CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Introduction to the Problem

Political parties play a unique and crucial role in a democratic system of government. They form one of the most significant political institutions which define democracy. They are the efficacious channels connecting political process and policy makers. It is through them that processes of representation, competition, dissension and negotiation can be realised. They stand for contradictory features and propagate different ideals thus offering the people varied choices in a collage of ideological patterns. To confirm to democratic expectations, a political party must perform some specific *roles* which help to determine its legitimacy in the political system.

The concept of role is one of the most popular ideas in social sciences. It provides a perspective for discussing or studying many social and political issues. Role is defined as “a particular set of norms that is organized about a function” (Bates and Harvey 1975:106) or as “behaviour referring to normative expectations associated with a position in a social system” (Allen and van de Vliert 1984: 3). Sociologist Bruce Biddle (1986) lays down five major models of role theory. Out of them the Functionalist Approach to role theory sees a role as the set of expectations that society places on an individual or institution. By realizing the expectations, the individual or institution is expected to discharge the function connected to that position. However, the idea that expectations lead to behaviour is familiar to most theories associated with the concept of role. In this context, the expectations that are associated with functioning of democracy determine the role of political parties in a country.

There is no genuine democracy in which parties do not play a dominant and decisive role in both elections and governance. “As a keystone political institution in representative regime, the modern political party regularly fulfils three critical functions: nominating candidates for public offices, formulating and setting the agenda for public and mobilizing support for candidates and policies in an election. Other institutions perform some of these functions too. What however distinguishes parties is
their emphasis on linkage. It is the political parties which help to establish connection between ruler and ruled. Another point which distinguishes political party from other organizations is that the former always strives to acquire power. In the realm of competitive politics, this tussle for political power helps to keep political parties on their toes.

Political Parties perform another important role, i.e., they deepen participatory democracy. As a result of communication and technological expansion, political parties have been able to reach the people today at a much faster and a wider scale. More and more people are thus becoming aware of the political life of their countries. Today citizens take part in political activities like election campaigns, protest activities or other party activities thus enhancing the political culture of their nation. Needless to say, this trend is paying rich dividends to the healthy growth of democracy.

Besides, the political parties are principal agents of mass mobilisation. Through their beliefs and ideologies, activities of party building and fragmentation, cooperation and opposition, support and protest, competition and negotiation, the political parties have been able to build a healthy network of political interactions in the society and in the process are helping to embrace wider sections of the masses.

In India, as K. C. Suri notes, “Parties played an immense role as mediating agencies in bringing about democratic transformation of this ancient country in a relatively peaceful manner (compared to several other former colonial countries), in a relatively short span of time, and under conditions that were considered not very conducive for democratic development. They were instrumental in taking governments closer to the people. Today, all parties contest elections in the name of securing the common good. They maintain that they are committed to protect and promote the interests of the poor, marginalized and the socially disadvantaged.” Political parties have thus reinvigorated a new lease of life into the functioning of political institutions.

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The Indian National Congress occupies a distinct place from the point of view of its history. It has a legacy and record of achievement comparable to that of the Labour Party in Great Britain, the Social Democratic Party in Germany, and the Democratic Party in the United States (Guha, 2010). It was established as the oldest political party in India in 1885 and held power at the centre and in most of the states till 1977. But the strength and weaknesses of a party cannot be judged only by its electoral position but by its overall functioning in the governance and by the extent of its ability to fulfil expectations and demands of the masses. Herein lies the significance of examining the role of a political party in the politics of a country. In other words, the operational aspect of a political party can be gauged by the role played in the politics of the country. Party role and behaviour is more discernible if its regional history is kept in mind (Weiner, 1968). Against this context, the role of the INC in the politics of Assam is discussed.

1.2 Background of the Study

The growth of the Congress party in the state was moulded by evolutionary process rather than by sudden or dramatic events. The development of the party in the post – independence period has been a continuation of its role which it played in the pre – independence period. It was a movement aiming to integrate the goal of securing rights and liberties for the people with the broader objective of achieving political freedom from the British rulers. The Indian National Congress (INC) was not active in Assam since 1885 itself, unlike in other parts of the country. The aspirations of the people of Assam were represented by different associations like the Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha (1875), Upper Assam Association (1880) and Assam Association (1903). After working in collaboration with the INC for many years, the Assam Association held a meeting in the year 1921 where the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) was decided to be constituted out of the former. Thus the APCC officially came into existence in 1921. In order to ensure victory in the elections, the Congress party transformed its character from a movement to a proper political party in the post – independent period. The first state government in independent India was formed by the Congress party under the leadership of Gopinath Bardoloi. The role of a newly formed government in an independent country is always vital as it has to meet the expectations and aspirations of the masses and has to confront challenges that come on its way. In
this backdrop, the role of the Congress party in Assam politics is examined. The period 1947 – 1957 is chosen because it has been considered to be very challenging from the point of view of the number of problems that cropped up for the Congress government. Immigration, food shortage, poverty, unemployment, stagnant economic and industrial growths were the multitude of problems faced by the party in Assam. Immigration, as an issue has been highlighted mostly from the late seventies when the Assam Movement (1979 – 1985) began. In the pre – 1979 period, language conflict was the central issue which kept other major issues at bay. Most political parties, including the Congress party made a tacit agreement among themselves not to highlight the immigration issue due to its controversial nature (Baruah, 1986). Though it has been recognised in literature that immigration had been taking place since pre – independence days, yet for the major part, it remained a discreet issue. On the other hand, food scarcity was an equally serious challenge that the government of that time faced. Food being one of the three major necessities of life is inevitable for survival of the people. The period in the wake of independence brought about food shortages in some parts of India like Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Madras. Congress party led government’s strategy to cope up with immigration and food scarcity falls under the purview of analysis.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Two characteristics unique to Indian democracy and party politics are imperative to be examined. Firstly, the institutionalization of democracy itself is intriguing for scholars like Atul Kohli, Niraja Gopal Jayal and Zoya Hasan who argue that despite the absence of pre – requisites for establishing democracy like literacy, minimum standard of living and industrialization, India has not only preserved but also consolidated a democratic system. In fact, if anything Indian democracy has become dynamic over the years. The second noticeable attribute is that of the Indian party system which does not correspond into any of the theories put forward by the liberal democratic politics or the western political theories. Nevertheless, democracy and party system of India have evolved over the years in the backdrop of the diverse characteristics of the socio – political landscape of the country.

