

**THE ASSAM MOVEMENT :
A STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ✓**

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C E R T I F I C A T E

**Certified that the dissertation entitled
"THE ASSAM MOVEMENT : A STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC
AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS" by BHASKAR KHAUND for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously
submitted for any other degree of this or any other
University. We recommend that this dissertation may
be placed before the examiners for evaluation.**

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CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

Social movement as an approach to the study of change has been gaining importance in recent times. Social movements have traditionally been included in the sub field of sociology known as collective behaviour. The range of phenomena usually subsumed under the label of collective behaviour is distinguished by the degree to which normative structures have been institutionalized. Social movements are a specific kind of collective behaviour, which last longer and are more integrated than other collective behaviour like mobs, crowds etc., yet they are not organised like political parties. Here a large number of people are organised or alerted to support and bring about or resist social change.

The mobility and change that are brought about by social movements are generally based on non-institutionalised method.¹ A pattern of behaviour is said to be institutionalised when it is "widely accepted and binding in society or part of society".² There are many methods of expressing a grievance and pressing for solution

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1. MSA Rao (Ed), Social Movements in India, Vol. I, Manohar, New Delhi; 1979 pp. viii-ix.
 2. Harry, Johnson : Sociology : A systematic Introduction New York : Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1960 : p.21

to social problems which have gained this kind of acceptance. These include petitioning, electing representatives to a deliberative body, making out cases to judicial bodies, and organising strike, etc. Social Movements also make use of them when it is strategically necessary. But they are much more inclined, however, to step outside and use unconventional methods such as protest, confrontation, aggression, revolts to put pressure upon the appropriate authorities to affect change.

It is the particular significance of social movements that they are one of the media through which new ideas and policies enter the social fabric. Social movements demand attention because "they provide valuable clues, articulated in cries of anguish and declaration of hope, and about the directive which future change will take."³

This study is an attempt to look at the current social movement in Assam from a sociological perspective. It will be useful to discuss the concepts and the theoretical perspective of social movements and also to review the existing literatures on the subject before we examine the movement in general and its social and historical dimensions in particular.

3. John Wilson : Introduction to social movements.
Basic Book Inc., Publishers, New York, 1973, p.4

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS : CONCEPTS

The term social movement is used to denote a variety of collective efforts aimed at changing either a part of social structure or create an entirely new social order.⁴ A number of social scientists have looked at this phenomenon from diverse angles. Herbert Blumer⁵ defines it as "collective enterprise to establish a new order of life". While Gusfield⁶ looks at it as "socially shared activities and beliefs directed towards the demand for change in some aspect of social order"; similarly, according to W.B. Cameron, a social movement refers to "a large number of people band together in order to alter or supplant some portions of the existing culture or social forces."⁷ Rejecting the conventional approach and aiming to develop a comparative and systematic

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4. MSA Rao, opcit p.x.
 5. Herbert Blumer, "Social Movement" in B. McLaughlin(ed) Studies in social movements - a socio-psychological perspective. The Free Press, New York, 1969, p.8
 6. JR Gusfield, Protest, reform and revolt. John Willy, New York, 1970, p.2
 7. W.B. Cameron Modern Social Movement. Random House, New York, 1969, p.7

theory of social movements, Heberle has defined a movement as a "collective readiness for action by which some kind of change is to be achieved, some innovation to be made or a previous condition to be restored."⁸ In the opinion of John Wilson "a social movement is a "conscious, collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large scale change in the social order by non-institutionalised means."⁹

We can infer the following characteristics of social movements from the definitions described above:

- a) Social movements essentially involve sustained collective mobilization through either formal or informal organization.
- b) Social Movements are generally oriented towards bringing about change, either partial or total, in the existing system of relationships. However, there are efforts at times which are oriented towards resisting change and maintaining status-quo.

While sociologists agree on the collective mobilization and change orientation of social movements, there are differences of opinion on matters such as the presence of an ideology, method of organization and the nature of

8. R. Heberle, 'Observation on the sociology of social movement,' American Sociological Review, vol. 14(3), 1949, p.549

9. John Wilson, op.cit., p.8

consequences as forming a part of the definition of social movements. MSA Rao considers ideology as an essential component of social movement.¹⁰ While agreeing to this in principle, T.K. Oommen, however, contends that it is not necessary for an ideology to emerge before the social movements.¹¹ He further states : "often it is observed in empirical situation that people come together and start an organization to deal with situation of strain."¹² It is used as a means to fight and eradicate certain social problems.

Besides these broad characteristics of collective mobilization, orientation to change, ideology and organization, social movement also involves the leadership, collective action and participation as a part of its definition.

By means of these characteristics, social movements can be distinguished from other related terms.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND OTHER RELATED CONCEPTS:

We have already stated that social movements are a specific kind of collective behaviour which lasts long and are more integrated than some other collective

10. MSA Rao (Ed), op. cit. p.2

11. T.K. Oommen : "Charisma, Stability and Change: An analysis of Bhoodan-Gramdhan movement in India." Delhi; Thomson Press, p.18

12. Ibid. p.18

behaviour. Although the phenomena which are short-lived and unorganised, such as riots, mob, crowd behaviour etc. are included in the field of collective behaviour, they are not treated as social movement. Social movements can also be distinguished from these types of mere aggregate actions as they former are conscious, purposive attempts to bring about change. When these manifestations of elementary collective behaviour are transformed into an organised behaviour then only these can be considered as social movement.¹³

Similarly, the term agitation, which is one of the most frequently used terms in the context of social movement, is to be distinguished from it. Generally agitation precedes a movement and is of primary importance particularly in the early stages of the movement. It arouses the people for the task of participation in future collective activity in the form of a movement.¹⁴

Again, though, there is a qualitative difference, confusion arises between social movements and political parties on account of certain similar characteristics. The classical definition of party by Burke "as a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours, the

