no prospect of our own procurement position being established for keeping the situation under control. With this immediate allotment from the Govt. of India, it will be possible for us to have better control over the market which will ultimately result in better procurement as the season advances and it may be possible for us in due course to even do without any further help from India. But if we do not get at least 25,000 tons of rice immediately, it is certain that the situation will remain beyond control and the Govt. of India will be compelled by circumstances to allot much more such supplies to be state, than it would be the case otherwise.

The surplus available in the Manipur State and the Tripura State may be allowed to be dispatched to Assam immediately, as there is no other outlet for that surplus except through Assam and the supply will take minimum time and transport to reach the areas where it is needed most.

Source: APCC Papers, Packet Number 35, File Number 5 (a), Institutional, List Number 28, NMML, New Delhi.
APPENDIX 6

CONGRESS SEWA DAL

Tour impressions, suggestions & instructions to the Congress Sewa Dal Assam.

Impressions:

There certainly exists a feeling in favor of voluntary service, especially in the villages which if properly channelized and made use of, will help a long way in developing at least a loose volunteer organization on a very extensive scale.

Sewa Dal as an organization has made some progress as compared with the conditions existed two years back when I visited the province. This time I could see workers and works done by Dal volunteers though I could not meet all the volunteers who are supposed to be in large numbers. This was due to some defects in arrangements and communication of the programme of my visit.

Except a few top ranking individuals, Congress workers seem to take very little interest or give necessary importance to this activity. In this connection it is necessary to bear in mind that volunteers especially an organization cannot be built up at the eleventh hour when one would need it very badly. So, money spent and the energies utilized at this stage is a sort of an investment that would bring better return in future.

Suggestions:- (1) A loose organization should be encouraged to be developed as much as possible, trying at the same time for a nucleus at the Pradesh and district levels. Where conditions are favorable a nucleus at the local level instead of district level may also be attempted.

(2) More attention should be given towards the training of workers and volunteers from an organizational point of view. Workers when possible should be sent to training camp conducted by the all India office of Sewa Dal. As many primary training classes as possible should be conducted locally, strictly according to the notes publish for this purpose.
(3) A well planned rally in any convenient from should be organized in near future. It would be better if one rally takes place in Manipur State and another in Assam proper.

(4) It seems that district Sewa Dal Boards practically serve no purpose to the Dal organization or to its responsible workers. These Boards could be said to be useful only if they could use their influence in collection of funds and act as liaisons between the Dal units and the congress committee. The Pradesh Sewa Dal Board is also expected to perform these two functions amongst others things.

(5) The P.C.C. should progressively spend a reasonable share of its annual budget on Sewa Dal organization every year as the work increases. It is expected that the expenses incurred on office and the tour of the Samyojak be first met by the P.C.C. then any other item of Sewa Dal.

Instructions:

(1) Provincial office should immediately be set up at Gauhati and some one of the trained workers of Sewa Dal should also be present at the Head quarters. He could also look after Sewa Dal organization in Gauhati.

(2) Instead of starting Sewa Dal in all districts in the provinces our limited energy, finance and workers should be concentrated on few selected districts where local workers are available and where the D.C.C. is prepared to shoulder the financial burden necessary to carry on Dal activities.

(3) Meeting of volunteers and workers at a fixed place, time & day or days in a month as a regular feature of Dal activity should be insisted. Also monthly reports should be insisted from the units.

(4) A Dal Patrika or bulletin in any form should be brought out every month for the information and guidance of the workers. Dal literature should also be brought out in the provincial language.