Any discussion on political parties and their impact on democratic politics must generally begin with an attempt at understanding the role of political parties. Political
parties are central to the political landscape of India. Their centrality arises from the fact that they play so many key roles like formulation and implementation of policies, establishing link between individual and state, state and society, between social process and policy makers, develop ability to aggregate concerns and strengthen pragmatic leadership.

Political parties have played a decisive role by connecting process with the people thereby bringing people into governance (Hasan, 2010). Through political parties, people can influence debates and policies on issues affecting the interests of various social groups in the political system. Parties articulate different interests, visions and opinions of the people. In other words, parties express public expectations and demands of social groupings to the political system. By encouraging political socialisation and participation in citizens, political parties enable the formation of a sound political culture in a country. By laying out a specific political programme for which they campaign to receive the consent and support of the people, parties try to accommodate various interests into a general political project. However, often due to the inability of political parties to minimize the gap between promise and delivery, the trust in institutions like political parties has shaken (State of Democracy in South Asia – SDSA Team, 2008). But despite eliciting low levels of trust, political parties still continue to be significant in the political terrain of democratic countries.

One of the most formidable challenges confronting a state in a newly independent country relates to nation – building. The state must strive to devise political and governmental policies, institutions and processes so that it can lead to social, political and economic development of the people. Political parties being more flexible in character than bureaucracy or army have the ability to address demands arising from the need for national integration (Sharma 1976). The role of political parties in nation – building is hence crucial for our understanding. There are two models of nation – building namely the integration model and the interdependence model as (Gautam 1985). The integration model requires different ethnic identities to assimilate with the greater ‘national identity’. On the other hand, the interdependence model accommodates different ethnic diversities into the national identity without wiping out the distinctiveness or particularities of the ethnic diversities. Taking into account the presence of numerous socio – cultural diversities in the country, the INC adopted the
interdependence model. This model envisaged a relationship of interdependence between different ethnic groups especially between the majority and minority ethnic groups (Gautam, 1985). Indian culture according to interdependence model is the one in which all religious and social groups have synthesised to make their unique contribution to the whole. The Congress party emphasised on equal treatment, non-discrimination and tolerance towards all religious groups. The party’s secular and sectarian approach towards other religious and social groups provided the platform for the exercise of democratic norms. For example, the party tried to sow the seeds of unity in times of the Khilafat agitation and the Akali Movement. The whole system of the Congress worked through a principle functioning along the lines of unity amidst diversity, connecting people across regions while also allowing for dissent within it on policy matters. Thus Congress party’s adoption of interdependence model opened the doors for manifold groups and it became a catch-all party. In the case of Assam too the party strived to secure the participation of persons of different strata of society in the political struggle which it led. Though the Assam Congress was led by persons belonging to educated and professional classes of people and was dominated mostly by upper caste Hindus, yet, during the period of freedom struggle, the party became the principal instrument of political socialization for the masses. Leaders like Tarun Ram Phookun, Kuladhar Chaliha, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Chandradhar Barua, Chandranath Sharma, Lakshmidhar Sharma, Jagannath Baruah and many others3 were instrumental in shaping the orientations of the people towards the colonial policies and how it adversely affected the Indian economy, society and culture. It was due to the motivation and awareness created by these leaders regarding the cause of the national movement, that the people of Assam came together to participate in the Non Co-operation and Quit India Movements in huge numbers.4 In other words, we can say that the APCC reflected a broad platform and was not a tightly organized political party.

