CHAPTER VI

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION ISSUES

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1978:

The election campaigns have become an important part of our socio political life. To present their viewpoints on various issues, the political parties use various means of communication. They also put forward their plans and programmes and make pledges to the people in the hope of winning their vote. Their attitude towards the people as well as towards the system are mirrored through the manifold stimuli they project during the campaign. Such stimuli evoke diverse response, which may in turn indicate the effectiveness of a particular method or stimulus. The electorate everywhere, including the whole country, is exposed to such issues continuously during the period of election campaign through newspapers, radio election meetings, posters, leaflets, election manifestoes and other means.

The Indian National Congress took the 1978 Assembly election with all seriousness in its bid to remain in power in the State. The party had to face two fold challenge-
After the formation of the Government by the Janata Party at the centre, the party had been preparing for a formidable front against the INC in Assam and some of the old congressmen in the State had already joined the Janata Party. The split in the party for the second time and the consequent decision of the INC(I) to contest in all the constituencies in the State put the ruling congress in the State in a difficult position. In order to meet this two fold challenge, the INC made elaborate arrangements for vigorous campaign.

The APCC, in its Executive Committees meeting which was held on 4th February 1978 made overall arrangements to accelerate the campaign. The Division Engineer, Telephones was requested to provide the APCC office with special purpose telephones in the category of "Election Urgent", with the view of keeping the office in touch with all the constituencies as far as possible in order to meet contingencies whenever these arose. The meeting also decided to provide every OCC with Rs. 10,000.00 in two equal instalments in order to meet the campaign expenses. Similarly every candidate, with the exception of "Ministers and resourceful candidates" also received Rs. 10,000.00 to meet the expenses. The APCC office was allotted
a sum amounting from ₹50,000.00 to ₹100,000.00 for electioneering expenses including transport, conveyance and accommodation of all India leaders. Ten vehicles were hired by the APCC office for electioneering. Late Shri Dinesh Goswami, a former congress MP was appointed the Member in-charge of the election.

In order to ensure smooth campaigning in each district the APCC entrusted electioneering responsibilities to a leader or MLA or an MP of the district in the following manner - Shri Ahmed Hussain MP for Goalpara district, Shri Girin Choudhury MLA for Kamrup district, Shri Dev Kant Borooah MP and ex-President of AICC for Nowgoan district, Shri Bijoy Chandra Bhagabati ex MP and President of INTUC for Darrong district, Shri Bedabrata Barua MP ex Union Minister and Shri Gajen Tanti Minister in the Sinha Cabinet, for Sibsagar District, Shri Haren Bhumji, MP and Shri Dipak Murmoo, MLA (both from Tea Garden Labour Community) for Dibrugarh district; Shri Lalit Kumar Doley MP for Lakhimpur district, Shri Nihar Ranjan Laskar MLA for Cachar district and Shri C.S. Teron, the APCC chief for Kurbi Anglong and North Cachar District.

In the previous elections political parties used to rely mostly on door to door campaign although other forms of
campaign such as public meetings addressed by important leaders at the state and National level and posterings and wall writings etc. were also used. But this time all the parties seemed to have decided to rely mostly upon campaign by national leaders instead of door to door campaign. This strategy was adopted by the non congress parties perhaps to harp on Emergency excesses and to convince the people not to allow the congress to come to power again. The INC and the INC(I) also used this strategy to alley the apprehension of another Emergency and to dump upon each other the responsibility of Emergency excesses.

Shri Dinesh Goswami, Member-in-charge of the Election, in a letter to the AICC General Secretary, Shri K.C. Pant, urged him to send as many national leaders as possible at the earliest to start the campaign in different parts of the State. He also informed that PM Shri Desai and the former PM Mrs. Indira Gandhi had been campaigning for their respective candidates, and therefore, the need for the presence of the party's national leaders was extremely felt. He also suggested that the persons like Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Saugata Roy and Purobi Mukherjee should be sent to campaign in Bengali dominated areas and to persuade Shaji Qureshi, Abdul Ghafoor,
Yunum Saleem and Amjad Ali to campaign in some of the areas where Muslims constituted a sizeable section of voters. Shri K.C. Pant was in Assam for a considerable period of time supervising the campaign and also took personal interest in inviting the party leaders to visit different places. Chief Minister Shri Sinha took personal care in publishing advertisements in the press along with appeals to voters. The All India Radio agreed to broadcast the election speeches by the leaders of the contesting political parties. The Station Director of AIR, Guwahati in the meeting of the representatives of the different political parties held on February 6, 1978 decided by lot the dates of their respective campaign programmes. Every political party got two chances to broadcast its message to the electorate and the following parties availed of the chances on the dates, as follow - INC- 9th and 16th February, PTCA on 10th and 17th February; CPI(M) on 11th and 18th February; Janata Party on 13th and 20th February, Congress(l) 14th and 21st February; CPI on 15th and 22nd February.

The INC utilised the AIR in a more impressive manner than any other political party did. It decided to request Chief Minister Shri Sinha and M.M. Choudhury, a former CM of Assam
and a former Governor of Punjab, to broadcast the campaign address on the scheduled dates. The content of the broadcasts was discussed earlier among the leading members of the party and approved by the APCC chief. The broadcast of M.M. Choudhury included important issues such as glorious history of the congress, its role at the time of grouping, its martyr's sacrifices in the freedom struggle and its efforts since independence to remove poverty and to establish a socialist society removing differences at all level. In his broadcast Shri Sinha tried to assert that promises to the people during 1972 electioneering had been fulfilled and in this way the INC had become a "revolutionary organization". The APCC was also offered help of various kinds including vehicles by congressmen of the adjoining states like Tripura.

The Janata Party had resources to make arrangements in a way befitting the party which newly emerged as a national alternative to the congress. But except making arrangements for public address by its national leaders, the party did not seem to have made any vigorous campaign. A large number of Janata leaders toured different places for electioneering. They were PM Desai, the Party Chief Chandrashaker, Union Ministers like George Fernandez, H.N. Bahuguna, Raj Narain,
The INC(I) had very little time at its disposal to meet all the requirements of perfect campaign. Nevertheless, it organised parallel DCC's and MCC's throughout the state. Its only resource appeared to have been Mrs. Indira Gandhi who remained the pivotal figure throughout the campaign. Its other leaders like Kedar Pandey, Daroga Prasad Rai, Mir Qosim, Zail Singh, Dr. S.D. Sharma, Nazrul Islam, Subrata Mukherjee, Pranab Kr. Mukherjee and Mohshina Kidwai toured different places of Assam, but they had been overshadowed by the visit of Mrs. Indira Gandhi because her visit to every place provoked disturbances. Mohshina Kidwai held street corner meetings in different parts of Guwahati. However, this method was also adopted earlier in the campaign by the CPI(M-L).

The CPI(M) contested 27 seats and its campaign appeared to have been vigorous. Its organ 'Ganashakti' as Assameses
weekly from Guwahati, and the party leaflets issued separately in different areas carried out the bulk of campaign. The party cadres made door to door campaign in a vigorous way. Instructions were issued to party workers to ensure that voters slips were distributed properly to all voters. Proper arrangements for deputing polling agents to the polling booths completed much ahead of the polling day. Like other national parties, the CPI(M) too relied great on the campaign of its national leaders as well as the party leaders from adjoining States like Tripura.

Two leaders of the CPI(M-L), Sontosh Rana and K. Benerjee, visited Assam to campaign for their party candidates contesting 5 seats. Beside addressing public meetings in all these constituencies and hold street corner meetings in the urban constituencies like Guwahati, the party made vigorous door to door campaign more particularly in the rural constituencies contested.

CAMPAGN ISSUES:

A great variety of issues, national and local got prominence in the campaign meetings. A survey of the public speeches of national leaders of all India parties reveals
that national issues like imposition of internal Emergency, the Shah Commission Report, democracy versus dictatorship, PD Acts etc., were focussed prominently rather than regional issues like demands for broadgauge railway lines, flood control, expansion of refineries in Assam, industrialization of the region etc. which of course, secured better attention in the manifestoes of different parties brought out during the time of election.

As the preparation for the Assembly election in the States started in the first week of January 1978 news on the evidences of Emergency excesses given by the different person in the Shah Commission came out prominently in all the national and local dailies and weeklies. These news items and the potentiality of creating anti congress feelings among the voters, reports on Indira Gandhi's defiance to the summons of the Shah Commission appeared in most of the dailies. A case was registered against her for such defiance under IPC 178-179.