(5) Workers qualified for the purpose should only be appointed to responsible posts and conduct training. Those who are not qualified should be sent to training camps conduct by the A.I. Office.
12.5.54

(S.V. Inamdar)

Source: APCC files, Packet Number 49, File Number 2 (ii), Institutional, List Number 28, NMML, New Delhi.
Appendix 7

A part of “Press Statement on Assam Tour” Written by Jawaharlal Nehru

For four days and three nights I toured up and down the valley of the Brahmaputra in Assam and visited many places, both in towns and villages. The tour was all too brief and yet with a maximum of rapid movement (except walking difficulties and minor motor niggles) and a minimum of rest, I covered a great deal of ground and many people and during my night-time hours I travelled about eight hundred miles and visited Guwhati, Nagaon, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, and Boko and stopped for a brief while at many other places. I also saw the usual mass meetings throughout and pressed my main object was two-fold: to meet my Congress colleagues and fellow-workers, to confer with them about the work to be done, to receive criticisms from the pleasant and amiable people of Assam, and to understand the situation in the province. Secondly to meet executives from Burma to find out what was being done for them and what more could be done.

I was happy to be back in Assam with its wide rivers and its freely fascinating
frogs and lovely scenery, and above all its
charms. She always impresses me as being
the best socialist and she is not easily fallen.

I am always close to the British folk and wish
that I could be of more service to them.

I found my mind most frequently to that have
young woman, 'Gwendolyn,' styled the Dane, who
has been in a British jail now for twelve
long years, and still she is there. Even in
obscurity and infamy, she has grown from folded to spread
wings. She was remembered, an innocent. When her
simple people and a warning to the less of
the future, that holds her hands.

Arizona has always impressed me
with its great potential strength and
possibilities, embodied as far by men, as
women by those who wield nothing. It is
a reality linked into its ancients and
forests and untried acres; only to be
known and feared.

I see the spirit and
enthusiasm. Men, people, fire in the
eyes of the boys and girls, which will all
the threats and petty that constitute them be
victors' of the great rally of the Shearith Geen.
Appendix - 8

Gopinath Bardoloi’s correspondence with Jawaharlal Nehru regarding Sylhet disturbances, 1946

Page 8

My dear Sir,

I am writing in behalf of the Madhuri Ladies’ Association to convey our appreciation of the efforts taken by you for the prosperity of Sylhet. We deeply appreciate the steps taken to settle the disturbances in the region.

We would also like to convey our gratitude for the assistance given by you in the development of the area.

We hope that your visit to Sylhet will be a success.

Yours sincerely,

Gopinath Bardoloi

Source: G.N. Bardoloi papers, correspondence with Nehru, Jawaharlal, Serial Nos. 57, 58,
NMML, New Delhi
APPENDIX – 9

The mighty river Brahmaputra of Assam with numerous logs of woods and tree trunks which were dislodged from the hill areas due to the 15th August, 1950 Earthquake floating down the broad expanse of the river. (Courtesy: The Hindustan Standard, 29 August, 1950).
APPENDIX – 10

A village in North Lakhimpur totally submerged in the floods which followed after the Earthquake of 1950. (Courtesy – The Hindustan Standard, 29 August, 1950).
APPENDIX – 11

Sri Gopinath Bordoloi, Chief Minister of Assam from 11 February, 1946 – 6 August 1950.
APPENDIX – 12

Sri Bishnuram Medhi, Chief Minister of Assam from 9 August 1950 – 27 December, 1957.
Reflections on the Politics of Immigration Problem in Assam: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract: The initial euphoria of independence from colonial rule in India soon subsided when Assam, one of the northeastern states of the country had to face a major challenge in the form of immigration into its territory. This was however not a post – colonial phenomenon. Immigration was a colonial policy designed to accomplish imperialistic designs of the British rulers. The paper explores the historical origins of the problem of immigration in colonial and post – colonial Assam and the politics that was being played within it which escalated the magnitude of the problem.

In the post – independence period, apathy of the central and state government, faulty laws and policies have led to burgeoning of the problem. Construction of illegal vote banks has enabled politicians without performance to keep returning to power. This has led to a sense of insecurity among the indigenous people of Assam whose socio – cultural identity remains threatened in the backdrop of unchecked immigration.

Keywords: Assam, demography, East Bengal, immigration, insecurity, identity.