The role of a political party in providing stability to the governance of a country entails discussion. Democracy was enriched during the institutional era (roughly from 1950 till the late sixties) when institutions and practices of democracy found

3 See Chapter 2 for details.
4 Ibid.
considerable acceptance during the first phase dominated by Nehru. (Kohli, 2001). This phase laid down the path for Congress to achieve legitimacy as it commanded power in almost all states of the country. The entire focus of party activity was placed on the performance of its governmental wing. The Congress initially was an organisation in the pre – independence period which sought to create nationalist consciousness and articulate and channelize the democratic aspirations of the people. It assumed a central institutional role in governing the country by converting itself into a political party in the post – independence period. According to Bipan Chandra, the Congress was the most important political organisation in the Nehru era. “There was no alternative to it on the horizon. It enjoyed immense prestige and legitimacy as the leader and heir of the national movement. Its reach was national; it covered the entire subcontinent...Congress gave the country a stable government; it was a major instrument of the political stability India enjoyed for several decades.”\(^5\)

Post – independence, the Congress party gave a stable political system to the country and governed it for three decades until the emergence of new political forces along social cleavages. For Assam Congress, the party could reap the reward of its role during the national freedom struggle. The totality of political activity during the colonial period provided the base for electoral victory in the post – colonial period. Immediately after independence, the impact of the discussions centering on the relevance of the Congress was felt at the provincial level also. The most important question that arose was as to how Congress as an organization was to function in the provinces after the immediate question of political freedom had been resolved. While answering this question, major changes came about in the Assam Congress as well. From the organizational wing, emphasis was laid on development of the governmental wing under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi and Bishnuram Medhi. The development of organization of the party in the post – colonial period got sidelined as major factional clashes took place between the Congress leaders.\(^6\)

Lack of adequate finance from the centre and inability to raise own party funds for running the

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\(^6\) See Chapter 3 for organizational clashes within APCC.
organization had rendered the organizational structure weak in Assam. But despite organizational deficiencies, the APCC could rule Assam until Janata party’s rise in 1978. Absence of a strong opposition on one hand and a powerful legacy of the Congress party which helped to achieve independence from foreign rule were the two major factors which accounted for the sustainability of the party in Assam for three whole decades after independence.

Another significant observation should be directed towards the association that a political party has with the government. In a country where a single party rose to dominance after being in the mainstream of the nationalist movement, the distribution of power within the party needs to be articulated for the maintenance of democratic processes. Until 1947, Congress was a mass party with an organizational structure starting at the grassroots with tehsils at the bottom and followed by the district, provincial and all – India units constituting the organizational tier. In the changed post – independence scenario, the Congress had to define the role of the organization in relation to the new function of the party as government. After 1947, Nehru was convinced that separation of party and government was most essential for the functioning and continuity of the party system in India. Now the question arose as to whether the party or the government would enjoy the upper hand. In this context, the party models of different countries which had a single dominant party were taken into consideration. Among the contemporary models, the British model had the party as government playing the dominant role. Whereas in the Communist model, the party organization was all in all. Taking into account the diverse cultural landscape and unique socio – political conditions prevalent in the country, a mixture of the two was considered to be the most feasible.

In Indian politics, the development of the association between the mass organization of a party and the government can at best be effectively studied in the context of the INC (Kochanek, 1966). The Working Committee of the party in the pre – independence period was the most commanding body in the entire Congress structure. The reconstruction of the Congress from a movement to a political party led to the end of the role of the Working Committee as a major policy – making body. The importance paid

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to organisational structure of the INC in the colonial period diminished to give way to emphasis on the governmental wing. This change defined the contours of power within the party while framing new boundaries of relationship between party and the government. In 1947, Nehru abdicated the position of Presidency in order to head the Government. Soon after, the decision – making organs of the party no longer held the centre of the political arena as government became powerful. This led to dissension between party leadership and government on crucial matters. Between 1948 to 1951, the issue of the relationship between party and government remained at the centre of controversy within the Congress (Chatterjee, 2009). However a unanimous decision within the party required Nehru to accept the position of the Congress President after Purushottam Das Tandon’s resignation. The Congress by this time came to accept the view that the governmental wing was the most formidable organ through which power was exercised. The Congress in the provinces continued to dominate the political scenario considerably because of the manner in which the relationship between government and party was handled at the national level. While exercising power, the provincial Congresses also had to dispatch communications received from the party at the centre. This helped to ensure uniformity in the organisational structure. Thus the party system in India was one where provinces were allowed to exercise their autonomy within the ‘dominant party system’. It was characterised by plurality within the dominant party which made it more representative, provided flexibility and sustained internal competition but at the same time was fortified by the party messages that the provinces despatched in their regions (Chatterjee, 2009).

The role of the political party in establishing link between government and society cannot be understated. It is known to all that a government cannot build up a nation on its own. Co – operation of the society which consists of both majority and minority groups is inevitable. In this connection, political parties serve as channels which can connect government with the complex heterogeneous and diverse society like India.

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8 Purushottamdas Tandon was a freedom fighter from Uttar Pradesh. He held the position of the Speaker of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly and was also elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946. He succeeded Acharya Kripalani as the President of the Congress. Das is highly recognized for his efforts in helping to achieve the Official Language Status for Hindi. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1961.
As opposed to the design of a homogenous nation – state, the model of democracy adopted in post – colonial India provided space for the recognition, inclusion and accommodation of spatial and social diversity. The reason for Congress dominance in the period following independence was largely because of the manner in which the link between government and society was developed by Nehru (Taylor, 1987). Accommodation of new groups and individuals who represented the dominant forces at the village level was encouraged. Taken together, these techniques enabled the construction of what was described as the ‘Congress System’ by Rajni Kothari and W.H. Morris Jones (Taylor, 1987).