In the campaign the Janata leaders used these facts to expose the authoritarian behaviour of the congress politicians. Referring to these issues and happenings, they appealed to the voters in Assam to preserve and project their democratic rights by casting their votes in favour of the Janata Party. This slogan invariably was raised by all the Janata leaders right from PM Morarji Desai to Haji Arif Beg.
The INC leaders like Y. D. Chavan said that his party had to fight against both Indira Gandhi and the Janata Party. He admitted that all the Congress leaders were more or less responsible for excesses and imposition of emergency was a mistake. He said "we should have opposed it but could not". He pledged that his party would never commit the same mistake in future. He felt that there should be some constitutional guarantee against such a wrong imposition.

The INC(I) President Mrs. Indira Gandhi tried to refute the charge that her Government was responsible for the emergency excesses. She told in an election meeting that the State Governments were responsible for all the emergency excesses.

The Janata Party and other left parties also raised the issue of democracy vs. dictatorship. The alleged that leaders of the undivided congress were responsible for the imposition of emergency resulting in the regimentation in national life. In several meetings PM Desai said that his party had freed the people from dictatorship and that was the greatest achievement of his party. He urged upon the people to strengthen his party which had restored democracy in the country. Similarly, the other leaders of the party Raj Narain, Krishna Kant, H.N. Bhuguna, Chandrashekar etc. emphasised the need for strengthening the democratic bases of the country and they felt that
their party was making all round efforts to re-establish democracy on a solid footing and they appealed to the people to join hands with them to rebuild the democratic structure of the country. The Party pledged for a clean administration both the centre as well as at the State level, for which it wanted a strong and stable government at both the levels.

The CPI(M) intensified its campaign in the constituencies where its candidates had been contesting. The Tripura, Chief Minister Nripen Chakravarty, was the first leader to start the campaign on 30 January 1978 in the Cachar District, followed by Jyoti Basu who addressed a public meeting at Guwahati on 1 February. The party raised the issue of democracy vs. dictatorship, as other anti congress parties did. It also raised other important issues like Centre-State Relations, Industrialisation of Northeast India to improve the economic condition of the people of the region and the growing trends of provincialism which was threatening the integrity of the country, and the party asserted its firm determination to fight against these trends. All the CPI(M) leaders invariably appealed to the people to support the candidates of the Janata Party, the CPI, the RCPI and SUCI and the RSP in such constituencies where the CPI(M) was not contesting.
The CPI felt that it was unfortunate that an electoral alliance among the left parties could not be formed, although it tried to initiate such alliance from the very announcement of the election. The party criticised the Janata Party for its failure to keep the promises of 1977. It held the Janata Party fully responsible for the growing political instability in the country. It also appeared to be highly critical of the performance of the INC during the last three decades. It alleged that in the name of democracy the INC was adopting a capitalist line. And therefore it pleaded for united efforts to build up the third alternative that is a viable alliance of all the left parties like CPI, the CPI(M), the RCPI, the CPI(M-L) and SUCI and the RSP. Indrajit Gupta, CPI MP toured Assam and participated in election campaign, he denounced Janata Party as a representative of monopoly capitalists and he therefore called it an anti working class party. He urged the people to elect candidates of his party and also of other left parties contesting in those constituencies where his party candidates are not in the fray.

The CPI(M-L) tried to clarify its stand on its participation in the election under the prevailing system of parliamentary democracy. One of its basic aims in contesting election was to fight against authoritarianism of the INC. Santosh Rana,
a CPI (M-L) member in the West Bengal Assembly, appealed to all the left political parties to fight unitedly against all the sources of fascism. He in this regard saw a new danger from the Janata Party which had not been fulfilling its promises of 1977. He explained that his party was participating in the election with the view to uniting the people to protect their interests to using the election and the Assembly as the platform for exposing the fascist forces.

Besides these, local issues like overall development of the region, expansion of refineries in Assam, extension of broadgauge railway line, flood control, shortage of salt, the unemployment problem etc. figured in the campaign. George Fernandez assured the voters that his party would undo the injustice done to the region during the last 30 years of Congress misrule by establishing at least one industry in each of its districts, and he alleged that the acute shortage of salt was caused by the mismanagement of the Congress Government in Assam. PM Desai was pained to see the deteriorating condition of the communication system. He assured the people that once they installed the Janata Government in Assam development in the state would be rapid, he also assured to solve the unemployment problem within 10 years and implement the Government's policy of flood control in the region. The question of the
extent of broadgauge railway line up to Tinsukia was also raised by it. Another important local issue i.e. the expansion of the capacity of the existing refineries was also taken up by the party. Meanwhile the centre was reportedly considering the question of nationalisation of the oil companies in Assam. All these indicated that the Janata Party by sympathising with much talked about local issues, made its bid to win favour of the electorate of the region who still appeared to have been supporting the congress party.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi had an unusual and terrible experience in her electioneering in Assam. She was greeted with black flags everywhere, and trouble broke out wherever she visited. There was stone throwing at different places and on one occasion Shri Pranab Mukherjee was hurt. In her election meetings, she had to take pains in explaining the significance of her party symbol "hand* for obvious reasons. The Election Commission had allotted the traditional symbol of the cow and the calf to the INC and her natural apprehension was that the people would identify the INC as the "real congress" she tried to explain even to the urban voters of Jorhat how useful the hand could be. However, a quick retort from the public was that the "hand* could be used to impose Emergency and subsequent
attrocities. She tried to woo the minorities like the Muslims and the Harijans, and in all her public addresses, tried to stress that all the minorities had been protected by her Government but the Janata Party was responsible for committing atrocities on them.

Not only INC(I), but also the other contesting parties were trying to win the votes of minorities particularly the Muslims who constituted 25 p.c. of the total population of the state. All these parties with the exception of the left parties appeared to have taken special interest in the minority communities and they did not hesitate to make religious appeals to the voters by sending Muslim leaders to campaign in the Muslim dominated areas. The INC, the INC(I) and the Janata Party took particular care to focus the problems of the religious minorities and each of them projected itself as the champion of the cause of minorities. The newly formed North Eastern Muslim League also tried to cash upon the religious sentiments of a section of the Muslim voters.

**ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1983**

As already stated the 1983 Assam Assembly Elections were held in the midst of a state wide agitation demanding
the postponment of the poll till such time that the foreign nationals issue threatening the integrity of the state of Assam and the identity of the Assamese people, was not settled satisfactorily. The Government and the Election Commission urged that the poll could not be postponed beyond the normal term of the House and therefore the poll must be held as a constitutional imperative. At the minimum, the sponsors of the Assam agitation insisted on a thorough revision of electoral rolls before holding the poll. The Election Commission pointed out to the difficulties involved in the process of a comprehensive revision of polls and in view of very little time at their disposal, it would be impossible to achieve the task. Against this background the student leaders refused to co-operate with the process of elections and called upon all genuine voters to boycott the poll. The call for poll boycott was said to be peaceful but according to the Election Commission it was followed up by threats and intimidation, coercion of the voting population throughout the state. As a consequence therefore the 1983 elections could hardly serve the purpose for which they were meant. The parties as well as the candidates could not function in the normal way. There was no campaign in the real sense except silent persuasion.
ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1985:

After the signing of the Assam Accord between the leaders of the Assam Movement and the Government of India in the small hours of August 15, 1985 in New Delhi, the people of Assam heaved a sigh of relief. The six year long agitation disturbed all normal life and activity and virtually brought development to standstill. At long last, peace seemed to have returned to the strife-torn state. The boycott of the electoral process which rendered the 1983 elections to a farce was finally lifted. As a part of the Assam Accord the Assembly was dissolved and on 14 November 1985, a notification was issued for fresh election for Assembly as well as Parliamentary constituencies. These elections, eighth in the series of Assam Assembly Elections were to be held on 16th December 1985.

With the announcement of elections, political parties began organising their election strategies and poll campaign.

AGP CAMPAIGN:

The AGP which was formed on the eve of the election was the most popular party. It had the support of a major
section of the people, particularly the youth. Though wanting in financial resources, the party had an abundance of human resources to back its campaign. There were bands of enthusiastic supporters, particularly the youths from all over the state. They were so enthusiastic that they spared no pains to help organise the AGP campaign in the best possible manner. In fact the poll campaign of the AGP was so extensive and so well organised that all other political parties had been relegated to the background.

The AGP began its election campaign with a Mass rally at the Judges Field on 3rd December 1985. The rally was attended by all the central leaders of the party and the contesting candidates. They addressed millions of their supporters who joined the rally. Leaders of other Regional parties of North East India also addressed the rally.