13. T.K. Oommen, op.cit. pp.11-12

14. Herbert Blumer, Op. cit. p.13

national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed"¹⁵, only adds to the confusion. It would, therefore, be more realistic to define political party in the words of Schumpeter as a group of people who "proposed to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power."¹⁶ The binding factor in a party may be a set of principles on which all members are agreed or it may be a complex of common interest. It may also be an emotional-affectual attachment to a charismatic leader."¹⁷

By contrast to the above situation a social movement may not place most of its emphasis on gaining power, but it might selectively support or endorse a party or parties in the hope of fulfilling its objectives, in future. Moreover, the organization of a social movement may not have any strict principles like a political party in terms of recruitment, membership or participation. Generally social movements precede political parties where an organization becomes predominant. Therefore, it can be distinguished in terms of the normative structure of the collective

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15. Edmund Burke, Thoughts on the cause of the present discontents, Cambridge University Press, Edition 1930 p.96. as cited in Rudolf Heberle, op.cit. 350
 16. Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy 1962, p.283 as cited in Rudolf Heberle, op.cit. 350
 17. Max Weber, Theory of Social and Economic Organization Oxford University Press, 1949 p.407 as cited in Rudolf Heberle, op.cit. 351

behaviour. Thus, when a movement becomes routinized with the established institutional procedures then it becomes a part of the institutionalized system losing its innovative features and it ceases to be a movement.¹⁸ John Wilson states that "rather than claiming that a collectively is a social movement or a political party, it would be more accurate to say that social movements have more uninstitutionalized aspects than other organized collectivities."¹⁹

Social movements are also different from another collective phenomenon known as interest group. The function of the interest group is to protect and promote particular interest by influencing the policy of government. It aims at influencing the decision-making process of a political party to the benefits of its own members only. But "Social Movements are not necessarily limited to the achievement of the self interest object of their members. They may see one particular social category as being primary but the ultimate betterment of society is their final objectives and is proclaimed as such."²⁰

18. MSA Rao, Op.cit., p.25

19. John Wilson, op.cit., p.10

20. Ibid., p.11.

From the foregoing discussion it can be concluded that though social movements are collective behaviour, yet all types of collective behaviour cannot be termed as social movements. Thus, social movement is a conscious, collective, organised attempt on the part of a section of society to bring about or resist either partial or total change in society through leadership, organization, and collective mobilization based on a belief system and ideology.

Classification of Social Movements

Social movements are classified into various types on the basis of certain variables. We shall discuss here, the broad typologies of social movement as described by the social scientists in their respective studies.

Turner and Killian²¹ have made three types of classification of social movements: value-oriented movements in which the principal support for the movement is derived from a conviction of the worth of the programme for change; power-oriented movements which have as their primary orientation the acquisition of power, status or recognition for their members; and participation oriented movements that are centred around the provision of membership gratification mainly through self-expression. They have made a further three-fold subdivision of the last type of social movement,

²¹ Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, 1957, Collective Behaviour, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall as ~~excitadin~~ Wilson pp 16-22.

viz., passive reform movement, personal status movement and limited personal movement.

Aberle²² classifies social movements along four dimensions, the locus of change sought and the amount of change sought. The dimension of locus distinguishes between movements aiming at a change in the individual and those seeking change in the social structure. The dimension of amount distinguishes between movements aiming at partial change and those aiming at total change. The cross classification of these two dimensions generate four possible types: (a) Transformative movements aim at total change in the social structure; (b) Reformative movements at a partial change in supra individual system; (c) Redemptive movements aim at total change in individual; (d) Alternative movements aim at total change in individuals.

Smelser's typology²³ is based on a kind of belief under which behaviour is mobilised and it distinguishes collective behaviour from other social patterns. It is the level of generality of this belief which distinguishes one type of collective episode from the other. The levels at which efforts are made to reconstitute the social structure are as follows :

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22. DF Aberle, The Peyote Religion among the Navaho. Viking Fund Publishing in Anthropology, No. 42, New York, Wenner-Green Foundation, pp. 315-333. Cited in John Wilson, op.cit., pp. 23-27.
23. Neil Smelser, Theory of Collective Behaviour, New York, The Free Press, 1968, p.127.

- (a) At the level of situational facilities, the belief is that reconstitution can be effected through the modification of technology and the environment.
- (b) At the level of mobilization, the belief is that individual agents are responsible and can be successfully attacked.
- (c) At the level of norms, the belief is that only through the modification of social rules will the threatening situation be removed.

A norm oriented movement offers no serious challenge to the basic value of society. It demands the changes of certain existing rules or sometime the enforcement of already existing agreements to remove the threatening situation.

At the level of values the belief is that the cause of dissatisfaction is rooted in the basic values of society and the change must, therefore, be radical. The assumption that ideology reveals a great deal about the origins of movements and has important things to say about the nature of tactics, organization and membership commitment it will display is one of its objectives of making distinctions.

Discussing the nature of social change brought about by social movements, MSA Rao distinguishes three levels of structural changes:²⁴

24. MSA Rao, Op.cit., p.3.

- 1) Reform which aims at modifying the belief system and life styles of the members of a group;
- 2) Revolution which aims to bring about sudden and total changes in all the aspects of society;
- 3) Transformation which brings about changes in the traditional balance of power relations, altering the economic and political super-ordination and subordination relationships.

Another criterion of classification is provided by the locus of a movement which may be designated as linguistic, religious, caste, peasant etc. They may also be classified on the basis of their scale of operation, i.e. All-India, regional, local, etc. The dominant issue forms another criterion of classification, e.g. women's liberation.²⁵

T.K. Oommen²⁶ states that the defining criteria of a movement are the means, the end, the scope and the content. The means may be violent or non-violent or as mixture of the two. An example at hand is the Indian freedom movement. Similarly, the end may be system-stability or system-change, or something, somewhere in between the two. The content of a movement may be religious or secular. The scope of the movement, again, may be segmental or total. It may be oriented to total transformation or it may concern itself

25 Ibid.

26 TK Oommen, op.cit., pp.12-13.

with selected aspects of society. It may also concern only a particular kind of community or it may involve the entire population irrespective of any particularistic criterion. Commen postulates sixteen different combinations of defining criteria of social movements. He also talks about three broader types based on the dominant features of the movements, viz., the situation of strain may give rise to either ideological or organisational movements. The third possibility is the emergence of a charismatic movement.

