CHAPTER V

POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTION MANIFESTOES

Political parties are a part and parcel of parliamentary democracy. Modern democracy has been 'Representative' or 'Indirect' democracy. It is operated through the representatives elected by the people and it is the role of the political party to motivate and direct the people to form their government.

Broadly speaking, the political parties which had been functioning in Assam till 1973 were mainly the National parties and few Regional and Local parties which were mainly confined to the hill areas and played a prominent role when Assam was a composite state. But with the beginning of the 'Assam Movement' by the students on the foreigners have a major change in the political scene of Assam took place. The year 1983 witnessed the formation of the major regional parties i.e. the Assam Gana Parishad and United Minority Front.

The political parties which participated in the General Elections covered by the present study are the Indian National Congress (INC), the Indian National Congress (In'jira group) INC(I), Janata Party, the Communist Party of India (CPI),
Communist Party of India Marxist CPI(M), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Forward Block (FB), the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and the united Minority Front (UMF).

The Survey of the working of those national and regional parties with reference to their participation in three general elections is presented below.

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS:

The undivided congress was returned to power in all the five successive General Elections beginning with the first General election held in 1952. Congress ministries were strong and stable and completed the five years term in office with no difficulty. But the emergency in the centre and excesses committed during the emergency had changed the fortunes of the ruling congress both at the centre and in a majority of states. In the sixth Lok Sabha poll held in 1977 the Congress was completely routed all over the country except in a few southern states and Assam. For the first time the national opposition under the name and style of Janata Party took office at the centre. The Janata wave or rather the anti congress wave was strong all over the country. In Assam,
however the congress did not lose its majority status in the sixth Lok Sabha poll but its hold over four of the fourteen parliamentary seats was wrested by the Janata Party in alliance with the PTCA. Poll results apart, the electoral support base of the congress suffered a serious set back.

Within a year of the Lok Sabha poll the sixth Assam Assembly Elections became due. The Congress was faced with a totally different situation. Since the party was out of power at the centre the advantage of continued central patronage was lost. There were large scale resignations of Congressmen including some MLA’s from the party. As if these were not enough, a split had occurred in the party on the eve of the 6th Assembly Election. Mrs. Anuwara Taimur who was Minister of State for Education in Assam and who had attended the convention of congressmen sponsored in New Delhi by the Pro Indira Congress faction sent her resignation letter to the Congress CM of Assam by post from New Delhi. Immediately after, she joined the INC(I). Along with her, Sri H.N. Talukdar, treasurer of the APCC, Sri Vishnu Prasad, Sri Dhruba Navayon Barua, MLA, Sri Tilak Gogoi MP, some youth Congress Leaders also resigned from APCC and joined INC(I). An ad-hoc APCC was formed with Sri Tilak Gogoi as President, Sri H.N. Talukdar as Vice President and Treasurer and Smt. Anuwara Taimur, Sri
D.N. Barua and Sri Vishnu Prasad as General Secretaries. Ad-hoc Committee were also formed at district and sub-divisional levels.¹

Both the Congress Groups were in total disarray. Neither had shown any inclination to enter into an electoral alliance with other political parties for the purpose of 6th Assembly Elections. The CPI was not averse to make a common front with the congress, Left and Democratic parties in the State. But the ANCC did not show any interest. It had however, set up many satellite candidates as Independents to split opposition votes. The Congress (I) was believed to have encouraged the formation of Progressive Democratic Front consisting of many small parties which sprang up just on the eve of the election. Here again the strategy of the Congress(I) was to split the opposition votes.²

The INC nominated its candidates in all the 126 constituencies in the 1978 Assembly Election and secured victory in only 26 constituencies, the INC(I) contested in 115 constituencies.

²Ibid. p. 24.
and only in 3 of them. In the 1983 election Congress (I)
contested in 105 seats and won 91. The other Congress which
come to be known as congress socialist contested 34 seats
and secured 2. In the 1983 election the Congress contested
in 125 constituencies and could win only 25 seats. The
Congress (S) which contested in 73 constituencies secured
again in 4 of them as against 2 in the previous general
election.

THE JANATA PARTY :

At the national level, the Janata Party was formed on
the eve of the sixth General Election to the Lok Sabha held
in March 1977. It was preceded by the extra ordinary situation
of the national emergency during which civil liberties were
arbitrarily suspended, almost all political opponents of the
ruling party headed by Indira Gandhi were put behind bars and
democracy itself was derailed. The many opposition parties felt
that unless they combine together and organised a unified
opposition front against the Congress, the Congress might once
again win and find an electoral justification for the excesses
of the emergency.