Regional parties of other states such as the Telegu Desam Party of Andhra Pradesh, National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir had also extended support to the AGP campaign.

Six Telegu Desam MP's arrived in Assam to campaign for the AGP candidates. Addressing a press conference, C. Madhav Reddy leader of the TDP group advocated the view that
the regional parties rather than national parties should prevail in the States as these could have a better grasp of the problems of the state and hence could also handle them with greater confidence. Members of the group addressed public meetings in Tezpur, Jorhat and Dibrugarh in support of the AGP.¹ Sri N.T. Roma Rao, the Andhra Chief Minister and President of Telugu Desam Party, reached Guwahati on December 6, on a three day election campaign for AGP. He concentrated his campaign in the Tea Garden areas of upper Assam, he also visited Nazira to campaign against the candidature of the caretaker Chief Minister Sri Hiteshwar Saikia. Along with P. Upendra, the Leader of the TDP Parliamentary group, Sri N.T. Roma Rao addressed a vast election rally at the Judges Field in Guwahati. He expressed his firm belief that AGP would win and appealed to the people to vote for the AGP as it was the only party which could offer a stable Government and implement the Assam Accord effectively. Sri Rao declared "Let a new Assam be born to save the people of Assam from 38 year long neglect, misrule and corruption".²

¹The Assam Tribune, 1st December 1985.
²The Assam Tribune, 14th December 1985.
Almost all the student organisations of Assam assumed the responsibility to campaign for the AGP. The All Kamrup District Student Union (AKDSU) began its campaign in support of the AGP from December 6. Meetings were held at various places and these were addressed by Sri Kartik Hazarika, President of AASU and other student leaders.

On December 7, the All Guwahati Students Union organised a Mass rally in support of the AGP which was addressed by the top leaders of AASU, All Manipur Students Union, Student leaders of North Eastern States and those of Co-ordination Committee of All Assam Karmachari Parishad.

Women in general and women's organisations all over the state campaigned for the AGP and appealed to the people, especially the women voters to vote for the AGP.

The AGP campaign was strong and colourful in various other ways. The campaign supporters invented several novel methods in order to seek support from the voters. Using audio cassettes the campaigners coined a number of ear shooting slogans and parody songs which were turned into popular traditional songs like Nams, Jikirs and Folk songs including Bihu songs. A procession was organised in Chandmari area of
Guwahati which involved tiny tots, small school children went in procession carrying AGP flags and singing some specially composed Assamese songs in the form of Nursery Rhymes.

Prafullo Kumar Mahanta, the AGP President who was contesting for the Assembly constituencies of Nowgoan and Kaliabor addressed ten to fifteen meetings a day. His main plank was Assam Accord. He assured the Minorities that the Accord would do good to all and hamper the genuine interest of no sections of Indians.

In short, the AGP campaign was remarkable for the spontaneous popular enthusiasm it generated as well for the voluntary popular participation of all sections of the people. The election symbol of the AGP, the familiar 'Pachyderm' appeared to be marching triumphantly all over the state.

**JANATA PARTY CAMPAIGN**

The campaign of the Janata Party was launched by then Chief Minister of Karnataka Sri Ramkrishna Hedge on December 2, 1985. In a public meeting at the Judges field Sri Hedge made a fervent appeal to the people to vote for
the party on the basis of its performance. In Assam as well as in Karnataka he blamed Congress(I) for most of the ills of the people. Sri Hedge addressed election meetings at many other places in the State. Prominent among other national leaders who campaigned for the Janata Party were Sri Madhu Dandovate, Swami Agnivesh Surendra Mohan, Chandrashekhar etc. Addressing the election meetings at Pattraila, Gauripur, Dhubri, Bongaigaon etc. Prof. Dandovare charged the Congress(I) for ruining the country's economy and failing to eradicate poverty. He also held the Congress(I) responsible for precipitating the foreign nationals problem in Assam. He appealed to the voters to vote for the Janata Party as it was the only national party to make the sincere attempt to solve the problems of Assam. According to him regional parties would bring more instability in the politics of Assam.

Sri Golap Barbora, the President of the Janata Party unit in Assam appealed to the people not to let go the prevailing anti-congress(I) sentiment to be wasted and join hands with the Janata Party, for the party was always on the forefront in the movement of the people of Assam against foreign national, and also in regard to many other longstanding
demands. Lastly, he appealed to the people not to make the Assam Accord the only issue at the 1985 poll.

CONGRESS(I) CAMPAIGN:

Besides the state leadership, central leadership was mobilized in a big way to boost the campaign of the ruling Congress(I) party. In addition to the PM's campaigning the Chief Ministers of Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujrat, U.P. Meghalaya were drafted to visit Assam to campaign for the ruling party.

Sri Hiteswar Saikia, addressing his election meetings at Chokmukh, Mathurapur, Chariadeo and Numuligorh areas said that the "Assam Accord was the triumph of the ideals of Democracy, unity and secularism." He also claimed that the ruling Congress(I) which had restored complete normalcy in the state after turmoil was the only political party capable of forming the stable government for speedy implementation of the Accord and ensuring socio-economic development of the state. He also appealed to the people to maintain peace and

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amity and not to be swayed by the false propaganda and wrong interpretation of the Accord.

The Assam Minority Yuva Parishad decided to support Congress(I), Sri Chandar Kumar Sarkar its acting President along with other office bearers of the Parishad called on Sri Rajesh Pilot AICC Observer and conveyed their decision to extend their full support to the party. He also appealed to the people to vote for Congress(I) candidates and said that Congress(I) has proved their sincerity towards Assam's progress and minorities interest by bringing up an Act in the Parliament and they should not be misguided by other parties.

Film Star and MP Sri Amitabh Bachchan reached Guwahati on December 8 to campaign in favour of Congress(I) candidates at Vijay Nagar, Maligoan, Sonapur, Nongolai, Bokaghat, Dergoan, Jorhat, Nazira, Moran and Dibrugarh.

The Congress(I) electioneering which was on a low key received a massive boost with the arrival of the PM Sri Rajiv Gandhi on four days tour beginning from December 11. Along with him several other Congress(I) Ministers also addressed the meetings in the state including Union Minister Sri K.C.Pant.
and AICC(I) General Secretary Sri Oscar Fernandez, Indian Youth Congress(I) President Sri Anond Sharma MP, the Chief Ministers of all the North Eastern States and Union Territories started vigorous campaigning in favour of Congress(I) candidates from December 10 throughout the state. Several CM's outside the N.E. Region and Union Territories, Sri N.D. Tiwari (Industries) Srimati Mohsina Kiduai (Public Health) and Srimati Rajendra Kumari Bajpayee (Social Welfare) campaigned in support of their party candidate. Sri Darbar Singh the former CM of Punjab addressed a Public meeting at Tezpur on December 9 1985. Sri Nar Bahadur Bhandari CM of Sikkim launched his election campaign on December 9 in Kokrajhar District and called upon the people to cast their votes in favour of Congress (I) for the welfare of the backward people of the state.

Former Youth Congress(I) President Sri Tarique Anwar and Congress(I) Seva Dal Chief and former Union Minister Sri Z.A. Ansari campaigned in favour of Congress(I) candidates and claimed that their party was the only party to provide stable government in the state. Sri Anando Sharma MP and the former Governor of West Bengal arrived in Guwahati on December 9 for five days campaigning visit and addressed Public meetings at Jorhat, Kaliabor, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Guwahati.
Film Star and MP Amitabh Bachchan while addressing the public meetings on December 12, at Maligoan and some other places appealed to the people to vote the Congress to power in coming election as it alone could safeguard the country's unity and integrity. He also urged the people to strengthen the hands of PM in his fight against forces bent on disintegrating the country. He also recalled the unstable days after Srimati Gandhi's assassination and said "at that critical hour I decided to join politics to strengthen the hands of Sri Rajiv Gandhi".  

PM Sri Rajiv Gandhi while addressing the election meetings at Morigoan, Hojai and Tezpur on December 11, blamed the Janata Government for dividing the Assamese and the minorities and warned the people of Assam specially the minorities not to be misled by the false propaganda against the Assam Accord which he claimed was "well timed" and will protect the interests of all sections of the society. He added, "we signed the Assam Accord keeping in mind two basic objects – First, for peace and progress of the state and second, for...