P.N. Mukherji's²⁷ classification is on the basis of the quality of change to be brought about. In his opinion, a change will occur if the social mobilization demands a change within the system. However, it will be the alternative if the mobilization is directed towards creating new structures. The change will be transformative if the effort of the movement is to replace one structure by another.

Theories of Social Movement:

Sociologists have been looking at the genesis of a social movement from the various prospectives. Some of them give importance to the structural conditions of a society, while others look at it from the point of view of socio-psychological or motivational forces which give rise to a movement. The theories of social moments have been classified by many writers in many ways. But for our

27. Partha Nath Mukherji, 'Naxalbari Movement and the peasant revolt in North Bengal', MSA Rao (ed.) op.cit., p.21.

purpose we have taken the three broad types as mentioned by MSA Rao.²⁸ These are : (1) Strain Theory; (2) Relative Deprivation Theory; and (3) Revitalization Theory.

We have observed that people organise into a social movement, when they feel that existing institutionalized methods are unable to satisfy their needs, or when they are discontented with the existing structural arrangement of the society.

The strain theory treats structural strain as the underlying factor leading to collective behaviour; the structural strain may occur at different levels of norms, values, mobilization and situational facilities. According to this view, societies are always experiencing changes and for this reason strain is endemic in all societies. While strain provides the structural conditions, the degree of perception of this situation may create a generalized and organised belief and thereby may give rise to a social movement. Both strain and generalised believe require precipitating factors to trigger off a movement.²⁹

Although there are variations among the structural-functionalists' view of strain theory, the basic perspective of this approach emerges in its prime emphasis on society and on the inter-relation of its institutions rather than on the individual or groups. It views societies as a system of inter-related parts, hence causation of

28. MSA Rao, Op.cit., p.4.

29. John Wilson, Op.cit., p.33.

strain is multiple and reciprocal. It says that although integration is not perfect, social systems are fundamentally in a state of dynamic equilibrium. The dominant tendency is thus : "towards stability and inertia, as maintained through built-in-mechanism of adjustment and social control."³⁰ As a result of this process, dysfunction, tensions and deviance do exist and can persist for a long time, but they tend to resolve themselves or be institutionalized in the long run. The objective of this view is to delineate the conditions and demands of social life, and to trace the process whereby a given society arranges to meet the needs. Smelser, one of the proponents of this approach, considers impairment of relations among parts of a system leading to the mal-functioning of the system and includes deprivation under strain.³¹

Thus, the focus of attention of the structural-functional approach is on the social order and agreement, its enduring social patterns and on the reasons for their persistence rather than on the collective behaviour as a indicator of the existence of a disturbance in the society. The existence of such behaviour is looked upon as a sign that the system is temporarily out of balance and that the normal method of handling disturbances have been found wanting. "Social movements are treated as one kind of

30. Pierre L. Van den Berghe : "Dialectic and Functionalism towards a synthesis" in N.J. Demerath and Richard A Peterson (ed) System Change and Conflict. The Free Press New York 1967. p.296.

31. J. Wilson, Op.cit. p.35.

erant response to disequilibrium, the emphasis is not really on the movements but on the nature of a disturbance which created them."³²

This approach is criticized on the ground that it alone is not adequate to furnish the conceptual tools to extract motivational forces.

The social-psychological approach on the other hand, tries to understand the point of view of the actor who has wants, demands and anxieties which affect his behaviour. The social psychologist is thus interested in the subjective experience, in contrast to the structural-functional concentration on the objective conditions. It requires that a description of experience should be included in the account and that social action can be described in terms of the attitudes, feelings, and the expectations of the people affected.³³

The relative deprivation approach emphasises the resolution between expectation and achievement on the grounds that actual material conditions of the population are less important than the attitude of mind taken towards these conditions. One basic requirement here is the identification of both the individual's membership group and his reference group. Relative deprivation thus describes a perception of

32. Ibid., Op.cit. p.33

33. B. McLaughlin : Studies in social movements, The Free Press, New York, 1969, pp.

the world and as such need not have any objective reference; and it arises only when legitimate expectations are frustrated.³⁴

There are several dimensions of relative deprivation. For instance, John Wilson talks of three dimensions on the basis of a) magnitude, or the extent of difference between expectations and achievement; b) frequency or the proportion of a given up group which feels relatively deprived and c) the degree or the intensity varies according to how often and how consistently the feeling of relative deprivation is impressed upon the individual. Moving along Weberian lines, relative deprivation can also be conceived in three broad dimensions as it is felt in terms of the class, status or power.³⁵

Marx has emphasised conflict while developing the theory of relative deprivation. He divides the entire population into conflicting classes according to their relationships to the existing means of production. Explicitly he identified the major visible actors in the policies of the time with their class bases, offering judgements of their

34. John Wilson : 'Op.cit. p.69.

35. W.C. Runciman, Relative Deprivation & Social Justice Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961 are cited in Wilson Op.cit. p.72.

basic interests, conscious aspirations, articulated grievances and collective readiness for action. He attached great importance to the ease and durability of communications within the class. Little importance was given to generalized tensions, momentary impulses and personal disorganisation.³⁶

Anthony F.C. Wallace has defined the revitalization movement: "as a deliberate, organised, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."³⁷ The aim of the movement is to return to a former era of happiness to restore a golden age or to revive a previous condition of social virtue.

The society is considered a definite kind of organisation and its culture is conceived as those patterns of learned behaviour which contain "parts" of the social organism. And a society will work, by means of coordinated sections by all or some of its parts, to preserve its own integrity. Wallace analysed the dynamics of revitalization movement in the following four stages :

- 1) Period of cultural stability: Wherein the society either doesn't experience stress or is sufficiently disillusioned to be seriously interested in radical changes.