After the dissolution of the Lok Sabha the leaders of
the four non communist opposition parties i.e. the old congress,
the Jana Sangha, the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialists held a meeting at the residence of the former Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai with the aim to form a new democratic party which can be projected as the alternative to the Congress, which was also attended by three rebel ruling congress members who were expelled from the party. After several hours of discussion considerable headways were made towards the emergence of the United Democratic opposition party which decided to contest the Lok Sabha elections under the banner 'Janata Party'. In order to direct the entire election affairs including the selection of candidates and issuing the manifesto a nine man committee was set up. On Jan. 23, 1977 the Janata Party launched its election campaign with Morarji Desai as its Chairman and Charan Singh as Deputy Chairman and three General Secretaries L.K. Advani (Jana Sangha), Chandrashekar Mohan (Socialist Party) and Ram Dhon (Former General Secretary of the Congress Parliamentary Party). Besides a 27 member national committee was also formed as a top decision making body of the new party which was contesting the General Election in all the states. The Lok Dal symbol "haldar" (man with plough) was adopted as the party symbol as their inclination to have a common symbol was turned down by the Chief Election Commissioner T. Swaminath on the ground that it was possible only after the
The Janata Party in Assam, despite the Central help of all kinds, popular goodwill and the anti-Congress mood in the state, failed to organise itself as a cohesive unit of the party in power at the centre and to build up its image as an effective alternative to the INC. It was on the contrary, in utter disarray, and inner party democracy was still a far cry. In fact it remained a disorganised group of politicians with diverse background and affiliation who had been brought together by the emergency. The internal affairs of the Janata Party were marked by chaos arising out of bitter factional rivalries. The first meeting of the ad-hoc state council of the party on 20 Dec. 1977 was disrupted by a group of disgruntled youths belonging to the party. Thus, leadership of the party failed to iron out group rivalries and to devote to organisational activities at the grass-root levels. Little efforts were made to convert the 'Janata Movement' against the emergency into a cohesive 'Janata Party' and to build up its image as the defender of democratic rights of the people. On top of it, the party had been maintaining ad-hocism with regard to organisation of its various structures though it had already adopted its constitution. Its failure to hold election to the various party offices at all levels
so as to display inner party democracy made its supporters critical of its sincerity in honouring the election pledges that it had made during the Lok Shabha poll. Because of these inherent weaknesses, a section of the leadership of the party made sincere efforts to arrive at an electoral understanding with the CPI(M) and other left parties, excepting the CPI. Negotiations for adjustments of seats between the representatives of the Janata Party and the CPI(M) also took place. The feeling of anti-congressism which was still strong in the mind of the electorate provided the basis for a talk on electoral understanding between the two parties. Had the proposed alliance materialized it would have been the basis for unity amongst the left and democratic forces in the state against authoritarianism. But the central leadership of the Janata Party was reluctant to forge an electoral alliance with the CPI(M) which had defeated both the Congress and the Janata Party in West Bengal and Tripura in the last Assembly elections. This section of Janata leadership was also apprehensive of the fast growing influence of the CPI(M) in the North Eastern part of the country and so they decided to foil the state councils negotiation for an alliance with the CPI(M) by offering them not more than nine seats to be chosen at the discretion of the state council of the Janata Party. This was a humiliating offer. The negotiation collapsed and
the Janata Party started seeking allies in other political camps.

The Party had already succeeded in eroding the support bases of the INC and in enrolling a large number of Congress members including some MLA's as its members. Having succeeded in weakening the INC and recruiting congressmen into the party on a large scale, the Janata leaders then entered into negotiation with the plains tribal council of Assam and the Ujani Asam Rajya Parishad, but the All India Gorkha League which had supported in the 1977 Lok Sabha Election was however not approached by the party for an electoral understanding in 1978. However, the Janata -PTCA - UARP alliance thus formed had a limited scope as the strength of the partners of the Janata Party was confined to a few constituencies as they were given altogether 13 seats only. The alliance, however was looked upon as a part of mobilization of the conservative forces in the state by the Janata Party in its bid to capture power.

In the 1978 Assembly Election at which the Janata Party contested for the first time, it set up 117 candidates and emerged as the single largest party having won 53 seats. In the 83' Election the Janata Party was among other politi
parties which agitated for poll boy-cott. In the 1985 Election it contested 86 seats and drew a blank.

THE LEFT PARTIES:

Among the left parties which contested the Assembly election in Assam were the CPI, CPI(M), RCPI, RSP, CPIU, Forward Bloc, and CPI(ML). In the 1978 General Election the CPI(M) the RCPI and the RSP agreed upon seat adjustment and avoided contest in the constituencies with candidates of other left party. It did not contest for sixteen such constituencies. In 1983 it set up 25 candidates out of which only one was returned. In 1985 it contested 20 seats but drew a blank.

REGIONAL PARTIES:

Prior to the 1977 election there were four regional parties in Assam. Those were the People's Democratic Party, the Plains Tricolor Council, the Ujani Assam Hajya Parishad and the Asom Jatiyabadi Dal. The PDP merged with Janata Party in 1977 while the UAPP and the PTCA had fully aligned themselves with the Janata Party on the eve of 1978 Assembly election. The Asam Jatiyabadi Dal maintained its Independent existence
but it had lost hold over its electorate. After the 1977 Lok Sabha election Nibaran Dora, a former socialist leader who had not joined the Janata Party, formed a new regional party, named Purbanchaliya Loko Parishad. The PLP had neither the popular support nor the necessary funds to challenge the national parties in the election but it decided to contest in the election in order to convey the message to the people of Assam that the state needed a strong regional party to solve the peculiar problems. In its opinion, the national parties had outlived their utility in the state. The Assam Jatiyauddi Dal also had the similar objectives. However, there was no formal electoral understanding between them.