Hence as Kothari (1970) says, the Congress is not to be studied merely as a political party but as a ‘system’. The ‘dynamic core’ of the system of political institutions in India is within the Congress party. This system functioned through the Congress paramountcy. The narrative of the post – colonial Indian state begins with this differentiated entity which connected legitimately with the peripheries to build an arrangement which Kothari (1970) called the ‘Congress system’. The terms ‘Congress System’ and ‘One – Party – Dominance’ implies an overwhelming position of the Congress in all the states (Chatterjee, 2009). “Clearly, this dominance had been built up in course of the decades of organized political activity by the Congress in the nationalist movement in different parts of the country.”\(^9\) Internally it was held together by the grand coalition of the most significant major social and political forces of that time which had helped to make it popular because of its contribution to the achievement of freedom (Hasan, 2010). In a similar way, Iqbal Narain also argues that the Congress is to be studied as a system, variable in the context both of national and state politics in terms of one party dominance and its impact on the Indian political system both at the central and state levels. He also states that one can adopt a number of sub themes for study from the vast realm of one party dominance – ranging from pre – 1967 to post 1971 periods, one party dominance and factional politics at state levels, dissent and defections in a dominant party system and so on. In the case of examining the role of the INC in Assam politics, the sub theme of observing the party’s performance in the

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period following independence has been taken up together with enquiring into the organisational challenges which the party faced.

From the above discussion it is understood that the immediate period following independence of the country was of critical importance for the INC because of the transformation in its political and organizational character. While leading the political struggle in the Indian subcontinent, the Congress built for itself a position of unrivalled authority in the centre as well as in the states. The power it possessed was utilized by the leadership to erect and then sustain the new state. As such, not only study of the party at the centre but at the state level needs theoretical and empirical understanding so that the totality of the role of the party can be highlighted. For the purpose of the study, a combination of the interdependence model, as well as the deductive approaches used by Hasan, Sharma, Chandra, Kochanek, Chatterjee and Kothari have been used.

1.4 Objectives
The major objective of the study is:

1. To examine the role of the Indian National Congress (INC) in Assam politics during the period.

Sub Objectives are:

2. To examine the evolution of the Congress party in Assam and its role in the freedom movement.

3. To examine the organisational structure and challenges within the Congress party.

4. To analyse the response of the party with respect to the major issues of the period, i.e., immigration and food scarcity.

5. To assess the impact of immigration and food scarcity on the socio-political conditions of the state.

1.5 Hypotheses

1. The Congress party has played a major role in Assam politics.

2. The Congress party has significant roots in pre-independence political movement in Assam.
3. The Congress party failed to address the organisational challenges within the party.

4. The party has failed to address the issue of immigration and food scarcity to the interest of the people.

5. Failure of the Congress led government in taking adequate measures with regard to immigration and food scarcity led to political instability in the subsequent years.

1.6 Methodology

The methodology adopted is qualitative which involves the processes of observing, examining and analyzing the available published and unpublished content. The tools which are used in qualitative method have aimed at examining the complex realities of Congress party’s role in Assam politics. Indirect Observation has been used through document analysis. In this regard, content analysis has helped to analyse the contents of documentary materials like books, magazines, newspapers, reports, Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha Debates, private papers, government documents etc. Large quantities of documentary materials have been analysed using content analysis. Using the case study method, investigation of the role of the Congress party in Assam politics from 1947 – 1957 was carried out. The emphasis that case study method puts on historical analysis has helped to represent the record of personal views and opinions of several politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnuram Medhi.

Primary sources for the study mainly consists of official records preserved in the Assam State Legislative Assembly, Dispur; Office of the Directorate of Archives, Government of Assam, Dispur; National Archives, Delhi; All India Congress Committee and Assam Pradesh Congress Committee papers collected from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; regional and national newspapers; old magazines; articles and periodicals preserved in District Library, Guwahati; Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati; books, periodicals and newspapers from Krishna Kanta Handique Central Library and Indian Council of Historical Research Library of Gauhati University, and Assam Police Central Library, Guwahati.
Interviews with eminent people and senior citizens were also conducted to secure first hand data relevant to the study area. The secondary data have been collected from relevant books, journals and other published documents.

1.7 Chapterization

The thesis is organised into five chapters.

Chapter I is introductory in nature and provides a broad framework of theoretical apparatus for the understanding of the research problem. The chapter contains a background of the study, objectives and hypotheses that have been developed, methodology which has been used, a review of literature and significance of the study conducted.

Chapter II deals with the historical background of the Congress party in Assam. The history of the freedom struggle is intricately associated with the emergence of the Congress party, for the party was the vanguard of the national movement guiding the people of the state and the country to achieve independence from the British rule. As the Congress party was one of the most important part of India’s institutional development, therefore its growth and development in the state of Assam is crucial for the understanding of its role in the post – independence period.