I. Introduction

Independence of India in 1947 gave rise to many expectations among the people. In Assam too, people belonging to different communities had started to nurture new hopes, dreams and aspirations. But only very few of these dreams and aspirations saw the light of the day. The war and partition proved disastrous for Assam as she was bogged down by many problems and challenges. Food scarcity, natural disasters like perennial floods and the Great Earthquake of 1950, poverty and unemployment were only a few to name. But among these issues, the problem of immigration was a particularly serious one as it had its repercussions in the demography and politics of Assam even in the post – colonial period. This paper sets out to explore the historical origins of the problem of immigration in Assam and the politics that was being played within it which escalated the magnitude of the problem. The importance of policies taken in the colonial era to understand the conditions under which immigration was facilitated is sought to be deconstructed. The response of the governments in the post – colonial period have also been encompassed.

Assam is a strategically located state in the northeastern part of India. It is surrounded by six Indian states and two foreign countries. It has an area of 78,550 square kilometers with a total population of 31 million making it the 14th most populated state in India. It has a population density of 397 per square kilometer which is higher than the all – India population density of 382 per square kilometer [1]. To the west and southwest of Assam are two states which are predominantly Bengali. They are West Bengal (population 91 million) and Tripura (population 3 million) respectively [2]. Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) with a population of 15 crores and population density of 1033.5 per square kilometer, also with Bengali speaking majority, borders Assam. Thus Assam shares her borders with 24.4 crore of Bengali speaking population.

Immigration during the post – colonial period in Assam, did not capture the Indian popular imagination like the conflict in Kashmir and Punjab. Perhaps because of the fact that “Assam and the northeast are very far away; a ‘sensitive border region’ to use an Indian cliché; the image it evokes is of a borderland full of deviants conducting subversion” [3]. Two major factors that helped to keep the immigration issue out of the political agenda in the pre – 1979 period were firstly, the ethnic tensions arising from the language conflict which had occupied most of the space in the political discussions of that time and secondly the tacit agreement among political parties (including the Congress party) to come to a decision that immigration was a contentious issue and hence left safe if unattended to [4].

Undocumented and large scale immigration becomes problematic for any country to tackle as it causes drastic changes in the demographic balance of that country. But it raises higher and greater questions on political repercussions when immigration is dispensed by enfranchising ‘refugees’ and ‘illegal immigrants’ alike as was allegedly done by the Congress party of Assam until the 1970’s [5]. Consequent to the partition of India in 1947, there occurred a huge movement of people into India from neighboring countries. Assam was one of the states of India to be affected by the process of immigration in a way that has challenged the demographic dimensions of the state as influx into this northeastern arm of the country did not cease even in the aftermath of the partition, as in Punjab. Hence it is imperative to delve into the historical origins of this problem.
II. Historical Origins of the Problem

The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) between the British and the Burmese resulted in the victory of the East India Company in Assam. The state was incorporated into the Bengal Presidency in 1838. This territorial integration of Assam into colonial India opened the frontal gates for new settlements. With the introduction of Bengali as the official language, reorganization of Assam meant inducting many Bengalis in the administration department. Meanwhile, the repressive policies followed by the zamindars in East Bengal required the revolutionist elements to be exported to another area. Assam seemed to be a favorable option as many cultivable lands here were much more as compared to the availability of land in East Bengal. At the same time, the peasants of East Bengal flocked into Assam to carry out jute cultivation. The requirement of cheap labor to work in the tea industry encouraged many laborers from the Chotanagpur region to migrate to Assam as well. The discovery of coal and petroleum towards the later part of the 19th century opened the flood gates of immigration into Assam as streams of people started coming in mainly from Bengal, Bihar, Nepal and Rajasthan. This manpower was needed to run various departments, construct roads and railways, excavate the hidden coalmines and to work in various service sectors. Therefore the colonial government decided to boost the flow of immigrants to fulfill their imperialist goals.