36. MSA Rao, Op.cit. pp. 6 7

37. AFC Wallace : "Revitalization Movements", American Anthropologist. Vol.48, 1957, pp. 264-81.

- 2) Period of increased individual stress : Wherein as a consequence of one or many possible circumstances - such as depression, famine, conquest by an alien society, etc. - growing number of people experience psychological and physical stress.
- 3) Period of cultural distortion: This period of anomie leads to the distortion of the cultural fabric by the institutionalization of such socially dysfunctional customs as drug and alcoholic addictions, organised crime, excessive corruption of officials, mob-violence etc.
- 4) Consequent dissillusionment and period of revitalization:
In this period, a prophet formulates a code which defines what is wrong with the existing culture, and delineates a goal. That is described as better than the existing culture, and outlines a cultural transfer by the use of which people can move from the bad existing culture to the good future culture.

This last phase may be subdivided into sub-phases as follows : communication, organisation, adaptation, cultural transformation, revitalization and steady state. Once the cultural transformation has been accomplished and the movement's organisation has been routinized in its activities, a new steady state may be said to exist. Even if the professed aim of the movement was revivalistic, this new state will almost certainly be different from the initial steady state.

From the foregoing discussion one can conclude that all the approaches and theories try to analyse the structural and motivational factor of a social movement from various perspectives. Not a single theory is complete because of its own limitation. Thus, combination of these theories have to be taken for a proper understanding of social movement.

Part II

The present study : objectives

In the light of the above discussion the present study is an attempt to analyse the current social movement in Assam. The main issue involved in the movement is the problem of infiltration of illegal foreigners mainly from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and to a lesser extent from Nepal. Through this movement, people of Assam demanded the detection and deletion of the names of illegal foreigners³⁸ from the voters' list and also demanded their subsequent deportation.

38. Persons who migrated to India from Pakistan after partition and before July 26, 1949, automatically became Indian citizens. After this cut off date, immigrants had to go through a legal process to obtain citizenship. But, without any kind of visa being received, unrestricted immigration of foreign persons from Bangladesh and Nepal continued into, the N.E. region. This is why it has been termed as "illegal foreigners".

The movement was initially started by the All Assam Students Union in July 1978 and has spread to obtain grass-root support since June 1979. In August, 1979, the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was formed, which is a confederation of eleven organizations. They have vowed to conduct their movement according to the Gandhian principle of non-violence and Satyagraha.

Here a conceptual classification of the term foreigner becomes imperative as it has been observed that the terms "Bideshi" (foreigner) and "Bohiragota" (Outsider) have been interchangeably used in the context of Assam movement. The term "foreigner" has been defined by the leaders of the movement strictly on a legal and constitutional basis. They declared that the fight is only against non-Indians staying illegally in Assam and not against people from the rest of India who are residing in Assam. Thus the term "foreigner" will only be used to denote a person who is not an Indian citizen in the content of our analysis. As opposed to this 'outsider' clearly implies non-Assamese Indians residing in Assam. The term foreigner is often confused with the Bengali speaking people residing in Assam mainly because of (a) the traditional linguistic rivalry that has been existing between the two groups since the advent of British in Assam and (b) the fact that most of the foreigners residing in Assam speak Bengali. Thus, though theoretically it is possible to categorize the Bengali speaking population of Assam into two clear cut groups (i.e. Bangladeshis and

West Bengalis), in empirical situation it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish between the two.

Moreover, agitators have categorised foreigners into three groups - Pakistani or Bengaladeshi Muslims who, came after partition, Non-muslim refugees who have not yet acquired Indian citizenship, and Nepali migrants who have retained Nepali citizenship.

The infiltration of foreigner has been going on for a long period of time. But this became a problem only after the independence. The immigration would not have become troublesome for the native population, if the number of it would not have crossed the limits of the absorption capacity of the state and the number of immigrants would have been regulated by the Government machinery. Legal and administrative machinery exists in all nation-states to check such infiltration. But in Assam on account of governmental carelessness and some vested interests, the immigrants are posing a threat to the existence of the people residing for centuries. The large scale illegal influx of foreigners is bound to create conflict in any situation such as the one in Assam, where indigeneous people perceive the presence of foreigners as an economic and political threat to them.

The problem created by the infiltrators is multidimensional. Its repercussion can be seen in the economic, political and social life of the people which we shall discuss in our third chapter.

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Many memoranda and petitions were submitted to the respective authorities to take measure to check this immigration in the initial stage of the movement. But due to the failure of the institutionalized methods to solve such a problem, the people of Assam in general and the student community in particular had to resort to the path of non-institutionalised methods of protest in the form of a social movement.

But, the issue of foreigner or immigration is not an isolated item of discontent, it is a product of accumulated grievances of the people against the existing national political parties and the governments (we have discussed it in detail in Chapter III & IV). It is seen that a single factor like immigration can not be the sole cause for such a mass upheaval. Therefore, the intensity and the form of the movement can be understood in the light of the problems specific to it, but this specificity can not be comprehended outside the general context and the pattern of India's development. As such to understand the hidden cause behind it, one has to go into the structural basis of the society.

The low level of development of India which is further characterised by the pattern of uneven development can be held responsible for a number of movements in the post independence period.³⁹ On account of un-even development, certain regions have experienced relatively higher

39. For instance, the Shiv-Sena Movement in Maharashtra, Jharkhand Movement, Anti-Bengali Movement by Tribals of Tripura, the Andhra-Telangana Conflict etc.

rates of agricultural and industrial development, while some other regions are relatively underdeveloped. This unevenness also is seen in the growth of nationalities in India. Some sections of people belonging to certain regions and communities became dominant, while others remained almost unrepresented. In this way the dominant communities began to dominate business, trade and avenues of employment all over the country including the area inhabited by backward communities. This trend continues even today. In these circumstances, it is natural that the backward communities or small nationalities would feel relatively deprived, and that they will bear a grudge against the dominant communities. This feeling has given rise to a number of social movements in the past and it has also found expression in the movement going on in Assam.