In Chapter III of the study, the organisational structure and challenges encountered within APCC have been discussed. The organisational structure of a political party is the foundation on which the credibility of the party depends. Successful implementation of programme and policies of a party are conditioned by the presence of a strong and democratic organisation. For our purpose, the examination of the organisational structure of the APCC has been taken up. Along with it, the main organisational challenges of the party have been identified and explored in detail.

Chapter IV deals with two major challenges, i.e., Immigration and Food Scarcity which emerged for the Congress led government in Assam during the period. Assam had been attracting millions of settlers from different parts from inside as well as from outside the subcontinent since the pre – independence period. Throughout the nineteenth century, Assam was regarded as an area with large virgin tracts, uncleared
forests lands and arable land all along the river Brahmaputra. Hence it had been an area of interest for people looking for better opportunities, jobs and livelihood. Immigration continued to occur during different stages in the history of Assam, starting from the time of Ahom rule and manifesting with a greater intensity during the British reign. During the post – independence period 1951 – 1961, the process had suddenly picked up contrary to the general expectations that the partition would put an end to the influx of migrants from the newly emerged East Pakistan (Goswami, 2009). As an issue, immigration was highly understated in the political discussions of that time because the language issue had occupied all attention from the middle of the 1950’s onwards. Therefore the immigration issue from 1947 – 1957 has been chosen to be discussed within the scope of analysis. Besides, food shortage issue was acute in the post – independence period. The very lives of the people were at stake when production could not meet the demands of the increasing number of population. How the state and government of Assam coped up with this challenge and the policies which had been adopted in this context has been dealt in this chapter.

The last chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the study. In post – colonial Assam, the performance of the party with regard to confronting immigration and food shortage is analysed bringing to limelight the policies adopted to tackle them. Though both the problems were recognized, yet they remained unsolved during the tenure of both the chief ministers due to reasons which have been discussed in the earlier chapters. In spite of its failure to figure out durable solutions for problems within and outside the party during the period, the Congress could thrive in the state due to lack of popular party choices.

1.8 Review of Literature

Gopinath Bardoloi, ‘The Assam Problem’ and Nehru's Centre by Nirode K. Barooah (2010): Substantial information on Gopinath Bardoloi’s political career can be obtained from Barooah’s book. It deals with Bardoloi’s thoughts and actions as leader of the opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1941 – 44 and his tenure as the first Chief Minister of Assam. The role of Bardoloi who organised a revolt against the Cabinet Mission Plan has been discussed in detail. The popular agitation organised by the Assam Congress led by Bardoloi against grouping Assam with East Bengal made
the British Government realise that the Cabinet Mission Plan would never materialise in Assam. Besides, the book covers issues in post – independence Assam like refugee problem and rehabilitation, financial difficulties faced by Assam in the post – war period, tribal aspirations and communist insurgency in Assam. However Bardoloi has hardly been critically evaluated by the author, especially with regard to his role in addressing the issue of immigration.

**Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi by Lily Mazinder Baruah (1992):** Detailed speeches of Gopinath Bardoloi and his interviews with Mahatma Gandhi and articles written by Gopinath Bardoloi have been compiled in this book. Information relating to Bardoloi’s opinion on eviction of immigrants from East Bengal can be obtained by examining the documents compiled by the author. For example, Bardoloi was highly opposed to the ‘Muslim League’s propaganda’ of occupying grazing areas of Assam. Hence he criticised the Saadulla government of inaction regarding eviction. Bardoloi also denied that there were vast uncultivated lands in Assam which were actually inundated by flood waters. Therefore, he was of the opinion that land was scarce for settlement and cultivation by the immigrants.

**Assam in the Freedom Movement by Anuradha Dutta (1991) is a comprehensive account of Assam’s role in the freedom movement. The book traces the historical background of the nationalist movement in Assam and its growth and development during the subsequent years. The background behind the formation of the APCC and participation of Congress delegates from Assam in the initial sessions of the Congress has been discussed. The author notes down that through the instrumentality of the Congress movement, the state came to participate in the national political scenario. The intensification of national awakening in Assam had been made possible by the state’s participation in the various phases of the freedom struggle.**

**Political History of Assam (ed.) by A.C Bhuyan and Sibopada De – Vol. II and III (1978 and 1980) is an account of the history of the nationalist movement in Assam in two volumes covering the period of struggle from 1920 till 1947. Besides tracing the contribution of Assam to the national liberation movement, the two volumes also aim to highlight how the freedom struggle, apart from mobilising the people also brought about changes in the socio – economic structure of Assam.**
Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947 by Amalendu Guha (1977) is an analytical work dealing with the socio-economic structure of the colonial period and the politics of anti-colonialism in the legislature as well as outside it. Beginning from 1826 when Assam was annexed to British India, the author also covers the political and economic objectives of the freedom movement and further discusses the politics in the colonial period. Guha concludes by mentioning about the socio-economic tensions faced by Assam in the post-independence period in the form of a slackened economy and rift between religious and linguistic communities. The book however takes a stand disregarding the efforts of Gopinath Bardoloi in keeping the Hindu dominated parts of Sylhet in Assam when in fact Bardoloi’s Cabinet went to Sylhet to influence the people to vote against East Bengal. The author also condemns Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury, founder of Assam Samrakshini Sabha and C.S. Mullan, Superintendent of Census operations of 1931 for alerting the people against uncontrolled immigration into Assam.