At the 1983 Elections no new regional parties were formed. At the 1985 election however, two new regional parties called, AGP (Asam Gana Parishad) and UMF (United Minority Front) were formed, the former representing the majority Assamese community generally and the latter Muslim and other minorities. The AGP was the product of the Assam Movement, and the political child of AASU and AAGP. The UMF on the other hand was formed with the intention of countering the programme and policies of AGP concerning Assam Accord.
Assam was the stronghold of the INC which won the first five general elections. So it formed Government uninterruptedly from 1952 to 1978. In 1978 the Janata Party came to power, but it was defeated in less than two years. The year 1985 witnessed a major change in the political scene of Assam with the emergence of a local party the Assam Gana Parishad, which was the direct outcome of the six year old Assam movement over the foreign nationals issue.

The Assam movement over the foreign national issue began in 1979 under the leadership of the All Assam Student Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gona Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which was formed at the instance of AASU. During the first year of the movement around 2.5 million people courted arrest after offering "Satyagraha". The near total participation of all the sections of the people of the state and also of Indian citizens from other states residing in Assam pointed to the massive character of the Movement centred around implementation of three D's... the detection of the foreign nationals, the deletion of their names from the electoral rolls, and their deportation from the country acting within the framework of the constitution and the laws. The most
distinguishing feature of the Assam Movement was that it functioned outside the framework of existing political parties.

The Assam Movement's basic demands found acceptance at the hands of the Government of India and the leadership of the movement as represented by AASU and AAGSP. Following the settlement AASU and AAGSP called off the agitation programmes. At the time of settlement with the centre, it was agreed that the Assam Assembly brought into existence through the force of an election in 1983 would be dissolved. In the view of the impending election AASU and AAGSP demanded appropriate revision of the electoral rolls and the government also promised fair electoral rolls.

The post accord situation in Assam was a demonstrative spectacle of mass euphoria over the victory of the Assam Movement after six long years of struggle in which hundreds laid down their lives and were acclaimed as martyrs. Hundreds of meetings were held in different parts of Assam to accord a rousing reception to the leaders returning to the State after signing the Accord at the national capital. The pre-election mass rallies convincingly demonstrated popular support for the party that was yet to be born. AASU leaders formally
resigned from the student body since as an organisation it could not have any affiliation with any political party. The leaders of the movement decided to hold a convention at Golaghat to decide the future course of action and at this convention the AGP was founded on 14 Oct. 1985. The presidium were Sri Thaneswar Boro, Sri Binod Goswami, Sri Brindaban Goswami, Sri Ataur Rahman and Sri Jiren Dolo. Sri Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Sri Atul Coro and Sri Siraj Sharma were appointed as General Secretaries. Eight secretaries of the AGP were Sri Nagen Sharma, Sri Bharat Narah, Sri Digen Dora, Sri Chandra Patwary, Sri Khanindra Mahanta, Sri Balabhadra Tamuli, Sri Narayan Roy and Sri Barki Prasad Telenga. Other members of the adhoc executive body were Sri Lalit Rajkhowa, Sri Prabin Gogoi, Sri Pabindra Deka, Sri Chandra Arandhore and Sri Dineuwar Tasa. In the political resolution adopted at the convention it was said that the AGP would strive to achieve unity of the multi ethnic Assamese society and would have as its aims secularism, democracy and socialism. The party would also strive to achieve for Assam its rightful place in the Indian federation. The people of Assam welcomed the formation of the Asam Gona Parishad which they hoped would be sincere in implementing the accord in letter and spirit.
The AGP moved into the election arena exactly two months and two days after its formation. The Assembly election was held on 16th Dec. 1935 and AGP contested for 125 seats for which elections were held and won 64 seats and polled 34.55% of the total valid votes. Thus for the first time a regional party formed the most popular government with Sri Prafullo Kumar Mahanta as Chief Minister.

THE UNITED MINORITY FRONT (UMF):

Along with AGP which was formed with the sole aim to implement the Assam accord, a section of religious or linguistic minorities which felt the necessity of having their own platform, called a special convention at Hojai on 9th and 10th Nov. 1985 and formed another regional party called United Minority Front with the intention of countering the programme and policies of AGP concerning Assam Accord.

The UMF was born at a crucial time of the history of Assam when the rights of all the linguistic groups were jeopardised by the Assam Accord. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord States, "Constitutional legislative administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and
heritage of the Assamese people". It was felt that the accord has recognised the dominant rights and position of the Assamese community disregarding the very demographic composition of the state. An idea has gained ground all over India that in Assam only Assamese speaking are living and they are the majority. But an analysis of the nomenclature of the state and its demographic composition will bring to light the real picture.

It will be pertinent to place the census figure of Assam communitywise of 1931, 1951, 1961 and 1971 to prove the contention that Assam is basically a multi lingual and multi national state.