In the light of above discussion, the proposed analysis of the Assam movement is based on the verification of the following assumptions :

- 1) Lop-sided development of the Indian economy has converted Assam into a colonial hinterland.
- 2) Infiltration from the neighbouring countries is seriously threatening to disturb the ethno-linguistic balance and the polity and economy of Assam.
- 3) Indifferent attitude of the centre with regard to various important socio-political and economic decisions in the past led to the feeling of

of relative deprivation and alienation among the people and the same is manifested in the present movement.

While discussing the above assumption, our emphasis will be to project the pattern of economic development in Assam and socio-economic, cultural and political dimension of the immigration problem. Finally we shall discuss how these motivational forces have given rise to the present movement and how it has been reflected in the movement.

Method of Study:

The present study is not an outcome of field work, instead it is based mainly on the secondary sources of information. On the problem of study. Like any other study done in this manner, this study too has certain unavoidable shortcomings. Still we have endeavoured to throw sufficient light on the various socio-economic, historical and political issues which necessitated the launching of a mass movement, in Assam.

The search of literature on the ongoing movement led to our reliance on newspapers, periodicals, pamphlet and leaflets brought out by various organisations time and again. The relevant census reports and other Government reports were also made use of.

Besides our informal talks with certain leaders of the movement and research scholars proved quite beneficial and did definitely help in reformulation of our thought

processes. Only after a thorough study of the material obtained from the mentioned sources, we have made attempts to prove the assumptions made in the foregoing pages.

Plan of Study :

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 titled as "Introduction" has been divided into three parts. In the Part I, we have discussed the concepts and theories of social movements. In the II part the problem relating to the present movement in Assam has been stated and a few assumptions have been incorporated, and part III presents a socio-economic profile of the state.

Chapter II presents a critical review of the available literature on Assam, mainly on the current Assam movement and its socio-historical conditions. In this chapter an attempt is made to highlight the main arguments put forward by various writers in their respective writings.

The III chapter of our dissertation would be an attempt at the verification of our assumptions. An attempt has been made to show what are the objective conditions that have been working as a motivating force for the movement. Here we have mainly dealt with the pattern of economic development in Assam, and the impact of immigration on the society and economy of the State. A section of it also deals with why there is a feeling of alienation and relative deprivation among the people of Assam.

In the IV chapter an endeavour is made to analyse the movement. It mainly deals with the aspects such as, how it has originated, its various phases, nature of leadership and organisation, their mobilization and finally participatory aspects of the movement.

In the last chapter a summary of discussion done in the preceding chapters has been presented and the impact of the present movement on future social set up in Assam is analysed.

Part III : Assam - A profile

Location: Assam is situated in the north-east corner of India and is surrounded by Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet on the north, Burma, Nagaland and Manipur on the east, Mizoram and Burma on the south and Tripura and Bangladesh on the west. This state of North East India is connected with the rest of India by a narrow strip of land of about 15 miles, lying in the submontane region of the Himalayas.

Social Structure and Institutions:

The structure of any society takes its form on the basis of certain factors involved in the course of its formation. Accordingly the geographical location, political history and the particular type of socio-demographic composition of its population can be held responsible for the formation of the present Assamese society. Though the social structure of Assam resembles to a great extent the

broad structure of the Indian society. It differs from it in many ways.

Since 13th century till the takeover by the Britishers in 1826, Assam was ruled by a semi-tribal group known as Ahoms, who had migrated to Assam from the upper part of Burma sometimes in 1228. The Ahoms initially followed Buddhism but later on embraced Hinduism - the religion of their subjects. As followers of Buddhism, they believed in social equality and thus could not accommodate themselves to Hinduism.⁴⁰ For the efficient administration of the vast empire, the Ahom rulers introduced the "paik system" wherein the status and privileges were conferred on the individuals on the basis of their administrative functions. Thus the traditional caste system was largely superseded by the systems of functional groupings.⁴¹

Another historical factor which has shaped the structure of Assamese society, is the contribution of Sankardeva and his Bhakti movement in the 16th century. The origin of many of the characteristics of Assamese Society, outlook and attitude of the people can be traced back to the teachings of Sankardeva. The Neo-Vaishnavite

40. S.K. Chauhan : Caste Status and Power: Social Stratification in Assam, Classical Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1980. p.1

41. Hem Barua : The Red River and the Blue Hill; Lawyer's Book, Stall, Gauhati, Assam, 1962. pp. 40-44.

movement under his leadership posed a challenge both to the existing caste system as well as to untouchability. It was he who brought about social cohesion and discipline in place of social disorder and disarray by means of certain socio-religious institutions like "Satra" (Vaishnava Monastery) and Namghar (prayer house). He liberalised the caste system to a great extent.⁴² In the opinion of Neog, "Sankaradeva did tone down much of the stigma attached to such discrimination. In the Vaishnava congregation, all members of the fraternity are equal."⁴³ Thus the Neo-vaishnava movement based on the philosophy of equality and its propagation through the local language could leave an impact on the tribes and caste Hindus, and in this process it delivered a blow to the Brahmins and the caste system.

The third factor, which has but peculiar characteristic to the Assamese society is the composition of its population. Assam consists of the most heterogeneous types of the social groupings and presents the classical example of a composite culture. It has many castes and tribes. Besides the

42 M.C. Goswami : "The Institution of Satras in Assam" in S.M. Dubey's (Ed) North East India - A Sociological Study, (Concept Publishing Company, Delhi) 1978, pp. 89-90.