Freedom Struggle by Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi and Barun De (1972) is an account of the national freedom movement starting from its inception till the achievement of freedom from the colonial rule. It covers the different phases of the national movement with emphasis on civil rebellions, the growth of modern political associations and the programme and activities of the nationalists. Throughout the struggle for independence, the sacrifices of Congressmen and the sense of widespread enthusiasm and involvement among the people has been covered in its entirety.

State Politics in India by Iqbal Narain, ed. (1976) recognises the domain of state politics as a salient terrain for the unfolding of democratic processes and competitive politics. It is a collection of essays on the different aspects of state politics. The book analyses several patterns of emerging areas of state politics to identify a changing Indian political paradigm.

State and Politics in India by Zoya Hasan, ed. (2010): The collection of essays in this book deals with range of issues like the historical origin of the Congress System and the different social cleavages which gave rise to the multi-party system in India. The effects of social and electoral change and challenges confronting the party system are covered in different essays. The political competition around the party
system and its transformation over the years has also been discussed here. Overall it outlines the main phases in the development of the party system.

**State and Politics in India by Partha Chatterjee, ed. (2009)** is a collection of fifteen essays of distinct intellectual style which analyses the significance of state politics as a frontier discipline in India. It throws flood of light on electoral performance of different states in India, evolving trends in bureaucracy, centre – state relations, gender issues, dalit politics and communism in India.

**Congressor Kasiyoli Rodot (in Assamese) (English– At the sunny dawn of Congress) by Benudhar Sarma** describes the role of the Congress party of Assam in the national freedom struggle. Taking 1921 as the watershed year, the author notes down that the beginning of this year saw the dawn of a new era in the Assam political scenario with the formation of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. The book is an account of the various phases of the Indian freedom struggle in Assam.

**Herai Jowa Dinbur (in Assamese) (English – The Lost Days) by Debeswar Sarmah** discusses the different episodes in the movement for Indian independence and the part played by the Congress party of Assam in it. The book covers the British oppressive colonial policies, the Indian nationalism which arose as a result of this oppression and how the national and provincial Congress of the time arose to the occasion.

Myron Weiner in his book **Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India (1978)** has provided an understanding that “potentially explosive” situations could result from clashes between migrant and indigenous populations. He argues that the consequences of modernization were responsible for increased mobility and a greater sense of ethnic identity and ethnic cohesion. He develops his argument by analysing three case studies related to Assam, Chota Nagpur and Andhra Pradesh. Regarding Assam, he notes that though Assam experienced different streams of migration from West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa and Nepal, yet the state was mostly threatened by migrants from the first two states for the reason that the Assamese middle class felt threatened by their increasing presence in the society.
The Assam Movement by Monirul Hussain (1993) studies the Assam Movement from a sociological perspective with a detail background emphasis on the pre – colonial society of Assam which demographically transformed due to the policies pursued by the British government. Following independence and partition of the country, the conscious Asomiya elite began to feel relative deprivation as economy was still underdeveloped in the state as compared to the other parts of the country. The author uses the conceptual categories of class, ideology and identity to examine the factors which culminated into the Assam Movement (1979 – 1985). He also points out that the movement was of a unifying nature which led to the emergence of a broad based democratic movement on issues which affected Assam’s social and economic development.

Immigration and Assam Politics by Alaka Sarmah (1999) is a close examination of the impact of immigration issue on the politics of Assam. The author considers that immigration has been in the centre of political controversies since the colonial period. Various political parties of Assam have been responding towards this issue in different ways and this has led to shaping of their policies, pronouncements and actions on immigration in the post – independence period. The author also tries to analyse whether influx of people was alone responsible for the Assam Movement (1979 – 1985). An examination of the character of the movement and position of the national and regional parties with regard to immigration and the agitation has also been carried out.

The Food Problem in India by Naresh Chandra Agrawal (1961) addresses the vital question of availability of food in proportion to the increasing population of the country. The author considers food to be an important item in both individual and national economies and hence considers necessary to examine the food economy of India. He discusses the trend of foodgrains production and rising population in the country from the colonial period onwards and emphasises on the food position vis – a vis the First and Second Five Year Plans. In conclusion he warns the people of the impending food crisis and suggests few measures to check the problem.

Sir Henry Knight in Food Administration in India 1939 – 47 (1954) studies the problems faced by India in the food sector in the period following the Second World
War and the various administrative measures undertaken to combat these difficulties. The increase in prices of foodgrains and the fact that the country was divided between British India and Indian States complicated the difficulty of dealing with India’s food supply. However, the introduction of measures like calling of the Third Food Conference in 1943, abolishing free trade and appointment of the Foodgrains Policy Committee in 1943 laid down the policies for food administration in India. The author underscores the ability of the Indian administrative system to deal with unexpected crises and safely concludes that the policies pursued by the Foodgrains Policy Committee were sound to deal with the situation.