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<th>Census 1931</th>
<th>Census 1951</th>
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<td>Assamese speaking</td>
<td>1982595</td>
<td>5965159</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>3454035</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>1253515</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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(Average growth rate 19.94)
Bengali  -  1719155
Tribal   -  1238149
Others   -  1429475

Census 1961

(Average growth rate 21.46)

Assamese speaking  -  6784271
Bengali            -  2089248
Others             -  

Census 1971

(Average growth rate 34.95)

Assamese speaking  -  8904996
Bengali            -  2907100
Tribal             -  2813056

The minorities felt that the Accord was a stumbling block for their very existence in Assam. The leaders of minorities felt the necessity of organizing themselves for a counter agitation to resist the onslaught of the agitationists.
The Bengali speaking Assamese along with Nepalis and other non-Assamese groups organised a civil rights association called Citizens Right Preservation Committee (CRPC) to preserve and protect the rights of all the linguistic groups. This organisation influenced the youths and students of minority communities who organised All Assam Minority Student Union (AAMSU) and the minority Yuva Parishad respectively. But the Assam Accord was signed without considering the national consensus. The minorities Bengali's, Nepali's and tribals were not even consulted before signing of the accord. The minorities found to their surprise the

3 Citizens Right Preservation Committee this organisation came into existence in a crucial time when the minorities felt insecure at the hands of the dominant section of the people in State. Its first meeting was held at Tongla in 1978. Late Kalipodo Sen was the first President, Sri Binoy Roy was the first Secretary and Sri Saidul Islam was the Joint Secretary of the organisation.

4 All Assam Minority Student Union - This non-political students organisation was formed in 1980 at the General meeting held at Jaleswar. The chief office bearers were the following persons – Abdul Haya Nagari, the first President, Sri Asger Ali and Utpal Nandi were at the chair of General Secretarship.

5 The Minority Yuva Parishad Manch - This organisation also come into existence at the same conference held at Jaleswar in 1980 with the following persons at the chair – Sri Chandan Sarkar, President, Faruki and Lahore Ali – General Secretaries.

All the three minority organisation are still now playing a vital role in protecting the minority rights and minority grievances are coming out through those three mouth pieces.
national political parties also went back on their own stand and national consensus. A co-ordination committee of all the minority organisations. CRPC, AAMSU, Minority Yuva Parishad, Jamiat Ulema Hind was formed at a special convention in Guwahati to convey their strong protest and indignation against the accord and also jointly resist any attack on their rights and priviledge.

While signing the Accord there was an unwritten understanding that the Assam Government would be dissolved and fresh election would be held in Assam and voters list would be thoroughly revised, when the voter list of 1985 was prepared names of lakhs of minorities were deleted from voter list illegally. When the minorities approached all the national political parties to take up their cause and fight for preservation of their rights, they were denied any help. The birth of AGP created a panic in their minds. When the elections were finally announced, finding no other alternative, a special convention of all the minorities was organised in Hojai. In that conference it was unanimously decided to create a separate platform for the minorities and on 9-10 Nov. 1985, the United Minority Front was born in Assam to ventilate the grievances of all the minority groups and also to counter the threat of AGP. Each of the organisations belonging to the
co-ordination committee formed earlier such as CRPC, AAMSU, Minority Yuva Parishad and Jamiat Ulema-Hind retained their identity but they all worked for the success of UMF.

The aims and objectives of the election campaign of UMF as envisaged in its constitution and Election manifesto are as follows -

a) To work within the frame work of the constitution of India.

b) To work for, political, social, economical, educational, cultural and general well-being of the people of the country, particularly of Assam with an ideology of social justice, secularism and democracy.

c) To work for the well-being of all the minorities including ethnic group of Assam and to cultivate good feeling among all sections of people.

d) To strive for the welfare of the State of Assam and to cultivate good feeling among all sections of people.

e) To co-operate with similar organisations of other political, linguistic groups of Assam.

f) To stand behind the oppressed people and to render them all
possible help to fight for their cause and sufferings.

g) To strive for rehabilitation of people becoming victims of circumstances and to uphold and further their cause.

h) To stand for the equality, unity and fraternity of all, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, community and religion.

The U.M.F. oriented its strategy and tactics that non-Assamese population in the plain districts of Assam are not a floating population. They are living for centuries. So, the U.M.F is against the Assam Accord and its election manifesto expressed its sentiments in the following words. "If returned to power it will form the government committed to the national ideals in collaboration with other like-minded representatives who are opposed to the Assam Accord and who are secular, democratic and progressive in their precepts and practice".