The Bengali Muslims from Mymensingh and Rangpur of East Bengal in eager anticipation of settlement in Assam had started to grab lands at whatever price they could get. These Bengali Muslims cleared vast tracts of dense jungles along the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and occupied flooded lowlands all along it. Therefore to prevent indiscriminate settlement of immigrants, the government took certain measures. In 1916 according to the rules of land settlement, the government authorized the Deputy Commissioner to drive out immigrants who had not acquired appropriate right on a piece of land within three months of notice. The introduction of the Line System in 1920 which empowered the district officers to draw lines in order to restrict immigrants from occupying new lands, eliminated the developing tensions between the Assamese Hindus and the immigrant Muslims. The movements of the immigrants were restricted within defined tracts. Apart from the British rulers, the approach adopted as regards immigration by one of the foremost political leaders of modern Assam, Syed Mohammed Saadulla (Muslim League) should also be taken into account. A qualified parliamentarian, Saadulla was a great rationalist who was willing to assist the Britishers so as to usher constitutional reforms in the country. Saadulla’s role becomes significant when we encounter with the fact that the land settlement policies followed by him, in violation with the Line System, gave indications to the Assamese elite that his Muslim League government in Assam was promoting the inflow of Muslims into the territory of Assam so that in due course of time it could be converted into a Muslim majority province [6].

Saadulla’s introduction of the land settlement policy opened up 1 lakh bighas of land in Assam Valley for the settlement of Bengali Muslim immigrants during 1939–1940 and proved very beneficial to these land hungry peasants who could hold as much as 30 bighas of land or more for each homestead [7]. Saadulla’s government of 1942 further revised the regulations regarding grazing and forest reserves only to facilitate the incoming of more immigrants from East Bengal [8]. This second wave of immigration to Assam created quite a stir in Gopinath Bardoloi’s mind, who had been imprisoned in Jorhat jail since August, 1942 in connection with the Quit India Movement. The Line System was blatantly violated as streams of immigrants were permitted to enter and settle in the state. The flow of immigrants was so outrageously high that Saadulla at one point of time had to himself admit that Muslim immigrants had flooded the state [9]. But ironically he adhered to the policy of abandonment of the line system. It must be noted here that apart from the British and the Muslim League, Jawaharlal Nehru was also in favor of open borders. The reason cited was to implement the ‘grow more food’ campaign and meet the production demands. With the patronage of the British and political leaders, the population of Muslim immigrants saw a perceptible increase as revealed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Muslim Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3,55,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>5,85,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>9,43,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>13,03,962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The table shows that between the years 1911 to 1941, the Muslim population in the Assam Valley (including Garo Hills) had substantially increased. This increase in Muslim population resulted in the demand for the creation of a separate state for the Muslims. In 1940 the Lahore resolution of the All India Muslim League voted for a separate homeland for the Muslims of the country. Echoing this demand, Saadulla said, “The Pakistan Scheme demands that in order to avoid conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims they should live separately and establish separate states...If the Muslims be in majority in Assam then Assam and Bengal can
form one Pakistan State and Punjab, North West Frontier Province and Sind can form another Pakistan State.”

The issue of immigration was discussed in the Assam Legislative Assembly, within and outside Congress from different perspectives. Sarveswar Barua (Congress) submitted a motion in the Assembly to highlight the troubles faced by indigenous people due to the land settlement policy of the government [12]. Bringing an Adjournment Motion in the Assembly on 16 November, 1944, another Congressman Beliram Das pointed out the forcible occupation of grazing reserves by immigrants from Bengal [13]. To this, Saadulla proposed to hold an All Party Conference where the earlier policies on land settlement would be revised. Though the Conference put forward certain proposals for consideration, however a mutually acceptable resolution on land settlement could not be arrived at as the revised policies were strongly opposed by Revenue Minister Munawwar Ali and Finance Minister Abdul Matin Choudhury, both belonging to the Muslim League.

The Muslim members of Saadulla’s ministry differed from their Congress counterparts regarding immigration. For instance, in 1945 responding to Maulavi Matior Rahman Mia’s enquiry about the presence of number of settled immigrants in Assam, Maulavi Munawwar Ali informed that their number could not be ascertained. Several Muslim Leaguers like Maulavi Matior Rahman Mia wanted that the government should open up vast tracts of wastelands for settlement of immigrants [14]. Munawwar Ali interestingly wanted to keep on postponing the discussion regarding the Adjournment Motion on immigration raised by Beliram Das [15]. However on the persistence of the then Speaker, Babu Basanta Kumar Das, the motion was apty raised and a lively discussion took place in the Assembly. In this way, though the rays of legislative politics fell on the question of immigration, yet nothing concrete could be done to restrain it in the colonial period. In fact, as it is obvious from the above description, Muslim population of the state went on increasing, culminating to the demand for inclusion of Assam with East Pakistan. Meanwhile land for the immigrants was being settled in accordance with the policy laid down by the government.