43. See Maheswar Neog: Souvenir volume of Indian History Congress quoted in Khorshed Alam "Social Traits and Institutions of the Assamese people and their Economic Significance", North Eastern Economic Review Vol.1. No. 2 p.126-128.

indigenous people, people of various castes and tribes migrated from the other parts of India to Assam. The presence of the overwhelming tribal population and the weaker position of the caste Hindus and especially of the Brahmins, both in term of numbers and politico-economic status, to a great extent undermined the growth of a priestly model of Hinduism.⁴⁴

Caste System:

We have already stated that the caste system⁴⁵ in Assam was somewhat, different from the system existing elsewhere in India. As a result of it, the evils of the caste system could not leave a deep scar on the social fabric of Assam. As a sort of explanation why the caste system did not strike deep roots in Assam, P.C. Choudhury remarks, "Due to intermixture with the Alpine priests, the Brahmins of Assam did not perhaps take to strictly orthodox habits In spite of their pride in social superiority, .. they were liberal in their outlook regarding occupation and in their observances of other social laws."⁴⁵ Two more reasons

44. Chauhan, op.cit., p.2-3.

45. Hierarchically population in Assam may be divided into - (a) upper castes, (Brahmin, Ganaks, Kayasthas, and Kalita), (b) middle castes (Ahom, Koch, Chutia Keuts, Muttocks), (c) Hinduised Scheduled Tribes (Kachari, Mikir, Dimasa, Miri, Deuri, Lalung, Bodo Mech and Rabha), and (d) Scheduled castes (Kaibartas).

45. P.C. Choudhury: "The History of the Civilization of the People of Assam" Gauhati, 1966, p.313.

are also adduced as an explanation of relative laxity of caste system in Assam. First, Assam being a frontier territory, there was a regular flow of people belonging to different races and tribes into Assam at different stages of history. The intermixture of people of different culture and civilization that took place in Assam as a result of this immigration did not give any scope for crystallisation of the caste system.⁴⁷

Demographic Aspects: The total area of Assam is 78,523 sq.km. which constitutes 2.4% of the country's total area and its population of 146.2 lakhs in 1971 accounted for 2.7% of the country's population. Consequently it had a higher population density of 186 persons per sq.km. as against the country's 167.

Population Growth: A significant feature of the state's population has been that throughout the current century it has grown at a rate higher than the country's. During the period 1901 to 1971, the country's population increased by 130% and the state's by 343%. Had the state's population also grown at the same rate as the country's, it would have been 75.67 lakhs in 1971, i.e. this higher growth rate has been due not to so much to natural growth as to immigration. For instance, during the decade 1951-61 and 1961-71 the population of the state grew by 34.98% and 34.95%, and the

47. Ibid. pp. 314-115.

country's by 21.52% and 24.82%, respectively. The excessive growth of about 13.5% and 10% during two decades was due to mainly immigration, both from the rest of the country and outside it.

This abnormal growth has not only inflated the size of the state's total population, but also caused other problems by disturbing its composition partially. The state has a large variety of languages, religions, castes, tribes and cultures. But a sustained and steady increase in immigration over the last so many decades has changed both the size and the composition of the population (which we will be discussing in detail in subsequent chapters), without leaving much time for adjustments. Such a heavy influx into this border and backward state has created many social, cultural, political and economic tensions and problems, which tend to surface and erupt from time to time, and the current movement in Assam is the manifestation of the same.

Population Composition: Assam's population is composed of many heterogenous elements. There are a number of tribes professing different rituals and beliefs and speaking different languages and dialects. (See Appendix)

✓ According to 1971 census Assamese is the language of 57% of the population, Bengali accounts for 17%, followed by the language of Bodo (2.9%), Khasi (3%), Mizo (1.8%) and Karbi (1.3%).

In the field of religion, Hinduism accounts for 66.41% of the population, followed by Islam (23.29%) and Christianity (6.44%). Over 3% of the population professes tribal religions.⁴⁸

In respect of literacy, Assam has made very little progress. While literacy rate for the country as a whole increased from 24.0% in 1961 to 29.5% in 1971, Assam's increase was very marginal - from 20.0% in 1961 it rose only to 28.1% in 1971. As per 1971 census, Assam ranks 12th among the states of India in regard to literacy.⁴⁹

A notable feature of the movement of literacy rate in Assam is that literacy level among females showed a marked increase from 15.1% in 1961 to 18.6% in 1971. In the case of males, however, there was actually a slight fall from 37.3% in 1961 to 36.3% in 1971.

ECONOMY OF ASSAM

Assam's economy is mainly agrarian, agriculture contributing around 55 percent annually to the total income of the state. An analysis of the state's income shows that

48. Pulin Bihari Berthakur : Assam, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1971, p.3.

49. Census of India, Assam, 1971.

it is heavily dependent on the primary sector, while contribution of the secondary sector is still very low. The employment opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors have not come up to the desired extent which is evident from the following table.

Table 1.1

Occupational Distribution of Workers in Assam in percentage to total workers

<u>Sector</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1971</u>
Primary	70.90	77.86	76.68
Secondary	16.15	8.80	5.46
Tertiary	11.95	13.34	17.86

SOURCE: Censuses of India, Assam, 1951, 1961 and 1981.

The above table reveals that occupational structure in the Assam economy is still highly dependent on the primary sector; indeed this dependence has risen during the period 1951-71. Lack of employment generating industries over these years has led to restricted occupational mobility. (It is to be noted here that the relatively high share of secondary sector in 1951 was due to the inclusion of the tea plantation workers). This shows that the economy of the state continued to be basically agrarian, with not much

Diversification.⁵⁰

INDUSTRY: In industry, the value added in Assam is only 1.6% of the country's total production while its population is 2.7% of the country. Moreover, the following table shows that the growth of industrial output is very low in Assam. Partly, this is because of the fact that Assam has not seen any spectacular growth in ancillary industries to oil and tea production as in Gujarat and some other states

Table No. 2

Index of Industrial Production in Assam
(Base 1970 = 100)

All Industries (Total)	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
	104	110	115	119	118	124	127

SOURCE: Directorate of Economics & Statistics,
Assam Economic Survey, Assam 1978-79.

of India.⁵¹ Furthermore, the industrial capacity for refining crude oil in Assam compared to total crude oil produced in Assam is very less.⁵² Moreover, the traditional

50. Centre for Economic Research and Analysis: 'The Economies of Assam (1976-77) - A review', North Eastern Review, April-June 1977, Vol.I, No.2, p.138.

51. "INDIAN CITIZEN VS FOREIGN NATIONALS": ASOM JAGRITI p. 5-6, Ganapati, January 25, 1980.