Though the party contested the election alone, local seat adjustments were made with some tribal leaders, U.M.F. as a political party contested the 1985 elections both for the Assam Legislative Assembly and Lok Shabha. The party decided to contest 56 seats out of total 126 seats of the State Assembly and it secured only 17 seats with a popular vote of 10.85%. The party nominated 4 candidates for the Lok Shabha seats. But only one candidate came out successful with
a popular vote of 13.01%. In this election U.M.F. became the second largest opposition party in the Assembly.
ELECTION MANIFESTOES:

An election manifesto of a political party is a fresh pledge which the party presumably undertakes to redeem. It is a reminder, a stocktaking sometimes, and also a fresh appraisal of the programmes and policies of the political party in the light of its experience during the inter-election years. Election manifestoes have played a significant role in the Indian elections too. The experience spread over nine General Elections have taught the Indian people, not to take the promises incorporated in the manifestoes seriously. It appears that the electorate by now knows that grandiose election manifestoes issued and lofty pronouncements made in them and from public platforms lack the seriousness that alone ensures their implementation. Political parties, however, continue to issue manifestoes in the belief that this will influence the voters, particularly the uncommitted voters. As the latter are not attached to any party as formal members but they constitute a good majority of elections. They

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will therefore vote for the party whose policy or programme attracts them. For this reason every party issues a manifesto. However, an intelligent voter is expected to read the manifestoes of the parties before exercising his voting right.

MANIFESTOES OF MAJOR PARTIES:

The manifestoes of a few major political parties which participated in the sixth Assembly election are presented here particularly the manifestoes of the INC, the INC(I) the Janata Party, the CPI and CPI(M), the CPI(ML) and the PLP are discussed in detail because of their contradictory ideological commitments and the varying stands on the major election issues. It is to noted here that a few independent candidates also issued their election manifestoes but those were hardly distinguishable from the ones brought out by the parties which supported them. For instance, Jiban Das an independent candidate in Hajo Legislative Assembly constituency issued a manifestoe which was similar to one brought out by the CPI(M). In fact the candidate in his manifestoe clearly stated that he received the support of the CPI(M) and that he would closely associate with the party if he was elected to the Assembly.  

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7 Election Politics in Assam by Dr. K.M. Deka, Dr. M.N. Das, Dr. A.N.S. Ahmed, Dr. N.L. Dutta, Dr. T. Labon - Election Manifestoes, p. 60.
As usual the political parties began their manifestoes as inter party critiques, projected in wider national perspectives. The congress manifesto opened with a pessimistic note on political situation in the country. It alleged that the Janata Government at the centre had halted the nation's progress attained during the congress rule. It referred to the reappearance of regional forces, deep economic crisis, wide scale violence let loose or Harijans and general disorder in the society and proofs of Janata misrule at the centre. It then gave a brief account of its achievement during past years of its rule, particularly the ones relating to the seventies. It highlighted on the APPCC's role in resuing Assam from the "infamous grouping plan", abolition of Zamidong, achieving emotional integration in the state during the sixties, shifting of the state's capital to Gauhati and the various development works undertaken for the uplift of the masses in the general and weaker sections in particular. It is interesting to note that the congress manifesto did not contain a single word on emergency. It was also silent on the split in the party that occurred formally in January 1978.

INC (I):

The manifesto of the INC(I) which opened with a self
compliment for gracefully accepting the verdicts of the Sixth Lok Shabha Poll devoted over four pages to exposing the 'misrule' of the Janata Party dominated by RSS and Jana Sangh. It held the Janata Ministry entirely responsible for sharp deterioration of law and order in the country and for the violence perpetrated on the Harijans. It also alleged that the Janata Party had reserved the policy of non-alignment, halted the implementation of land reform legislations and pampered the Monopoly Houses. It ascribed the unemployment problem to the wrong economic policies pursued by the Janata Government at the centre. Although no direct reference was made to the split in the INC, the manifesto criticised the rule of the 'self-seeking' congress leaders like Brahmananda Reddy and Y.B. Chavan who had been supporting the anti-people policies of the Janata Government and it observed that the INC would lose its identity in no time unless its leadership was quickly replaced. It expressed satisfaction over Indira Gandhi's current efforts, as in 1969 to rescue the INC from the hands of the unscrupulous leaders and to rejuvenate the party by her dynamic leadership. Thus it sought to create an impression in the mind of the voters that Indira Gandhi was purging the INC of its reactionary elements.
The manifesto of the Janata Party devoted its first five and half pages to an account of measures already taken by the Janata Government to restore democracy and rights and freedoms of the people which were mutilated beyond recognition during the authoritarian congress rule. It highlighted the centre's performances with regard to the fulfilment of the party's Lok Sabha poll promises such as lifting of the emergency and restoration of the freedom of the press, liberties and rights of the people, rule of law, freedom of judiciary and workers right to trade unionism. It had also prominently mentioned the release of most of the political prisoners, reinstatement of the suspended Government employees and the abolition of MISA and some provisions of the 'notorious' 42nd amendment of the constitution. It is remarkable that its tone of anti-congressism was somewhat milder compared to what it had been in the sixth Lok Sabha Election. This was presumably due to the recruitment of large number of Congress MLA's and Ministers who were earlier denounced as corrupt and authoritarian, into the leadership of the Janata Party in Assam.
CPI:

The CPI manifesto began with a brief account of the lapses of the congress rule in the country and an exposure of the "reactionary and communal" character of the Janata Party. In their view, the Janata Party was formed by sections of the congress dissidents with the help of the 'reactionary' Jana Sangh and RSS and the party received the backing of the big business and the secessionist feudal forces. It felt that real emancipation of the common people would not be possible under the rule of the Janata Party while almost three pages of the manifesto were covered by the party's critique on the congress and the Janata Party, only half a page was devoted to the summary of its role in building up movements on important issues from time to time in the past.