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protection and assistance of the minorities. He also pleaded that his party could form a stable government and had already taken steps in this regard and was successful in bringing normalcy in the State after the 1983 polls. He appealed to the people to maintain their age long tradition where the people of all parts were living in peace and amity and pace of development could be maintained only when they lived in peace and harmony.

On December 12, while addressing the meetings at Silchar, Hilakandi, Jorhat and Sibsagar, on his second round of campaigning Sri Gandhi directly attacked on the newly formed regional parties AGP and UMF and said that they were devoid of ideology and principle and had adopted the attitude of confrontation with the centre and could not work for prosperity of Assam.

The election meeting at Nago on Dec. 12, which was to be addressed by Amitabh Bachchan was abandoned because of the anti-congress mood prevailing among the people, which they showed by throwing stares and other things on the dias and

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persistently shouting 'Go back Go back'.

Captain W.A. Sangma, Sri Kishang Keishing and Sri Gegong Apang CM's of Meghalaya, Manipur and Arunachal PraJa respectively joined electioneering in favour of Congress (i).

Sri Amitabh Bachahan accompanied by Sri Rajesh Pilot addressed the public meetings at Nazira, Dibrugarh, Nonggoan, Jorhat, Sibsagar and other places campaigning in favour of Congress(II). He explained how efficiently Sri Gandhi had dealt with the Punjab problem and had also taken steps towards solving the Assam problem by signing the Assam Accord and he was sincere to implement it.

Addressing his last election meeting at Mongaldoi, Sri Gandhi expressed his confidence that his party would get the majority in the Dec. 16 election. Sri Hiteshwar Saikia, CM while addressing the public meetings at Pandu and some areas in Jalukbari Assembly Constituency on Dec. 14 assured the people, specially the linguistic and religious minority that his government would get back the voting right to the people who are likely to disenfranchised for 10 years following the Assam Accord immediately after his party returned to power.
Thus the Congress(I) was the only national party to have carried on a sustained campaign even though the popular mood was often unfavourable and at times even hostile to it.

**BJP CAMPAIGNING**

In its first round of poll broadc ast over Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Silchar radio station Sri Chakrashwar Saikia, President of BJP state unit said that Assam Accord itself was no solution to the foreigners problem and without checking future infiltration the Accord would become meaningless. He assured that his party would work for preventing future infiltration from neighbouring Bangladesh. He also suggested immediate steps for issuing photo identity cards, preparation or a national register of citizens particularly in border states and immediate holding of special census to ascertain the abnormal growth of population in the State. He also expressed that his party will co-operate with the like minded parties for a permanent solution of the foreigners problem, and while doing so it would ensure that no genuine Indian citizens were subject to undue harassment.6

The first ever mass rally was organised by the BJP on December 9, at Naharkatiya which was addressed by the party President Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his three day visit to the State. He spoke on the stand taken by the party in solving the foreigners problem in Assam and appealed to the people to elect his party candidate Dr. Thaneswar Swargori. He claimed that BJP members would form a strong opposition and compel the government to work for peoples interest.

Sri Vajpayee in a Press Conference in Guwahati on Dec. 11 alleged violation of code of conduct by the ruling party by misusing the official machinery and added that such violation of code by the political parties during the elections should be deemed as corrupt practice under the Representation of peoples Act. Addressing an election rally at Chowkidingi Field (Dibrugarh) he said that Assam Accord was only a means towards solving the vexed foreign national problem and for the proper implementation of the Accord a constant pressure on the Union Government would be necessary. He also said that without the prospect of improvement of relation between India and Bangladesh the border fencing might not be a reality and Assam might continue to be the dumping ground of social economic and political problems of Bangladesh. He also appealed to the

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non-Assamese people to live in peace and amity with the indigenous Assamese people so that they did not have to feel swamped over in their own state. He also criticised the community wise election campaign launched by Congress(I) CM and said that the non-Assamese people should be left to decide their political fate as they have to live with Assamese people in amity and affection. He also regretted that there was no electoral understanding with the AGP and appealed to the voters to vote for his candidate and help his party to play the role of a constructive opposition.

Addressing a series of election meetings in the Cachar District on Dec. 12 BJP Chief Sri Vajpayee claimed that an anti-congress wave was sweeping across the state and the ruling party would be routed in the December election. He further said that the people of Assam were now thoroughly disenchanted with Congress (I) for alleged corruption and non-performance of present Government. He further added that the ruling party in connivance with the administration might indulge in widespread rigging, particularly in Cachar and he would also talk to the Election Commissioner seeking measures to prevent it.

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The General Secretary of UMF Sri Tarapado Bhattacharjee released the party manifesto at a Press Conference on December 1 and said that his party would work for the scrapping of the Assam Accord if voted to power and said that it will also make efforts for the impeachment of the Election Commissioner for the violation of the established norms while preparing the rolls for the 1985 Assam election and shall make proper arrangements for the refugees who want to be the citizen of India. He demanded that 23rd March 1971 shall be the base year for the detection of the foreigners from Bangladesh and 30th July 1976 the base year for the people of Nepal origin. He also said that if voted to power it will make a thorough inquiry into various riots and communal disturbances and killings between 1979 and 1985.

The CPI reiterated its stand for proper and speedy implementation of the Assam Accord and assured to work for safeguarding the constitutional rights of the linguistic and religious minorities. In their first round of their poll
broadcast over the Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Silchar radio stations on Dec. 3, the party declared that it would work for introduction of identity cards for voters to step the problem of fresh infiltration in the state and on economic front it would fight for taking immediate steps to check price rise, strengthen public distribution and strengthen action against hoarders and black-marketeers.

Smt. Raja Despande member of political Bureau All India Communist Party urged that the voters of Assam have to play a vital role through the election for strengthening the unity and integrity of the state. She said that the Assam Accord created a normal situation after a long time and people could decide their political future in a peaceful way. She appealed to the people to vote for AICP candidate in Dispur, Naharkatiya and Thimgong Assembly constituencies. She also appealed to the voters of all other constituencies to vote for the candidate of progressive democratic and secular parties and to defeat the separatist, chauvinistic and communal forces.

CPI(M) CAMPAIGN:

The CPI(M) described the Assam Accord as anti minority and anti democratic. In their manifesto they said that the
accord has not only failed to create a sense of unity and amity among the people and has created a new division between the minority and the majority communities, and assured that their party would fight for the security of the minorities. Commenting on the formation of AGP it said that it was the culmination of the six year old agitation on foreign nationals issue. The UMF, it said though having some legitimate aims, its regard and communal outlook would not help solve any problem democratically.

ALL ASSAM TRIBAL STUDENT UNION:

The AATSU held a General Conference of the Union at Barapujia in Nowgoan district from 22nd to 24th of November and discussed the question of united tribal movement in Assam to achieve the political economy for the plain tribes of Assam. A seven member convention preparatory committee was constituted with the aim to unite all the tribal forces of Assam on the basis of a common demand for political autonomy in the form of Autonomous Districts and regions. The Conference opposed the Assam Accord describing it anti tribal and anti Assam and after discussing the political situation in the state decided to stand against both Congress (I) and AGP. A volunteer force of AATSU was also launched to keep vigilance in the tribal villages.
against the chauvinist, anti social and anti tribal forces and elements. A twenty eight member new executive committee was also formed with Sri Ranoj Kumar Pegu as the President, Sri Gandheswar Bora, Vice President and Sri Romakanta Ramchiar as the General Secretary.

CONGRESS (S) CAMPAIGN:

Sri Sarad Pawar the Congress (S) President arrived in Guwahati on December 8 to campaign for its party candidates. He addressed several public meetings in some important constituencies. Besides that he also held a press conference at Dibrugarh. Sri S.W. Dhobe Congress (S) member of Rajya Sabha denied the Maharashtra Chief Minister Sri Shivajirao Patil Nilangekors statement that Congress (S) President Sri Sarad Pawar was joining Congress (I).

THE INDEPENDENTS:

A meeting of the Independent candidates to the Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in Assam was held on December 7 to form a front in order to strengthen the prospects of the Independents. The convenor Sri Pradip Kumar Saikia, an Independent candidate to the Dispur Assembly constituency said that the
A large number of independents contesting the elections has raised fears of splitting of votes besides confusing voters. The meeting strived to form a front and explore the possibilities for putting up a single independent candidate to each Assembly and Parliamentary seat.