2.1 Cabinet Mission Plan and Assam:

The Cabinet Mission’s proposals to carve a confederation of two groups of provinces which would be formed on the basis of religion, i.e., Hindus and Muslims, was met with deep resentment by the Assamese public opinion.

When the recommendations of the Plan were announced, it gave rise to panic among the people of Assam. One of the clauses envisaged the division of provinces of India into sections A, B and C. Assam according to Section C was to be grouped along with Bengal and become a Muslim majority province. This violated the basic principle of provincial autonomy because of which Assam and particularly the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) (the state level Congress Committee) reacted immediately. The Working Committee of the APCC sent a telegraph to the then Congress President Abul Kalam Azad on 16 May, 1946 communicating their decision of opposing the grouping clause of the Cabinet Mission. A five member Committee was formed to organize an anti - grouping movement in the province. It was decided that 5 June would be observed as the ‘anti – grouping day’. The APCC rose to the occasion and made an appeal to the various organizations, students and youths to sensitize and mobilize public opinion on the issue of grouping. Bardoloi also wanted the Congress volunteers to prepare themselves for a mass movement in the wake of the Congress Working Committee’s session on 10 June in which Bardoloi feared that the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission would be accepted in its entirety, which would mean that Assam would be grouped with East Bengal. Bardoloi was thus ready to go against his own party to save Assam’s future. The APCC also shared similar concerns with Bardoloi.

The response to Bardoloi’s call was felt in different directions. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha fully supported Bardoloi and its General Secretary, Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury announced that he would go on a fast unto death strike to save Assam from being grouped. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Communist Party of India in Assam also lodged their respective reservations against the Cabinet Mission. The Muslims of Assam had different opinions on the issue. The Muslim League and the Muslims of the Surma Valley favored the grouping. Saadulla held the view that Assam was dependent on Bengal for economic purposes and grouping would help in administration of Assam. According to him, the Cabinet Mission had shown ‘great statesmanship’ in grouping Assam with Bengal [16]. On the other hand, the Assamese Muslims were confused regarding acceptance of the proposals of the Cabinet Mission. On one hand they wanted to preserve their Assamese ties with the greater Assamese population but on the other hand accepting the grouping clauses would imply increase in the numerical strength of the Muslim community.

Throughout Assam 5 June was observed as the ‘anti – grouping day’. Meetings and processions were carried out in towns across Kamrup, Nowgong, Jorhat, Darrang, Goalpara and North Lakhimpur districts. Lawyers, students, women and youths came out in support of APCC’s call for opposition to the Cabinet Mission’s grouping plan.
As noted earlier, the Muslim League welcomed the formation of groups. Mohammed Ali Jinnah justified the grouping on the ground of availability of the provision of opting out of it, if the identity of the province was threatened. But Bardoloi steadfastly opposed the proposed grouping of Assam and was not ready for any compromise. On the other hand, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan on 10 August, 1946 and had planned to proceed with the Constituent Assembly. The national Congress particularly Nehru and Azad, dismissed off Assam’s concerns expressed by Bardoloi as ‘unjustified’ [17].