CPI (M):

The manifesto of the CPI(M) contained an exhaustive criticism of the congress rule in Assam and it highlighted the Sinha Ministry's 'notorious' role in converting Assam into a police state where people were completely denied their freedoms and liberties. The party in its manifesto alleged that the congress rule in the country had basically served
the interests of the capitalists and the land-lords and that it was in the interest of these classes that powers had been centralised by the Union Government and the State Governments were turned into a department of the union Government.

THE CPI(M-L):

The CPI(M-L)'s manifesto printed in red letters begins with the rejection of the parliamentary system of government and it presented a critique on the role of the 'reactionary' congress and Janata Party as well as the 'revisionist' CPI(M) in setting up, in the garb of Parliamentary Government, an authoritarian and anti-people rule in the country. It criticised the Left Front Government headed by the CPI(M) in West Bengal for "suppressing peoples' rights and freedoms" and it equated the Left Front's defiance of the 'sacred' Legislature with that of Indira Gandhi's during the emergency period. It also expressed deep concern at the appearance of communal regional and ultra national forces in the State on the eve of the election.

PLP:

The manifesto of the PLP, while unfolding the basic causes of the deplorable economic backwardness of Assam despite its
The Parishad was particularly critical of the CPI(M) for its theorising on the Assam situation in terms of Marxian dialectics, with regard to the peasant's problems, for example the Parishad, in sharp contrast to the CPI(M)'s analysis, regarded the continued influx of Bangladeshis into the state as primarily responsible for these problems and it tended to prescribe the expulsion of the foreigners from the state as the only remedy to the economic problems of the peasantry.

The analysis of the manifestoes issued by various party's clearly indicates that anti-congressism was the keynote although the anti Janata trend was also reflected through some of these manifestoes. Despite the anti congressism advocated by the opposition parties and their consistent concern to replace congress rule in Assam, they could not unite to challenge the INC with determination.

ELECTION MANIFESTO'S 1983:

The 1983 Assam Assembly elections were held in extraordinary circumstances. The Assam agitation launched at the behest of the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana
Sangram Parishad was in full swing. The agitationists gave a call for boycott of the poll on the ground that the electoral rolls contained the names of lakhs of illegal migrants and Bangladeshi nationals. Therefore they demanded that until the electoral rolls were thoroughly revised and the names of non-citizens deleted, elections would be a meaningless exercise in Assam. Further to save Assam from being swamped by foreign nationals and to preserve the identity and language and culture of the Assamese, urgent steps should be taken to detect all illegal migrants and deport them to their respective countries. Until this was done, they would not co-operate with the election process which would only benefit the nefarious designs of the illegal migrants and unscrupulous political parties which encouraged the settlement of illegal migrants in Assam in order to create vote banks for themselves.

On the other hand the Government felt that the President's rule in Assam could not be continued beyond the normal term of the sixth Assembly which was expiring in March 1983. Elections should therefore be held as a constitutional compulsion. A total revision of electoral rolls would be time consuming. Besides the conditions prevailing in Assam were not congenial
for undertaking such a task at this stage. The Government and the Election Commission therefore pleaded that the democratic process should not be obstructed. Infact, the agitationists could have an opportunity to seek a fresh mandate from the people to fortify their claims.

The agitationists did not reconsider their programme of poll boycott. On the contrary, they issued direct and indirect threats to all those who supported the cause of elections that they would be facing dire consequences in case they participated in the elections.

Against this background many parties including the Janata Party and many candidates did not participate in the elections. Some of them did so far fear of reprisals rather than out of support or sympathy for the cause of the AASU. Thus, the whole process of election was vitiated and there was but one issue namely to boycott or not to boycott the poll. Therefore, although some political parties gave manifestoes but these had absolutely no relevance to the purpose of election.
The Eight Assam Assembly Election 1985 was held in an atmosphere of all round peace, amity and good will. The Assam Accord which preceded the election was welcomed by all sections of the people. There were however ripples of protest among certain minority groups who felt insecure. They also thought that they were let down not only by the State Congress (I) Government but also by the Central Government. Thus, the Assam Accord became the focal point of discussion and debate among almost all political parties and groups. This was clearly reflected in the election manifestoes.

A positive aspect of 1985 elections was that political parties which were till then opposing the democratic process had now decided to come back to the path of constitutionalism. In short, there was a strong hope that democracy which was derailed for nearly seven years could be put back on the rails.

**CONGRESS (I):**

The Party's election manifesto which was released by the then Chief Minister, Sri Hiteswar Saikia on November 28, 1985,
reiterated its pledge to implement the Assam Accord both in letter and in spirit if brought back to power. He referred to the Accord as a broad framework for setting the different issues related to the state’s interest and said that it reflects the relevance of the Congress ideals to the challenges confronting the state. The Accord, it said fully accommodates the interests of every section of the population and holds out the possibilities of a process of development in which every section would be assured of participation and protection.