**CAMPAIGNING DISTRICT WISE:**

Electioneering in Nowgoan District was on its full swing on December 1, from where the AGP Chief Sri Prafulla Mahanta was contesting with much popular support of the youth who were seen busy campaigning for him and his party. Mike fitted vehicles with smart slogan shouting youths and variegated posters and hoarding plastered on walls and street function meetings showed the sign of boosting the tempo or electioneering Sri Prafulla Mahanta was addressing ten to fifteen meetings every day. His main plank was Assam Accord. He also assured the minorities that they need not be apprehensive of the accord as it was not going to hamper their interest. He also expressed to the newsmen that his party was getting proper response from the people. Even the immigrants will vote for his party in Nowgoan.

In Golaghat sub-division poll campaign by candidates has taken momentum in various places of the sub-division. Here
AGP supporters were more active than others and were taking more interest and enthusiasm in organising poll campaign. They carried out "Sur Bahini" in the streets of Golaghat town.

Unlike in many of the plain districts in Assam Prohibitory orders under section 144 were withdrawn from Sonitpur district more than a year back. Inspite of this there had been hardly any campaigning by the political parties except AGP which had the support of well organised volunteer force.

Restrictions imposed in the Kamrup District by the prohibitory order under Sec. 144 promulgated on Nov. 21 were partially withdrawn by the District Magistrate of Kamrup to facilitate free election campaign by all political parties and candidates. They were allowed to hold meetings in small gathering with intimation to the police station of the area 5-6 hours in advance. Such meetings could be held without prior permission of the District Magistrate but for big gatherings his permission was a must and at rural areas such permission was to be taken from the sub Deputy Collector concerned till 7 AM of December 14.

In Dibrugarh Assembly constituency electioneering started gaining ground on December 2 where former Janata Chief
Sri Golap Barbora and his Cabinet colleague Sri Keshab Chandra Gogoi was campaigning for their party Sri Rajesh Pilot was campaigning for Congress (I) candidate Sri Gogoi appealing to the people particularly minority to vote for his party. But in contrast electioneering on behalf of Congress (I) was usually on a low key and was conspicuous by its absence in Assamese dominated areas. The AGP candidate Sri Handique began its campaign with a cultural procession of men, women and youths headed by an elephant its election symbol. Every conspicuous space of a roadside wall was eclipsed by poster or wall writing exhorting voters to vote AGP with able assistant of DDSU (Dibrugarh District Student Union). In few localities wall writings were seen on behalf of Indian Peoples Front which also held a rally but its candidate Dr. Parama Mahanta, reader in Physics of Dibrugarh University was relatively unknown to many voters. The BJP candidate Sri Lalit Bardoloi had to face twin problems of dearth of man and money as campaigning on his behalf was yet to be taken off. Janata Party was almost total silent in this district though it had fielded Sri Golap Barbora who however was contesting from his home town Tinsukia. The Congress (S) candidate Sri Jogen Bora's campaigning was on a low key CPI and CPI(M) had not fielded their candidate. The
candidates of some other party i.e. Sri Biren Das of Lok Dal, Sri Manohar Singh of Rashtriya Sanjay Manch, Sri Nurul Hudo, Sri Sahabuddin Ahmed and Sri Pradumnya Rai - all independents did nothing except adapting the common means of poster and wall writing to attract the voters.

The campaign scene in Nowgoan District was dominated by the AGP supporters mainly AASU volunteers. They adapted all the latest electioneering innovation like playing recorded cassettes by the party leaders, late night street corner meetings and the campaign strategy in the town. Electioneering by most of the National parties was still on a low key particularly in the rural areas where they were facing difficulties. Though Congress (I) and the newly formed UM F set up their candidates in this constituency. AGP's electioneering was far ahead of the other parties with the conventional methods like wall writing, display of fastoons. It has penetrated deep into the constituencies by setting up their election offices in rural areas where presence of other parties was virtually not noticeable. The illuminated cut outs of the elephant with huge clay model of the party symbol were displayed in the party offices.
Although barely twelve days were left, the electioneering in Darrang District remained in a low key. Being the harvesting season people were busy in their fields hardly showing any interest in the campaigning by the various national parties particularly Janata and Congress (I). But the newly formed regional party AGP's flags, fastoons and hoarding were seen fluttering in all conceivable places and all other parties seemed to be lagging behind it.

Electioneering in Goalpara District where there was a gruelling fight for the four Assembly seats mainly among the candidates belonging to Congress (I) AGP and the UMF was going on in full swing. For the Goalpara East seat Congress(I) was divided on the issue of dissatisfaction on selection of party candidate who was denied the Congress (I) ticket and shadeed Majumder was selected. Telegu Desam Party Leaders visited the constituency and addressed the public meeting in favour of AGP.

In Rangiya sub-division for the three Assembly seats the contest was between 29 candidates of various political parties including Congress (I). But the AGP was ahead in campaign for its candidates as they utilised all the available open space, walls and streets for slogans and posterings and
addressed meetings particularly in the rural areas with their supporters whereas the Congress (I) candidates were facing difficulties for campaigning due to lack of support from the local people. The other parties including the independents were seen lagging far behind. Janata Party Chief Sri Ramkishna Hedge, CM of Karnataka addressed a public meeting at Rangiya and appealed to defeat Congress (I) and vote for his party. Congress (I) also arranged several public meetings at different places.

The Barak Valley was also warmed up with a profusion of posters and graffiti meetings and processions arranged by various political parties where 117 candidates were in the fray for 15 Assembly seats. There was keen contest for Silchar, Udharbandh, Karimganj North and Sadarpur constituencies.

In the ten Assembly constituencies of Bokakhat, Sarupathar, Golaghat, Khumtai, Dergoan, Jorhat, Majuli, Titabor, Moriani and Teok where the main fight was between the Congress (I) and AGP candidate, electioneering was in full swing with the party workers campaigning almost around the clock. Candidates were addressing public meetings at various places and made attempts for door to door contract.
The AGP surpassed all other parties and candidates in campaigning in Dudhnoi, Goalpara East and West Bongaigoan and Abhyapuri South in Goalpara District. It faced tough contest in Jalaswar and Abhyapuri North constituencies from the UMF. Dudhnoi where the Left Front had a strong hold in post was eroded by the AGP. The Congress (I) was lagging behind in almost all those ten constituencies. A mass rally was organised by Goalpara Garo Parishad on Dec. 8 and two Telugu Desam MP's addressed the gatherings in support of AGP.

In Naharkatiya Assembly constituency where election was not held in 1983, six candidates of AGP, Congress (I), CPM, BJP Janata and Independents all were contesting. All of them were campaigning for their respective candidates. But AGP was far ahead of other parties in wall writing and posterimg. Procession was also taken out in support of its candidate, Sri Kusumvar Gogoi. The Congress (I) and CPI workers were still quiet. As the Janata Party candidate Sri Bukul Konwar was concentrating in his own place Sosoni and other villages no poster or wall writing was seen in his support in the town. In sharp contrast to that, BJP workers though very limited in number were seen contacting the people in the villages as well as in the town for the candidate Dr. Tankeswar Swargari. The AGP being the
In all the twelve Assembly constituencies of Dibrugarh District a strong Pro-AGP wave was surpassing unquestionably the Janata wave of 1977-1978. The enthusiasm and dedication of the AGP supporters was praise worthy. The Youths and Students in groups on bicycle and on foot visited every habitat. No such area was there where on AGP election booth was not opened. In contrast electioneering by the resourceful Congress(I) has failed to make an hopeful inroad into the rural areas. Other parties including the Independents were far far behind the race.

For the five Assembly seats of newly created tribal dominated Kokrajhar District, contest was mainly between the Congress (I)' and PTCA candidate, electioneering was going on in full swing. The AGP, which made considerable dent among the cross section of the people there, launched extensive campaign despite the party's limited resources. As for the PTCA, the newly formed United Trinamool Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) a breakaway organisation of PTCA comprising mostly of tribal youths, paused a threat to the party by
splitting up the tribal votes, which in turn would put the issue between the ruling party and the other political rivals Congress (S) and the Independent candidates.

In the entire Sibsagar District the AGP wave was more prominent, which submerged all other factors dominating earlier elections like caste, community language and religion although the Congress (I) desperately tried to woo the votes with the same traditional manner by bringing party leaders from different states to please the different sections of electorate.

For the eight Assembly seats in Nowgoan sub-division electioneering reached its peak. Important contesting parties were making frantic efforts to surpass each other, although AGP was ahead in all phases of electioneering no matter it was wall writing, door to door canvassing or procession.