As per the decision of the APCC, Gopinath Bardoloi submitted a Memorandum to the Congress Working Committee on December 9, 1946 expressing firm determination to reject the Grouping clause. He wrote,

“If Her Majesty’s Government’s proposals are to be accepted both our constitution as well as Grouping will be determined by the majority of the Constituent Assembly Members sitting in Group ‘C’, with the inevitable result that we shall be thrown entirely at the mercy of the Muslim League both for our provincial constitution as well as our Grouping. With this perspective of a Section before us, we, the members of the Constituent Assembly from Assam, can have but only one decision; and, that is that we refuse to go to that section.” [18]

In this regard it must be mentioned that the Working Committee of the National Congress had offered little help to the Congressmen of Assam on the course of action to be adopted. Instead, Nehru and Azad persuaded the Assam delegation to shed off their fears about the grouping. However, Mahatma Gandhi was much more supportive than the National Congress in understanding the concerns of the people. Therefore the APCC sent two Congress workers namely, Bijoy Chandra Bhagabati and Mohendra Mohan Choudhury to meet him on 15 December, 1946 to acquire advice on this matter. Gandhiji clearly remarked,

“I do not need a single minute to come to a decision for on this I have a mind….if there is no clear guidance from the Congress Working Committee Assam should not go into the sections. It should lodge its protest and retire from the Constituent Assembly. It will be a kind of Satyagraha against the Congress for the good of the Congress….If Assam keeps quiet it is finished. No one can force Assam to do what it does not want to do.” [19]

Gandhiji’s encouragement to the Assam Congress leaders helped them to frame their mind regarding the stand to be adopted on the Cabinet Mission Plan. Bardoloi thereby informed Nehru that Assam would firmly go by Gandhiji’s advice and frame her own Constitution. The AICC at a plenary session in January 1947 reviewed the situation for the people of Assam in the wake of similar reservations expressed by the Sikhs. In a resolution adopted on 6 January, 1947, the AICC stated that the provinces of the country should be vested with the power of deciding their own fate, should they be compelled to join another province which might endanger their autonomy and rights. But this resolution could assuage the fears of neither the non-Muslim Assamese nor the APCC. The latter consistently reiterated its stand of framing the province’s Constitution only by its own representatives. In the face of Assam’s unswerving opposition to the Cabinet Mission’s Grouping Plan, the recommendations of the Plan could not be materialized and it remained, for all its purposes, null and void. Lord Wavell was replaced as the Viceroy of India and in his place Mountbatten was appointed. Mountbatten was convinced that the Cabinet Mission was unsuitable for the country in the changed circumstances. Therefore, partition of the country on communal basis was inevitable.

2.2 Partition and Transfer of Sylhet

Lord Louis Mountbatten as the last Viceroy of British India was entrusted with the responsibility of making an arrangement for transfer of power. He constructed a Plan wherein the country would be divided on a communal basis. As it came to be known, the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June, 1947 envisaged partition of India and formation of a new Constituent Assembly. Regarding Assam, the Mountbatten Plan recognized the demand for inclusion of Sylhet district within East Bengal and announced that a referendum would be the deciding factor for ascertaining the geographical future of Sylhet. The Sylhet referendum resulted in the transfer of majority portion of Sylhet with East Pakistan whereas the three thanas of Pathankandi, Ratabari and Badarpur and about one half of the thana of Karimganj remained in Assam.

III. Politics of Immigration in Post – Colonial Period

In the post – colonial period, the Assamese emerged as the dominant section of the society asserting their power in the government. The Bengali Muslims of East Bengali origin residing in Assam started to feel insecure amidst the growing dominance of the Assamese. They were already apprehending expulsion from India in the wake of the passage of the Immigrants Expulsion (from Assam) Act in 1950xii. In the changed circumstances the Bengali Muslims decided to appease the Assamese people by declaring their mother tongue as Assamese and by endorsing the pro – Assamese government on the official language issue for the state. This covert pact of understanding went on for some time. Problems started to crop up after the creation of
Bangladesh. The 1971 Indo–Bangladesh war was followed by another major influx from Bangladesh to Assam. Around 10 million people crossed over to Indian borders due to fear of religious persecution and political pressure. Many of these people stayed back and mixed with the mainstream of Assamese socio-cultural life. In 1971, the census reported an increase of 820,000 Muslims or approximately 424,000 more than could be accounted for by natural population increase in Assam [20]. According to government estimates, the population of Assam increased from 14.6 million in 1971 to 19.9 million in 1981[21].