52. Ibid. [

cottage industries ^{have} were not been given their due importance. So a vast region has still remained unexploited which can generate a high level of employment.

POWER : Assam lags behind most of the other states of India in respect of installed capacity as well as per capita consumption of power. In 1975-76 the state accounted for less than 7% of the total installed capacity of the country and the per capita consumption of electricity in the same year was 34 KWH as against 110 KWH for the country. The rural electrification in the state is only 13.6 percent in 1978-79 as against 33 percent in the country. ⁵³

53. Assam State Electricity Board Publication, 1980.

CHAPTER - 2

CURRENT ASSAM MOVEMENT : A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There can not be a movement unless there is a genuine objective basis for the same. (Accordingly, the present movement in Assam has manifested and centred around the foreigner's issue.) Though apparently, the current movement is on the foreign nationals issue, it has also raised some other pertinent issues which have been reflected and observed in various literatures on the Assam movement. In this chapter, our endeavour will be to review these literatures and an attempt will be made to analyse how the various writers view the problem. For our purpose we have divided the Literatures under review into certain sub-headings, for instance, Demographic Aspect, Cultural and Nationality problem and Alienation & Economic backwardness.

1. Demographic Aspect : As we have already stated, the present movement is centred around the issue of illegal foreigners from the neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. (There is a feeling among the people of Assam that if this immigration continues at the present rate, then the Assamese community will lose its cultural identity in the near future. ¹⁾)

1. Memorandum submitted by All Assam Students Union (AASU) to the Prime Minister of India, 2nd Feb 1980, p.5.

The percentage decadal variation of population growth in Assam has been consistently above the national average even since the beginning of this century. It is, however, during the past half century that the population of Assam has come to record one of the fastest rates of decadal growth among the states. During the last three decades the process has gathered further momentum. Since 1951, coinciding with the beginning of the planning era, the population curve has taken a markedly steep course, the decadal growth rates for Assam and India in the 1961 and 1971 census being as under :

Table

Trend of Population : Assam and India

Year	Population (in lakhs)		Decadal Growth Rate	
	Assam	India	Assam	India
1961	108	4,391	34.98	21.64
1971	146	5,471	34.95	24.66

SOURCE: Census of India, 1961 and 1971

While the high growth rate of population in Assam in comparison with the other states is an established fact, there are differences of opinion regarding the factors responsible for it. K.S. Dey² in his study of population

2. K.S. Dey "In district variations in Growth of Population of Assam" paper contributed to the Indian census centenary seminars, New Delhi 1972 as cited in Census of India, 1971, p.47.

growth in Assam, points out that the growth of population in Assam during the last seventy years (1901-1971) has been abnormally high. He attributes this due to the inflow of tea garden labours, migration of Muslims from outside the state during the earlier decades and the large scale influx of Muslim population from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the later decades. In addition there has also been a heavy influx of Hindu refugees to Assam especially after the communal riot of 1950 in the erstwhile East Pakistan. He further substantiates this by saying that, even considering the entire population of Assam in 1901 as "indigenous" and subjecting this to all India rate of increase of 129.76% from 1901 to 1971, Assam's population in 1971 should have been a mere 7.56 million and not the present (1971) 14.64 million.

Similarly in another study P. S. Sarma claims that a thorough analysis of the different factors involved in the population explosion of Assam, clearly indicates that immigration has played the mere significant role. It is true that birth rate in Assam is higher than the national average and so is the death rate. He writes : "The higher birth rate in Assam is a comparatively recent phenomenon and is ascribable to the large scale inflow of immigration characterised by a markedly high fertility rate."³

3. Parameswar Sarma, "Socio-economic impact of immigration into Assam: an overview". A Seminar Paper (unpublished). p.2.

On the other hand, Susanta Kumar Dass⁴ states that the causes for Assam's high rate of population increase are mainly three: 1) heavy immigration, 2) high natural rate of increase since 1921 and 3) the relative absence of mobility of indigenous people of Assam. The chief findings of his analysis on the demographic transformation of Assam (1891-1981) are as follows: "since, 1951 the rate of increase of Assam's population has been much higher than that of the country as a whole or of any state or province. But unlike other states, this heavy increase has been due to a) an acceleration of the natural rate of increase; b) influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan and c) heavier migration of Indians from the rest of the country."⁵ Dass has thus concluded: "the widely held impression that Assam's population has been mounting only due to influx of Bengali Hindu refugees from East Pakistan since partition is not tenable," and he points out that the burden of Hindu refugees in Assam has been greater than any other state.⁶

Thus one can conclude that though there are differences of opinion regarding the causes and types of immigrants, it is an established fact that immigration of Muslims, Hindus

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4. Sasanta Kumar Dass, "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam, 1891-1981". in EPW, Vol.xv, No. 19, May 10, p.850.
5. Ibid, p. 759.
6. Ibid, op.cit. p.859.

or Nepalis is one of the factors contributing to the high growth rate of Assam.

The impact of immigration besides population growth has become apparent in a number of ways. While agreeing with the fact the immigrants have significantly contributed to the development of Assamese society, H.P. Das writes that the immigrants especially those who came in recent times have created many socio-economic and cultural problems.⁷ People's fear is that the number of such immigrants is becoming increasingly high and if their influx continues at the present rate, the identity of the state as the homeland of Assamese people may be at stake in the near future. This feeling of the Assamese people has been expressed by many writers in their respective literatures on the movement.

Cultural Dimension and Nationality Question:

We have already stated that the specificity of the problem lies on the foreign national issue, and it has given rise to the fear among the indigeneous people of

7. H.P. Das : "The problem of Immigration in Assam: A Geographical Review and Interpretation" Presidential Address to the National Association of Geographers, India, January 8, 1980, p.15

Assam that they might be swamped by the immigrants. Generally foreigners become a problem only when the state machinery does not work effectively. Complaints to the centre to take some action on this account have failed to produce any result. So the Assamese have given vent to their feeling and found no alternative but to agitate.⁸

But this feeling of the Assamese people has been explained otherwise by Amalendu Guha. He writes: "the theory that the Assamiya national culture is in danger is more a myth than a reality now. The movement is motivated otherwise. As he has observed, the movement is not spontaneous, nor are the students its originator. Its ideological and organizational roots are in the Assamiya upper classes who control the state's powerful local press."⁹

✓ It is really surprising that how a movement participated by people from all walks of life can be characterised by Guha as controlled by the Asamiya upper class. He is not able to explain the involvement of large sections of the Assamiya peasantry including plain tribals in the current movement.