_A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol. 1: Assam (1874-1980) by V V Rao and Niru Hazarika (1983):_ The study of the government and politics of Assam since its formation as a Chief Commissioner’s province in 1874 has been studied in detail by Rao and Hazarika. This treatise undertakes the journey of Assam politics from the colonial period covering wide areas of formation of governments, political parties and interest groups, the role of women in the politics of the state as well as the history and growth of local self-government from 1874 to 1974. The ‘politics of tensions’ under which the authors included the language politics, the inner line system, Sylhet transfer, foreigners vs. Indigenous issue and the establishment of a University in Assam have been lucidly dealt with. These sources of politics of tensions were responsible for shaping up the socio-economic – political history of the state in the later period.

_Girin Phukon in his book “Assam’s Attitude to Federalism” (1984) analyses_ the debates of the Constituent Assembly and Assam Legislative Assembly to reveal that members of Constituent Assembly from Assam were not in favour of the proposed distribution of powers and were critical of issues relating to centre – state relations, for example formation of a strong centre. During the course of description of facts, the author also brings to light some other interesting aspects like the issue of immigration and citizenship, and the stand taken by the press regarding these issues. The continuous stream of immigration from different parts of India as well as from East Bengal created a fear psychosis in the minds of the Assamese elite who were afraid of losing their distinct identity. The immigrant question which was initially started only with an
economic purpose soon assumed communal colouring as political power came to be determined on the numerical strength of different communities. The author distinctly notes down two major socio-political problems which arose as a consequence of immigration, namely, rise of Assamese-Bengali tension on linguistic-cultural question and increase in numerical strength of the Muslims in the province thereby threatening the dominant position of the Assamese caste Hindu elite.

**The Politics of India Since Independence by Paul R. Brass (1990):** Many significant publications on Indian politics post-independence have been remarkably advancing the study of democratic politics which has provided a better insight and comprehensive understanding of Indian politics chronologically since the 1900’s. Paul R. Brass’ book provides such an understanding of the Indian political scenario. The triumph of democracy is accompanied not just by linear progressive events but also by setbacks and regression and by social, economical and political changes since independence. Despite violent movements and insurrection, Union-State tensions and threats to the cooperative federalism that Nehru visioned for India, the author reposes his trust in Gandhian ideas in the form of introducing greater decentralization and insists on reforming institutions like the bureaucracy and the police.

**Politics in India by Rajni Kothari (1970) is one of the pioneering studies of Indian politics which has attempted to touch significant aspects of political discourses by covering theoretical, historical, socio-cultural, and comparative patterns of Indian polity. It also deals with the politics of party system and coalitions, social infrastructure and distribution of goods and equity. Issues of centre and periphery and India’s role in the context of the larger international environment also fall under the purview of analysis.**

**The History of the Indian National Congress by B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya (1935) is a detail description on the history and evolution of the oldest political party in Indian politics, the Indian National Congress. It traces the growth and development of this party in the light of Sitaramayya’s own experiences as a Congressman.**

**Party Politics in the Nehru Era by Yogesh Puri (1993) is a study of the Indian National Congress in Delhi. It systematically begins by analysing the character of the**
growth of ideology of the party and moves over to discuss the structure of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) and its relation with the All India Congress Committee. The organisational structure of the DPCC and the factional politics within it has also been touched upon in detail.

**Nationalism in India by Chandana Goswami (2008)** offers a detailed account of the nationalist movement in Assam and the role of different associations and individuals. Its historical approach is of particular help to study the role of different organisations including the Congress in the freedom movement in Assam.

**The Oxford Companion to Politics by Niraja Gopal Jayal and Bhanu Pratap Mehta, ed. (2010)** covers a range of issues starting from historical origins of the party system in India to a spectrum of problems like social cleavages and identity question, ideological polarisations in Indian politics, social movements and the role of civil society. Over the years, the political economy of the state has witnessed tremendous changes that have cast a vast influence on the socio-economic structure of the country. The institutional design, social groups and the politics of caste, religion, gender, class and region have also been discussed here.

**Success of India's Democracy by Atul Kohli, ed. (2001):** The book raises a fundamental question as to how democracy has taken root in India despite the presence of a low-income economy, widespread poverty, illiteracy and immense ethnic diversity. Through this edited volume, Kohli tries to bring together different essays which explain the historical origins of democracy, political institutions and consolidation of democracy and the forces which have progressed and abated the growth of democracy.

**Political Parties and Party Systems by Ajay K. Mehra, D.D Khanna and Gert W. Kueck, ed. (2003):** The book is a collaborative effort to present an illustration of the historical development of the party system in India. Its socio-cultural dimension, challenges faced by the party system and electoral trends in the post-independence period have been discussed in different essays. Besides, the complicated party–civil society relationship has also been covered. Moreover a comparative study
of the pattern of Indian party systems with that of the party systems of Germany and European Union has been presented.

State of Democracy in South Asia by SDSA Team (2008) discusses the democratic complexities and developments in South Asia. The ‘bewildering mosaic of different collective identities’ in South Asia made some scholars sceptical about the survival of democracy in this region. But democracy not only sustained but continues to be the reigning ideology in most countries of South Asia. This is the central idea of the report prepared by the SDSA which begins with a conceptual understanding of meaning of democracy in South Asia, the institutional democratic design in this region, the political culture and party competition as well as the problem of insurgency and poverty and its effects on democracy.