The Accord paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party, namely the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) which came to power in 1985. However the party failed to take responsibility for the immigrants who had entered illegally before 25 March, 1971, i.e., before the birth of Bangladesh. In 1979, shortly before the parliamentary election, the Chief Election Commissioner, S. L. Shaskdher stated that the electoral rolls for Assam had been inflated by the inclusion of illegal Bengali migrants from Bangladesh. This news sent waves of panic across the entire Brahmaputra Valley. It was hence apparent that the conscious Assamese people opposed the 1979 parliamentary elections. The AASU came forward demanding that the electoral rolls be prepared again to eliminate those who had entered India illegally. A civil disobedience movement was soon called as no agreement could be reached regarding the revision of electoral rolls. Thus with the launch of the Assam Movement, the first organized resistance for expulsion of immigrants took place, with the movement turning violent in places like Nellie (near Nowgong district), Chaulkhowachapori (Darrang district) and Silapathar (Lakhimpur district). A six year long agitation came to an end with the signing of the Assam Accord between the Government of India and the leaders of the movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The Accord paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party, namely the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) which came to power in 1985. However the party failed to implement the provisions of the Assam Accord in both of its tenures (24 December 1985 – 28 November 1990 and 15 May 1996 – 17 May 2001). “The growth of population in Assam during 1951 – 2001 was 136.38 per cent against the national growth rate of 116.30 per cent” [22]. The inordinate delay in implementing the core issues of the Accord, like detection of illegal foreigners, fencing the India – Bangladesh border and scrapping the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 [xvi] (which was actually the biggest deterrent in the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants) led to loss of trust in the AGP government by the people of Assam which was ultimately thrown out of power from the state politics.

During the years of Congress government’s rule too, the issue of immigration has not been addressed sincerely. The Congress party which had so intensely opposed the Cabinet Mission’s Grouping Plan to include Assam in the Muslim – majority province of East Bengal changed its policy towards immigrants and began to utilize them as vote banks for securing political advantages in elections. As a result immigration has only increased day by day. The presence of illegal immigrants in Assam was explicitly pronounced in a July 2008 verdict of the Gauhati High Court. In a case involving 61 people who were detected ‘foreigners’, the court said that most of them were able to avoid their deportation from India and that they had incorporated their names in the voters’ lists on the basis of which they had cast their votes. The court also noted that ‘large number of Bangladeshis’ in the state played a major role in electing representatives both to the Legislative Assembly and Parliament and consequently, in the decision – making process of the country. There are also more than 38,000 declared foreigners from Bangladesh in the state who are yet to be deported. Many of those who were detected even disappeared mysteriously and are now ‘traceless’ [23]. Porous borders and apathy of the Central and state governments to implement the main clauses of the Accord have resulted in inaction regarding detection and deportation of illegal immigrants. The process of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) which could have helped in the detection of illegal immigrant settlers in Assam has not seen the light of the day and remains a mere farce.

IV. Conclusion

The Human Development Report, 2009 titled ‘Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development’ states, “Large gains to human development can be achieved by lowering the barriers to movement and improving the treatment of movers” [24]. Western nations owe a major part of their existence to migration. They have indulged in celebratory acts of welcoming migrants resulting in expansion of culture. However such celebration cannot be performed in a state like Assam where questions of immigration have started to cast shadows of concern on the realm of identity [25].

The initial benefits of immigration have been replaced by a fear of outsiders threatening the socio-cultural and economic identities of the indigenous people and simultaneously also causing shifts in the demographic balance. Today immigration problem has virtually burgeoned into a curse. Lack of political will of the ruling parties in Assam to come to a mutually agreeable solution on the vexed issue has worsened the situation. It may be noted here that after a long hiatus the issue of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh has been revived on the Centre’s agenda. “Both the UPA – I and UPA – II governments maintained a stoic silence over the controversial issue. The Manmohan Singh Government initially acknowledging existence of illegal migrants, in the Rajya Sabha, later retracted the statement” [26]. The hope now lies in what policies the
Narendra Modi – led government adopts to expel the illegal immigrants from Assam. In this context strong public opinion will be helpful to put pressure on the current NDA government.