The newly formed UMF posed a stiff challenge to the ruling Congress (I) in the seven of the eight Assembly seats in Barpeta District. As the district was dominated by the immigrants AGP succeeded in splitting the votes of minorities who had been traditionally the supporters of Congress (I). Congress (I) contested for all the eight seats where as UMF and AGP excluded Pathacharkuchi and Chenga seats respectively.
For Sorbhog constituency neither Congress (I) nor UMF contested there. The main contest was between CPI(M) MLA Sri Hemen Das and the AGP nominee Sri David Ledger.

Throughout the Goalpara District AGP reigned supreme in electioneering and a strong, impressive and confident pro-AGP wave was clearly perceptible in six out of seven constituencies. Similarly Lohoal and Moran Assembly constituencies adjoining Dibrugarh were also in the grip of pro-AGP wave along with the rest of the constituencies. Though CPI and Janata Party have put their nominees for those seats along with AGP and Congress (I), but their efforts proved to be less effective than AGP.

The AGP surpassed all other political parties in the election campaign in the entire Barpeta District. Thousands of youths and students even from interior areas dedicated themselves to the cause to which AGP was fighting and campaigned in its support. Similarly in Nalbari, Barama and other areas of Naloari District strong AGP wave was seen. Thousands of men and women came out in procession shouting slogans in support of AGP.

By and large the poll campaign in the 1985 Assam Assembly Election was healthy, peaceful and democratic. There were reports
of intimidation, assault and disorderly conduct in a few cases. But considering the number of factors associated with this election such as the six year old agitation on the aliens issue, the unfortunate legacy of the controversial election of 1983 which divided the state's population both horizontally and vertically, the confrontation between the Saikia Ministry and the Movement leaders, controversy over the preparation of electoral rolls and a host of other critical issues, it must be said that the campaign by parties and candidates remained peaceful and without any major clashes. Main reason behind this was that the people in general desired peace and stability and reaffirm their faith in the democratic process.

ELECTION ISSUES, 1978:

The issues raised by the various political parties in their manifestoes can be grouped into two namely (a) General Issues concerning the nation as a whole and (b) the Specific Issues confronting the people of Assam. Those issues are discussed below in detail:

1. CENTRE STATE RELATIONS:

The centre-state relationship was one of the major
issues in the manifestoes of the left and regional parties. The parties were unanimous on the point that the division of powers in the constitution was too heavily tilted toward the centre and that the State was left with little autonomy. The CPI(M) and the CPI(M-L) projected the issue in the perspective of class interest while the PLP considered the existing constitutional arrangements as instruments of exploitation of the Assamese and their state resources by outsiders. As regards their programmes, the CPI(M) firmly stood for greater state autonomy. The party advocated suitable amendments of the constitution to allocate more powers to the state while leaving Defence, Finance, Foreign Affairs and communication to the centre. The CPI(M-L) also advocated state autonomy particularly in financial matters. The PLP proposed 'a total struggle' against the centre to recast the state's relationship with New Delhi.

2. SECURITY LAWS:

The issue of security laws was mainly a hangover of the internal emergency imposed during Indira Gandhi's Prime Ministership. For obvious reasons the manifestoes of the Congress I were silent on this issue. The Janata Party raised the issue in its manifesto and claimed that the Janata Government
at the centre had already undone much of the damage done to civil liberties and democratic rights, and expressed its determination to clear the remaining debris of the emergency. Although the CPI criticised the anti people policies of the Congress and the Janata Government, it did not specifically raise the issue of citizens rights and freedoms. The manifesto of the CPI(M) recorded the party's deep concern at the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms of the people in the recent past and proposed suitable amendments to the constitution in order to prevent their violation by one party dictatorial rule in future. The manifesto of the CPI (M-L) also put great emphasis on this issue and accorded priority. The party believed that citizens rights and freedoms were as unsafe as they had been during the rule of the Congress Party. It therefore, proposed to scrap all provisions that empowered the Union Government to enforce black laws like Misa and DIF. It proposed deletion of all the provisions relating to declaration of internal and external emergencies as well as all provisions that could be used against the organisation of a political party or a union to mobilise public opinion. The party advocated drastic changes in the Penal Code and the Jail Manual to stop atrocities of police and fail officials to stop police and armed forces from suppressing democratic
movements. It also promised to secure release of all political prisoners of the country including those detained in foreign countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. Over and above, the CPI(M-L) wanted the 42nd amendment to be declared as null and void.

3 ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

All the political parties dealt with the problem of administrative reforms in their manifestoes but none of them come out with concrete proposals. The views they put forward were not based on the recommendations of the Administrative Reforms Commissions. The INC(I) manifesto promised to cleanse the administrative machinery and to reorganise the districts and sub divisions in order to make administration speedy and welfare oriented. The 1977 Election Manifesto of the Janata party also talked reorganization of the district and the sub divisions but the present one was silent on this issue.

4. DECENTRALIZATION OF POWERS

The INC reiterated its stand on democratic decentralization of powers to the Panchayats and it laid great stress on allowing a greater measure of autonomy to the Panchayats
in order to ensure people's participation at the grass root level for effective rural reconstruction. The INC(I) also stood for decentralization of powers and developmental activities as far as possible. The CPI(M-L) advocated decentralization in the field of Industry. The other political parties did not pronounce on this issue in clear terms although they made casual reference to it in connection with some other issues.

5. ELECTORAL REFORMS;

The Janata Party included in its Lok Shabha Manifesto a proposal for recall of errant legislators but it did not repeat the proposal in the 1978 Assembly election manifesto. The CPI(M-L) advocated enactment of law allowing recall of an MLA or MP by one-third of the electorate of the constituency. CPI proposed to provide the right of franchise at the age of 18.

6. NATIONALISATION;

The CPI in its manifesto proposed nationalisation of foreign capital invested in Assam Oil Refinery, Oil India Ltd. and in the Tea Industry in Assam. The CPI(M)'s manifesto advocated nationalisation of all monopoly capital, the oil and
the tea industries in the state. The CPI(M-L) was of the view that only a determined people's struggle against imperialists and monopoly capitalists could liberate them from the exploitation of these classes.

7. PRICE RISE:

Rise in the price of the essential commodities was one of the common concerns of all the contesting political parties in 1978 Assembly Election. The non-communist parties, however remained uncommitted in their manifestoes with regard to the measures for a solution to this problem. The CPI in its manifesto pledged to take stern action against hoarders and black-marketeers and to build up a public distribution system through which all essential commodities would be distributed at controlled prices. The party proposed to include the small traders in the net work of the intended public distribution system. The CPI(M)'s manifesto proposed to arrest inflation and to effect drastic reduction in prices of essential commodities. It also pledged a drastic cut in the rate of certain taxes. The party in its manifesto advocated the state taking over of the wholesale trade in the essential commodities as to ensure their distribution of Government controlled prices. The CPI(M-L)'s manifesto held out a promise to root out the
hoarders and the blackmarketeers, to fix reasonable prices of all agricultural products and to halt the rise in prices of essential commodities.

8. MONOPOLISTS AND LANDLORDS:

The Congress (I) alleged that the Janata Government was under the influence of the monopolists and rich landlords but did not put forward any proposal to deprive these classes of their hold over the administrative machinery of the state. The CPI(M) advocated an amendment of the constitution to prevent the big monopoly houses and the landlords from using the administrative machinery of the state to expand and safeguard their class interests. The CPI(M-L) proposed people's struggle against imperialists, social imperialists and the comprador capitalists. It also proposed confiscation of all foreign capitals without paying any compensation and repeal of all treaties with the imperialists and the social imperialists.

9. EDUCATION:

All political parties had dealt with the problem of education in their manifests. The Janata Party promised that if the party was voted to power there would not be a single
village or a tea garden without an elementary school. It promised to provide free education upto primary level. In its Lok Sabha manifesto the party was committed to eradication of illiteracy within 5-10 years and to provide education upto the middle level to all within twelve years. The party made reference to all these pledges in the manifesto issued on the eve of the election to the Assam Legislative Assembly. The INC manifesto noted with satisfaction that Assam had taken greater strides in the sphere of education since Independence. The party proposed that education should be universalised, modernised and vocationalised. It pledged to introduce informal education for adults. The party proposed to provide Book Bank facilities, scholarships and mobile libraries. The Congress (I) manifesto while expressing its satisfaction alike IMC, at its services in the field of education instead of quantitative expansion. The party emphasised the need for vocational education to help the students for self-employment. It also promised to open schools in villages and tea gardens and to provide higher educational facilities to meritorious students. The CPI(M) while expressing its dissatisfaction at the low percentage of literate people in Assam, promised to provide primary education to all, free education upto Middle School level, scholarships and hostel
facilities to poor student and to provincialise all recognised High Schools. The party advocated student representation in the administration of educational institutions which was not considered by other political parties except the CPI. The CPI, while making promises to provide free education up to High School level like CPI(M) also felt the need for students and employee's representation in the administration of colleges and universities.