Language Politics in Assam by Sandhya Goswami (1997) analyses the language conflict in Assam with a theoretical perspective. The author gives a thorough background account of how partition and independence brought about large scale movement of Hindu Bengalis to Assam thereby giving rise to insecurity among the Assamese middle class. The rise of Assamese nationalism which grew out of this sense of insecurity emphasised on safeguarding the interests of the Assamese. The language policy adopted in Assam cast its impact on the issues of employment and cultural identity as well. Therefore, as the author says, it became a focal point of controversy between the Assamese and Bengali communities. Due to historical reasons, issues when not even connected with language tend to be viewed in terms of Assamese Bengali rivalry. Language as both a unifying and divisive force has been used as a pawn in the game of power politics in Assam.

The paper titled Immigration, Ethnic Conflict and Political Turmoil – Assam, 1979 – 1985 by Sanjib Baruah (1986) is an account of the political strife which engulfed Assam in the wake of the ethnic tensions between the indigenous population and the immigrants. This as the author highlights is the result of demographic transformation of Assam since the colonial period. In the backdrop of the detailed analysis of the Assam Movement, Baruah analyses the role of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the regional party of Assam in fulfilling the aspirations of the
Assamese people. He also dwells on the fact of immigration being obscured from the framework of ethnic accommodation due to vested political interests of parties.

The paper titled Congress Politics in Assam by V. Venkata Rao (1965) discusses the internal Congress politics in Assam emphasising on formation of factional groups and dissensions within the party from the period of formation of Gopinath Bardoloi’s ministry in 1946 till the late 1970’s when the period of three decades of Congress rule ended. The author gives a detailed account of the power struggle within the party and of the various political tactics of Congress members of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee adopted to outdo each other to rise to influential positions of the party and the government.

The paper titled The Indian National Congress: The Distribution of Power between Party and Government by Stanley A. Kochanek (1966) is an account of how power equations within the party saw perceptible changes in the period following independence of the country. Post – 1947, the role of Congress organization had to be redefined in the light of its transformation from a movement to a political party. As head of the interim government, Jawaharlal Nehru was convinced that functional separation of the party and the government was necessary. The author makes an attempt to study this relationship during the Nehru period.

The paper titled “Prospects of India’s Congress Party” by Myron Weiner (1954) studies the prospects of political stability in India upon the continued rule of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress party. Weiner emphasises an important aspect of determining the strength of a party by judging not merely from its electoral performance but also from the extent of cohesion present within the party. He also tries to state that the strength of the Congress party is not only because of Nehru’s attempts at consolidating the party but because of the continuous legacy of Gandhi’s mass appeal.

Marcus F. Franda in his research paper The Organizational Development of India’s Congress Party (1962) analyses the changes in the organization and leadership pattern in the Indian National Congress since its formation in 1885. The Congress organizational network was strongly rooted in the pre – independence period largely because of the way in which the organisation of the party percolated deep down
to the sub-district level. In the post-independence period when the Congress transformed its character from a movement to a political party, the emphasis shifted from the organizational to the ministerial wing. However, Franda credits the success of the party to provide a stable government for more than three decades to the party’s ability to solve problems within its organization.

In the paper titled *The Congress Party: Thirty Years of Power (1976)*, the author **B.G. Verghese** analyses the dominating role of the Congress party since the pre-independence times. He provides a critical appreciation of the part played by the party and its leaders (from Mahatma Gandhi in the colonial period to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi in the post-colonial period) in holding together the country strongly for three long decades. He also speculates on the future of the Congress party during the rule of the Janata party but refuses to conclude that the Congress party is defunct.

### 1.9 Significance of the Study

The study is of great significance as it deals with the role of the Congress party in Assam politics in the post-colonial period. It is the Congress party which has been able to remain in power for maximum period of time in Assam since independence (barring the periods of 1978–1979, 1985–1990 and 1996–2001, the state has been ruled by the Congress party since independence). The study relates to the period covering the reign of two major leaders during the period 1947–1957, namely Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnuram Medhi. Both leaders of the Congress party had played a significant role not only in the national freedom struggle but also in the period after independence of the country. Two significant issues of the period which are immigration and food scarcity have been identified for analysis. The importance of the study is highlighted as focus is given to the problem of immigration and food scarcity, which cast their impact on the socio-political conditions of the state even in the subsequent years. In the pre-1979 period, the issue of immigration had been marginalised by leaders of political parties due to its explosive nature (Baruah, 1986). Hence for much of the time it remained out of discussion. On the other hand, food shortage problem has hardly been emphasised from the point of view of its severity and impact. It has been revealed in the study that despite absence of a strong organization and weakness in addressing problems of the time, the legitimacy of Congress power
helped to provide stability to the Congress government in Assam. This legitimacy was acquired largely by the party’s association with the freedom movement. Moreover the people could hardly see an alternative to a Congress government due to weaknesses in the opposition parties. An examination of the role of the Congress party in the politics of Assam highlights all these significant historical trends.

The following chapter discusses the growth and development of the Congress party in Assam and its role in the national freedom movement.
References