Acknowledgement

The financial assistance in the form of a Doctoral Fellowship from Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, India received by the author is gratefully acknowledged. The author is also grateful to Dr. Sandhya Goswami, Professor, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Assam for giving her valuable comments and guidance in the preparation of this paper.

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Notes

i On the evening of 15th August, 1950 an earthquake measuring 8.6 in the Richter scale had struck the state letting loose a chain of devastation of lives and property. The energy of this shock was felt over an area of 1.75 million square miles. This great earthquake brought about destruction over large tracts of Upper Assam and in the hills of the North – East Frontier Agency.

ii For six hundred years Assam was ruled by the Ahoms, a Shan Tribe. Internal dissensions gradually weakened the Ahom central administration. Badan Chandra Barphukan, Chief of Ahom forces connived with the Burmese asking support to invade Assam and defeat his political rival, Purnananda Burahagohain, the Prime Minister of the Ahom kingdom. The British authorities meanwhile grew increasingly insecure about the presence of the
Burmese so near to Calcutta, which was already under their (British) control. So in order to confront the Burmese, the British interfered and thus the first Anglo-Burmese War took place in 1826. It resulted in the fall of the Ahom kingdom and British annexation of Assam.

iii Bigha is a traditional unit of land used in several parts of India. It is usually less than an acre (0.4 hectare), however it can extend up to 3 acres. Various states have different sizes ascribed to 1 Bigha.

iv The first wave was the labor force imported from tribal regions of Bihar to work in the fields and the third and fourth waves were Bengali Muslims from East Bengal. These are known as the four waves of migration to Assam.

v Gopinath Bardoloi was the first Chief Minister of Assam in independent India. He was an eminent Congressman, a freedom fighter and a strict Gandhian. He opposed the Cabinet Mission’s recommendations and played a pivotal role in saving Assam from being ‘grouped’ with East Bengal. He was also instrumental in establishing the Gauhati University and the High Court of Assam, Assam Medical College and Assam Veterinary College.

vi In the period following independence, most parts of India were facing food shortage problem due to rise in population, devastating Bengal famine in 1943 which affected the supply of food grains in the whole of India, and because of hoarding and black marketing of food supplies. To raise food supplies, increase production of food and check inflation, the Grow More Food Campaign was introduced by the colonial government in 1942. Nehru was of the view that the refugees and immigrant population in Assam would help the cultivators in growing more food, thus contributing to Assam’s economy.

vii The Cabinet Mission comprising of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade and A.V. Alexander, the first Lord of Admiralty arrived in India on 23 March, 1946.

viii The Assam Samrikshini Sabha founded in 1926 by Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury was established for preserving the interests and identity of the Assamese people. It was later rechristened as the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha.

ix In 1940, a student union named Asom Chattra Sammilani (Assam Students’ Association) divided into the All Assam Student’ Federation and the All Assam Students’ Congress. A decade later they recombined as the All Assam Student’ Association, which was later renamed to All Assam Students Union in January 1967.

x Located south of Eastern Himalayas, Assam comprises of the Brahmaputra and the Barak River Valleys. Barak Valley was an extension of the greater Surma Valley (now partly in Bangladesh).

xi All India Congress Committee (AICC) is the central – decision making body of the Indian National Congress.

xii The Act had the power to order expulsion of certain immigrants who were considered to be detrimental to the interests of the general public by the Central Government. The Act implicitly distinguished between Hindu refugees and illegal immigrants. It was repealed later due to political compulsions.

xiii Since the census was not conducted in 1981 due to communal disturbances, these figures are estimates.

xiv Under the Foreigners Act, 1946, the onus of proving the citizenship status was on the person concerned. The IMDT Act, 1983 stated that a person making a complaint must be a resident within the jurisdiction of the same police station as the person in relation to whom the application is made. The law also provided that a complaint could be rejected if it was found to be frivolous. Thus tacitly the law provided undue protection to the person whose citizenship was questioned. Later the Supreme Court repealed this Act in 2005.