10. UNEMPLOYMENT:

Since the unemployment problem reached alarming proportion in Assam the problem had received priority in the manifestoes of all the political parties. The INC manifesto promised to take up programmes for expansion of employment avenues in the rural and urban areas. The party believed that the State's growing population and the spread of education made the problem acute. The party promised to make efforts to end all kinds of existing regional and sectional disparities in the government employment and other sectors. The Congress(I) manifesto while criticising the Janata Party for not taking up any specific proposal to solve the problem. The Janata Manifesto promised to solve the unemployment problem within 10 years and in this regard the party mentioned the scheme taken up by the
Janata Government at the centre to solve the unemployment problem. As per the scheme the party promised to create avenues for employment in the field of agriculture and industry. The CPI manifesto criticised the Janata Party and advocated the provision of 'unemployment allowance' to the unemployed youths until they get employment. The CPI(M) manifesto promised to provide jobs for the unemployed and "unemployment allowance" to the unemployed persons on the line of the CPI the party manifesto also promised to take up schemes for rural unemployed so as to provide job opportunities. It also pledged to provide at least 2 Kg. of rice per day to each unemployed person. The CPI(M-L) while expressing its grave concern at the unemployment problem emphasised the need to amend the constitution of India for the purpose of ensuring the right to work for all Indian citizens. The PLP while expressing its concern at the problem of unemployment appears to have held the 'outsiders' responsible for it but the Parishad did not put forward a specific programme of action to eradicate the problem.

11. INDUSTRIES:

All political parties stressed the rapid industrialisation of the state. The Congress manifesto while emphasising the need
of heavy industries put equal importance on agri based cottage industries and local crafts. It also attached priority to the development of handloom industry and sericulture. It proposed to provide institutional financial aids and a prospective market for these products. The party promised to abolish middle men in the trade in sericulture to ensure direct benefits to rural people. The Congress (I) while giving importance to small scale and cottage industries proposed to establish new industries with locally available raw materials to establish a third refinery in the state to expand the capacity of the Guwahati Oil Refinery and to establish industries based on crude oil. The party promised to take steps to establish the Head Offices of the companies engaged in tea Industry within the state itself and to secure 75% of the employments in the industry for the local people. The Janata manifesto while recognising the acute unemployment problem stressed the need to develop agri based village and small scale industries in order to provide employment in industries. It proposed the establishment of jute and sugar mills on priority basis. The party promised to recast the concept of planning to serve this purpose and to reorient the marketing system to cater to the needs of the rural industries. The CPI in its manifesto proposed that the industrialisation of the state should be based on locally available
raw materials and pleaded for the establishment of the third oil refinery, more petrochemical complexes and promised to take steps for utilisation of natural gas. The CPI(M)'s manifesto contained proposals for fuller implementation of the already approved projects for industrialisation, taking over of the closed tea gardens and factories, development and expansion of cottage and small scale industries. It stood for regional planning in the field of industrialisation of the state in order to provide maximum job opportunities.

The CPI(M-L), while advocating the establishment of industries on the basis of locally available resources, pledged to stop investment of foreign and brokers capitals in the state and to ban export of local products in the interest of the capitalists, imperialists and social imperialists. The PLP was of the firm view that the present policy of industrialisation and the investment of outside capitals in industries like tea, oil and plywood had not brought up any significant benefits to the local people. It maintained that the local people of Assam had been systematically deprived of their legitimate share of employments in these industries. The Parishad however, did not spell out its policy for industrialisation of state which in its words should benefit the local people.
12. AGRICULTURE AND LAND REFORMS:

The Janata manifesto accorded primacy to agriculture and rural reconstruction. The party manifesto emphasised its commitment to establish Jute and Sugar Mills in Assam. The party promised to take up an agricultural plan with a view to providing employment opportunity. The party also committed itself to provide better irrigation, adequate power and natural gas for agriculture purposes. In view of the acute land problem in Assam, the party felt the need for reformation of the existing land laws instead of enacting new land laws. Referring to its achievements in the field of agriculture, the INC proposed to make special efforts to further increase the area under new cropping pattern of flood avoidance, to increase cultivation of pulses and mustard and to offer extension service to every farmer through an organised system of training. The party pledged to give high priority to development of irrigation. It proposed to supply power to the villages for agriculture, irrigation and cottage industry. The party also offered the exempt the poor cultivators from land revenue and to reduce land revenue for others. The INC attached high priority to distribution of land to the landless and allotment of house sites to the homeless families. The Congress (I) advocated in agricultural pattern
on the line of the INC and land reforms in line suggested by the Janata party. The CPI(M) manifesto promised to exempt cultivators from revenue on land up to 20 bighas, to provide loan to the farmers to fix reasonable prices for agricultural products, land ceiling at 30 bighas, land to the landless and to abolish zamindari system. The CPI pleaded reforms more or less on the Congress (I) line with regard to agriculture and land. The CPI (M-L) while deploring the present fate of the farmers promised to save them from middle men, by abolishing middlemen between the farmers and the government. The party also promised to fix reasonable prices for agricultural products. The PLP regarded influx of Bangladeshis into the state to be mainly responsible for agrarian problems but did not forwarded any specific programme of action.

13 COMMUNICATION

The communication bottleneck of the state attracted the attention of the various political parties. The INC promised to make efforts to secure the centre's early action for the construction of two bridges on the Brahmaputra at Silghat and Jogighopa, the extension of broad-gauge railway lines first from Bongaigoan to Gauhati and then to Tinsukia.
and from Guwahati to Goalpara and the construction of a National Highway across Majuli. It also proposed to improve ferry services in the state and to introduce Cargo services up to Calcutta. The INC(I)'s programme for the development of communication in the state was more or less similar to that of INC. It proposed construction of three bridges over the Brahmaputra, conversion of the North Trunk Road into a national highway linking Majuli with the rest of the state and improvement of internal water transport. The Janata Party also held out similar promises. The CPI in its manifesto expressed its commitment to the cause of removal of communication bottleneck and proposed to extend broad-gauge railway lines up to Tinsukia and to construct two bridges over the Brahmaputra. The CPI (M-L) also proposed improvement of communication. The INC and INC (I) laid equal emphasis on the increase in the number of radio centres and introduction of TV in the state (while the INC promised to set up the AIR stations at Tezpur, Haflong and Kokrajhar the INC (I) promised to set up in all the important towns of the state. The PLP also wanted to take urgent steps to develop communication in the state.

14. REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Janata Party laid great emphasis on the problem of
regional integration in Northeast India and proposed to settle boundary disputes amicably among the seven states of the region. It also promised to take up various developmental activities of the region. The INC advocated closer socio-economic and cultural relation among the sister states and promised to take up measures for the development of the region. The PLP also in its own way stood for regional integration and closer ties among the people of the sister states.

15. PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN:

Removal of social and economic disabilities from which the women of the state were suffering and the improvement of the status of women were the common concerns of all the political parties. The election manifestoes under review contained promises to end all sorts of discrimination to which the women had been subjected in male dominated societies.

16. PROGRAMME FOR THE WEAKER'S SECTIONS:

The Janata Party pledged to safeguard the rights and to fulfill the legitimate needs of the minorities. The party felt that preferential opportunities for employment should be provided to the scheduled tribe and scheduled caste people.
as per the recommendations of the Kalekhar Committee. The party promised to safeguard the land and forest rights of the Tribal people. The party advocated the development of the tribal languages and culture. The INC referring to its commitment to secularism pledged to protect the rights and interests of the minorities. The party would safeguard the interests of the Muslims and other religious and linguistic minorities and would firmly stand against any attempt to undermine their interests. It also advocated the protection of the interests of the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, and other backward classes and the economically backward sections of the population. The Congress (I) manifesto made the same commitments like the Janata manifesto. The two communist parties - the CPI and CPI(M) also made similar commitments for the development of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, the Minority and other backward classes. The PLP also promised to safeguard the interests of the tribal people and advocated the firm implementation of the laws relating to tribal belts in order to protect the tribals from exploitation.