The manifesto expressed concern at the distorted interpretations being made by certain quarters and appealed to the people not to be misled by these machinations.

The manifesto reiterated its firm commitment to democracy, Socialism and Secularism and the protection of minorities which form an integral part of the party’s plans and programmes.

The manifesto also promised a clean and efficient administration, liberal central help, development of the countryside with self-sufficiency in production, more liberal incentives of industries and development of natural resources and spread of education, health and development of urban infrastructures. Further the manifesto laid emphasis on
science development, ecology and a happier working class.

Recalling the remarkable progress made by the Congress(I) Government during the last three years, the manifesto said that the party was able to bring back the state on the path of peace and progress and cautioned the people against forces of destabilization.

The manifesto in conclusion projected the Congress(I) as the only party which stands alone between unity and disintegration, between dynamic growth and stagnation and appealed to the people to stand by it in the coming election.

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (B.J.P.)

The BJP election manifesto which was released on 29 November 1985 by the party's state President Sri Chakreswar Saikia, expressed that it has entered into the election arena with a view to creating on all India force to combat the grave danger of infiltration in Assam. The manifesto was of the view that the present problem of foreign nationals in Assam was an outcome of the uninterrupted congress misrule for the last 38 years and felt that only a united force committed to save Assam from being overrun by the foreigners was the
alternative to dislodge the Congress (I) from power.

Welcoming the Assam Accord the manifesto said that the Accord itself was not the solution but a step towards it. It also said that the infiltration was not only limited to Assam, but that other border states like Rajasthan, Gujrat, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, West Bengal were also facing the similar problem. It added, to stop this infiltration and get rid of foreigners, the regional force was "insignificant and unable" to deliver the goods.

Commenting on the electoral rolls the manifesto said that the electoral rolls remain defective with names of genuine citizens dropped and names of the foreigners included in it but the BJP did not consider it proper to remain aloof from the election in spite of the "inherent defects" of the electoral rolls.

Being aware of the special problem of Assam, the BJP expects to play an important role with respect of the following:

1. A pledge to stop illegal infiltration which has destabilized the demographic balance of the state but it doing so, the party
would see that no genuine Indian citizen were harassed.

2. It would take up the issue of identity cards of all the citizens and ensure the preparation of a National Register of citizens (NRC). Also, it would like a special census to be conducted in Assam to ascertain the causes of abnormal population growth.

3. The party would work to stop the regularisation of encroachers on forests and other Government lands for 25 years.

4. The BJP would work for the unification of different groups and tribes and assure their all round development while protecting their culture, language and religion.

The party would also see that a due share of central revenues, in respect of forest, oil, tea and mineral wealth etc. come to the state. It further added that the party would give more emphasis on establishment of cottage and agro based industries. The party stood for full employment, total eradication of poverty and maintenance of balance between production, supply and distribution.

On the social front, the party assured the raising status of labourers, solving the problems of women and children,
uplifting the backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The party would also give priority in respect of facility and encouragement of sports, arts and culture.

THE JANATA PARTY

Sri Ramkrishna Hedge the Janata Party Leader released the manifesto of his party for the 1985 Assembly and Parliamentary elections. It said that the party would co-operate with the centre in implementing the Assam Accord. He reiterated that if the AGP would need any sort of co-operation of the Janata Party, "we will be happy to do so before or after elections." He further added that the agitation launched by the students was essentially an economic one since they demanded that the sons of soil should be given jobs. However, in course of time the movement had been given a communal and linguistic colour. He further added that the Assam Accord could have been signed years ago and blamed Congress (I) Government for such delay and sufferings of the people of Assam and also for sowing the seed of disunity among the opposition parties of the country. He contended that the forthcoming elections would be the real one the people of Assam would be welcoming since 1978. He said that the 1983
general elections was a "farce" and in order to face all these challenges and solve the diverse and complex problems, Assam should have stable government which his party could and it capable enough to strive hard for the fulfilment of regional aspirations of the people of Assam if voted back to power.

The manifesto also said that the party would strive for the economic development of the state and would extirpate corruption.

COMMUNITIST PARTY OF INDIA (C.P.I.)

The CPI reiterated its stand for proper and speedy implementation of the Assam Accord and assured the people to work for safeguarding the constitutional rights of the linguistic and religious minorities. On the economic front the party said that it would fight for taking immediate steps to check price, strengthen public distribution system and take stern action against the hoarders and black marketeers.

In its 1000 words election manifesto the CPI has demanded that the proposed oil refinery in Assam should be of the grant size and a public sector petro-chemical complex be
set up near the oil fields and for proper planning to utilize the natural gas in the State.

Among the other economic demands are extension of broad gauge railway from Jogighopa to Guwahati on Tinsukia and Lumding to Cachar, timely completion of Silghat bridge, resumption of construction of Jogighopa bridge, new bridge at Dibrugarh etc.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST):

The CPI(M) described Assam Accord as anti minority and anti democratic.