17. PROGRAMME FOR WORKERS

The CPI in its manifesto promised to ensure workers
right to trade unionism and to secure workers participation in the management of industries. The party also stood for the cause of the workers and employees including those of Railways, Life Insurance, Post and Telegraphs and Bank with regard to payment of bonus at the minimum rate of 8.33 percent. The CPI(M) promised to restructure wages so as to make them need based and to repeal all legislations putting moratorium on increase in salary and wages. The party advocated a ban on lockouts of factories and layoff of workers. The CPI (M-L) also stood for a ban on lockout and layoff. The INC manifesto promised to fix minimum wages for all categories of workers in the state and to amend the existing laws in the interest of the workers. The INC(I) in addition to its proposal to fix minimum wages included in its manifesto a proposal for providing jobs at least to one member of each of the families which were below the poverty line.

18. PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYEES:

The INC manifesto while appreciating the hardship of the employees due rise in prices and scarcity, promised to ensure supply of essential commodities at fair price, and to extend other reliefs relating education of the children of the
employees, housing and medical treatment etc. The INC(I) manifesto pleaded for better relations and understanding between the Government and the employees. It also promised to pay dearness allowances to the employees of the state at central government rates.

19. PROGRAMME FOR YOUTHS

As in the case of women, the political parties were also alive to the problems peculiar to the youths of the state. The INC in its manifesto promised to provide greater opportunities to the youths for participation in public affairs and local organisations as well as in the management of educational institution. The INC(I) manifesto emphasised games and sports through which the youths could develop their physical and mental faculties. The Janata Party, also drew up the programme for the youths similar to those of INC (I) in its manifesto.

20. RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

Though almost all the contesting parties dealt with the problem of rural reconstruction in their manifestoes, the views expressed by them were, however, not identical. The INC pledged to initiate a comprehensive new village movement and
promote rural economy. The party promised to undertake programmes of public housing. It promised to provide help to the traditional rural artisans like blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, leather workers and potters. It also proposed rural electrification. The party promised to obliterate the money lenders from the rural area and proposed redemption from debts of the poor. Supply of essential commodities at reasonable prices, reconstruction of rural economy, co-operative programmes, development of rural sports, removal of social disabilities, benefits of rural workers, health care and family planning services, drinking water, development of art and culture, were other commitments. The Janata manifesto felt the need for rural electrification and development of rural communication. The party also felt the need to supply water to provide health service, housing for the homeless, free medical treatment and other family welfare services. The party pledged to develop the backward and under developed areas of the state. The INC (I) advocated rural reconstruction more or less on the line of the Janata Party and the INC. The CPI (M) stressed the problem of rural unemployment and it pleaded, for the development of rural industries. The CPI and the CPI (M-L) did not make any specific reference to rural development in their manifestoes.
21. FLOOD CONTROL

The Janata Party estimated the cost of damaged crops in the state at 10 crores every year. In its manifesto it assured that it would take steps to control the Brahmaputra and the Barak and take up measures to control flood in Assam with the help of the central Government. The INC promised to continue its efforts to secure centres early action on control of the Brahmaputra and the Barak. The CPI(M) manifesto also promised to control the aforementioned rivers and to provide compensation to the flood affected people till the problem was solved. The CPI also promised to take steps to obtain financial and technical help from the centre to control the rivers. Thus the parties more or less made the same commitments but no party except CPI(M-L) and the PLP came forward with specific proposal to solve this grave problem of Assam.

ELECTION ISSUES 1983

The 1983 Assam Assembly Elections were held in an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, coercion and large scale violence. The entire election process was negatived by the campaign of poll boycott launched by the AASU and AGSP.
parties and the candidates desisted from electioneering for fear of reprisals. Therefore, there was no campaign and no issues thrown out by the election. To boycott the poll or not to boycott the poll appeared to be the one and the only issue. Behind this issue of course, there were naturally different and contradictory perceptions about the nature and magnitude of the alien issue which had been raised by the Assam agitation.

ELECTION ISSUES 1985:

The issues involved in 1985 election are many and varied ranging from the unity and integrity of Assam to corruption less administration. The major issues generated by the present election may be studied as follows:

UNITY VERSUS REGIONALISM:

In the process of electioneering, an issue which was focussed by the ruling party referred to India's unity and integrity. It was often contended that India's unity was endangered by the emerging forces of regionalism, and religious fundamentalism.
ECONOMIC ISSUES:

Despite the tall claims made by the ruling party about the significant achievements in the economic sphere, the state economy remained in a bad shape. Although the centre allocated large funds by the way of plan and non-plan grants, the economic programmes undertaken by the ruling Congress (I) failed to make any dent on the problems of poverty, unemployment and rising prices. Almost all the parties blamed the ruling party for mismanagement of economy and promised to work sincerely for the development of the state in all respect and eradicate poverty.

CLEAN AND CORRUPTIONLESS ADMINISTRATION:

Another important issue of the 1985 Election was the claims made by most of the parties was to provide a clean and corruptionless administration. Parties like the AGP, the Janata and the BJP directly blamed the state Government for mismanagement and corruption in administration and almost all of them promised to provide a clean and efficient government and eradicate corruption.
The Assam Accord signed on 15th of August 1985 was the main issue generating a lot of heat and controversy in the Assam Elections, 1985. There was clear polarization among political parties and public opinion on this issue. Some parties were clearly pro-Accord while others were totally opposed to the Accord. A number of parties had reservations about some provisions of the Accord.

Almost all political parties contesting the poll made the accord the major issue in their respective election manifestoes. Both the ruling Congress (I) and the Asom Gana Parishad the major contenders for power assured the people of state for its early implementation.

The CPI(M) said that it could not approve the 'anti minority' and 'anti democratic' clauses of the Accord and the United Minority Front (UMF), a conglomeration of different political personalities opposed to the accord and representing religious and linguistic minorities said if voted to power it would work for scrapping of the Accord.

The state unit of Congress (S) had also expressed its reservations to the clause that contemplates disenfranchisement
of 1966 and 1971 stream of entrants from Bangladesh for a period of ten years from the date of their detection.

The BJP was of the view that Assam Accord by itself was no solution to the foreigners problem unless some effective steps were initiated to check any future infiltration from the neighbouring countries.

Almost all the political parties contesting the elections in the state, including the AGP formed, by the leaders of Assam agitation on the foreign nationals issue after signing of the Accord had expressed identical views in their respective poll manifesto that no genuine citizens should be harassed in course of implementation of the Accord. They assured that the constitutional rights of the ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities would be protected.

The BJP was of the opinion that the Assam Accord by itself was no solution to the foreign nationals problem. The party suggested effective steps for maintaining a National Register of citizens, introduction of photo identity cards for all citizens particularly in the border states. A special census in Assam to ascertain the abnormal growth of population
should be taken without any delay to prevent further infiltration.

Claiming that it was the only party that could properly implement the accord, the Congress (I) in its manifesto reiterated its stand to implement the Accord in its letter and spirit with national outlook. Taking the credit for the solution of foreigners problem, the ruling party said that the Accord represented the triumph of the ideals of democracy, unity and secularism. The Accord was a shining example of the commitment of the party to the nation's basic values.

The major regional party in the fray contesting 108 of the total 126 Assembly and 9 of 14 Lok Shabha seats, the AGP had assured the voters to take effective steps for a permanent solution of the state's foreign nationals problem and to establish peace and amity among all sections of the people keeping Assam Accord in view. While implementing the Accord, the party assured the people that no Indian nationals would be harassed in the name of language or religion and would ensure their fullest security. The party also promised to give a minimum of Rs. 20,000 compensation to each family of those killed during the agitation on foreign nationals issue.
or a suitable job of one member of the affected family.

Describing the Assam Accord as anti minority and anti democratic, the CPI(M) said that the Accord had failed to generate a sense of mutual understanding among different sections of the people and instead created a new division between the majority and minority communities. Assuring the voters that the party would continue to fight for ensuring security of the minority and democratic rights of all, particularly the 1966-1971 stream of entrants, taking 1971 as the cut off year.

The CPI contesting 21 Assembly and 2 Lok Shabha seats reiterated its stand for early implementation of the Accord and assured to work for safeguarding the constitutional rights of the linguistic and religious minorities of the state. The Congress (S) while expressing reservation about disenfranchisement clause of the accord welcomed the cut off year of 1971 for detection of foreign nationals.

However, it observed that the disenfranchisement of the 1966-1971 stream of entrants would cause a sense of uncertainty and fear psychosis among the minorities and the ruling Congress-I would try to take political advantage of situation by amending the citizenship Act.