The party in its manifesto for 1985 election in Assam said that Accord had failed to generate a sense of mutual understanding and amity among different sections of the people and instead created a new division between the majority and the minority communities. It assured the electorate that the party would continue fighting for the securities of minorities and democratic rights for all particularly for the 1966-71 stream of entrants taking 1971 as cut off year.

The CPI(M) said that the creation of the Asom Gana Parishad was culmination of the six year old agitation on
foreign national issue which had strong regional overtones.

And about the newly formed UMF the manifesto said that while the move for protecting rights of minorities was a legitimate one, formation of a political party with regional outlook would not help solve any problem democratically.

ASOM GANA PARISHAD (A.S.P.):

In its manifesto, the AGP claimed full credit for the conclusion of the Assam Accord with the central Government the Accord was highlighted as a remarkable victory for the Assamese people, a crowning glory of the popular mass movement in Assam, a fitting reward for the trials and tribulations and the supreme sacrifices made by the Assamese youths and last but not least a grand opportunity for the Assamese to preserve their identity, language and culture. Realising that the Accord generated fears among some minority groups, the manifesto sought to assuage these fears by declaring that the Assamese people, irrespective of religion language or region will stand to gain and not loose by the Accord. Therefore, the minorities need not have any fears.
The AGP promised to weedout corruption from public life and establish a clean and youthful Government. It had also promised:

i) Compensation to the families of the Martyr's and other Sufferers and their proper Rehabilitation.

ii) Security for every Indian citizen.

iii) End to the Politics of Division.

iv) End to All Repressive Policies and full Development of the Democratic process.

v) Clean and Efficient Administration.

vi) Accelerated Economic Growth through Full Development of Agriculture and Industry.

vii) Solution of the land problem.

viii) Rehabilitation of Ex-tea Labourers, Landless Peasants and Flood affected people.

ix) Proper employment of the unemployed.

x) Supply of pure drinking water everywhere.
xi) Control of floods of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

xii) Supply of Rice, Pulses, Salt, Sugar, Edible oil and Kerosene at controlled prices.

xiii) Free Medical Treatment.

xiv) Preservations of forests.

xv) Preservation of Tribal Belts and Blocks.

xvi) Preservation of Full Development of Languages and culture of Assam.

xvii) Safeguard to the Interests of the Tea Labourers and their development.

xviii) Reservation of seats for children of Tea Labourers in Educational Institutions.

xix) Provincialisation of Tea Garden Schools.

xx) Development of the people of the 'CHAR' Areas.


xxii) Free Distribution of the Text Books at the Primary levels.

xxiii) Expansion of Higher Education in Assam.
xxiv) End of political interference in educational matters.

xxv) Development of communication and transport.

xxvi) Permanent settlement of boundary disputes with Neighbouring states.

xxvii) Demand for more powers to states under a federal structure.

The manifesto assured that AGP would take positive steps for the development of agriculture, industries and commerce in the state so that these can bring an end to all exploitations of the weaker section of the people. High priority would be given to utilization of man power in an effective manner.

Voted to power the AGP promised to withdraw all prohibitory orders which curbed the fundamental rights of the people and to drop all cases against the supporters of the Assam Movement.

Further it said that it would ensure equal distribution of the essential commodities all over the state at controlled price and take stringent measures against corrupt officials.
Among other promises made by the party are setting up of a Land Commission to remove the anomalies in the land laws, full protection to tribal belts and blocks, supply of drinking water to all the towns, villages, tea garden and industrial belts, free medical facilities for all, preference to local candidates in employment and settlement of boundary disputes with neighbouring states in the spirit of understanding.

THE UNITED MINORITY FRONT:

The Party manifesto was released at a press conference in Guwahati by its General Secretary Sri Tarapado Bhattacharjee. According to its poll manifesto UMF would work for the scrapping of the Assam Accord if voted to power. It would also make efforts for impeachment of the Election Commission for violation of all established norms while preparing the rolls for 1985 elections and claims even after some of the rolls were published as final.

The manifesto also stressed that the political refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan and new Bangladesh intending to settle permanently in India be treated as citizens according to
national commitment on the eve of partition. They included Hindu, Muslim, Chakmas, Rajbanshis, Manipuri's, Garo's, Hajongs, Khasi's and others.

The UMF which was contesting for 72 Assembly and 7 Lok Shabha seats also demanded that no foreigner should be deported unilaterally and the appropriate bilateral arrangements should be made with the countries of origin for deportation.

The Front demanded that 26th March 1971 should be the base year for detection of foreigners from Bangladesh and 30th July 1976 the base year for the people of Nepali origin.

The manifesto also said that if voted to power the UMF would set up a thorough inquiry into the various riots, communal disturbances and killings between 1979 and 1985 and take effective steps for proper rehabilitation of victims of all communities.

The manifesto further declared "If returned to power it will form the government committed to the national ideals in collaboration with other like minded representatives who
are opposed to the Assam Accord and who are secular democratic and progressive in their precepts and practice".