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8. Kalpana Sharma 'Confrontation in Assam: what has aroused the Assamese', Himmat, Bombay, Dec., 7, 1979, p.7.
 9. Amalendu Guha: "National question in Assam - Little Nationalism turned chaviniist: Assam's anti-foreigner upsurge 1979-80" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.xv Nos. 41, 42 and 43 (Special Issue) October 1980, p. 1699.

Moreover it is very difficult to identify a clear class differentiation in a society like Assam. Criticizing his statement, Gail Omvedt has argued that - by lumping small capitalists with the petty bourgeoisie and calling all a 'middle class' - Guha has avoided the issue of dealing with the real class character of the movement's leadership".¹⁰ His explanation of the growth of the current-movement is reduced to saying that it is entirely the conspiracy of an "aggressive middle class", using the media to stir up the population has been ascribed by Omvedt as "un-Marxist powers for the media".¹¹ She further says that bourgeoisie, of course, always try to create divisions among the masses (for example she has pointed out Shiv Sena Movement) but there must be some material basis for this to have any success. The Shiv Sena has not been able to spread into the Maharashtrian countryside because of a lack of base in contrast to the overwhelming support the Assam movement could gather.¹²

Her argument seems to be more cogent in analysing the material basis of Assamese fear. She says that "it makes much more sense to say that there is a real material base

10. Gail Omvedt: "Little Nationalism Turned Chavinist: A comment" published in Economic and Political Weekly; Vol.xvi No. 33 March 28, 1981, p.590.

11. Ibid. p.590

12. Ibid.

for Assamiya's fear of being overrun (including loss of land in districts such as Kamrup and Nowgeng, fear of loss of political power and general backwardness, unemployment etc.) and that in the absence of left leadership these fears are being voiced by a petty bourgeoisie leadership? ¹³

Here a question arises, why and how the Assamese middle class has been playing a dominant role in the Assamese middle class has been playing a dominant role in the Assamese society. The point to be noted is that although the British monetised the economy and Assam became a part of the economic structure of British India, Assamese Society continued to nourish its strong semi-tribal, semi-feudal base. ¹⁴ In fact Assam's colonial development was such that there was very little scope for the development of capitalist relations or the development of an indigeneous bourgeoisie. The only field in which there could have been some capital investment were the tea gardens but that part of Assam's economy was completely controlled by the British imperialists and a few Assamese rich men who did try and invest in the tea gardens in the 1860's, were very soon ruined in the face of British competition. ¹⁵ The colonial

13. Ibid.

14. Amalendu Guha "Planter Raj to Swaraj", Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977, p.25

15. Ibid.

economy did not give any scope for the investment of the little money which the relatively rich landed artistocracy might have had. [Therefore, while neither the bourgeoisie as a class nor the landlord class evolved during the British rule, the ground was laid for the emergence of the Assamese middle class.] The classes were to a large extent the product of Western education. It came into direct conflict with the Bengali middle class which had come to dominate the administration during the early part of the British rule. Out of this conflict which had strong economic roots and which was adequately reflected in the struggle for the restoration of the right-ful place of the Assamese language, the Assamese middle class attained a degree of identity and leadership.¹⁶

These classes, however, continued to retain and nourish their ties with the peasantry. This was particularly due to "slow rate of urbanisation of the region which continued to possess a near total agricultural economy."¹⁷ According to Udayan Misra, a distinct middle class culture was yet to emerge in Assamese society, which has been characterised by the absence of strong dividing class lines.

15. Ibid., p.69.

17. Udayan Misra : "Assam Andolonor Shmi Charitra" (The Class character of Assam Movement) Angikan (Assamese) Vol.VII, Nos.1-3 September-October 1980 p.32.

The strong links shared by the middle class with the peasantry partly explains the massive response of the latter towards a movement which undoubtedly is being led by the middle class. This class which is made up of the educated section of people belonging not only to the caste Hindu strata of Assamese society but also having a large section of tribal and ethnic people, easily constitutes the most important class in relation to the current movement.¹⁸

In analysing the class character of the movement, Misra has emphasised the point how Assamese middle class still have a close link with the peasantry. He has taken two variables to substantiate his argument e.g. land and Assamese culture. He says that "the Assamese middle classes are not largely alienated from land and this has given them a strength and confidence quite uncharacteristics of its class."¹⁹ He further points out that unlike in many other states ^{particularly} like, Bihar and U.P., the Assamese peasantry has been relatively spared the intense feudal exploitation characteristic of the landlord-peasant relationship. While agreeing with the fact that poverty and hardship still prevail among the average Assamese peasant,

18. Ibid., p.33.

19. Ibid., pp. 30-33

~~in spite of this~~ ^{still the} "peasantry did not develop a strong class antagonism ^{as} or his counter part in Bihar or Bengal did."²⁰
 Relationship of middle class with the peasantry has also got to be viewed in terms of Assamese culture.

(According to him, a distinct urban Assamese culture centred around the middle class is yet to emerge and today the basic foundation of Assamese culture is in the village.) (Bihu-Assamese national festival - Namghars, Sankari Art and culture etc.). It is in this light that Misra has pointed out that "Assamese peasant is not worried about the middle class led struggle to preserve Assamese culture and identity."²¹ He further says that in supporting the movement "peasantry is fighting for the survival of a culture which is predominantly rural based."²² Of course he has not denied the role of the weak Assamese bourgeoisie in the movement, but it does not mean that they have dominated the movement.

Moreover, Guha has made an attempt to analyse how the little nationalism has been growing in Assam and it has taken the form of Chauvinism in the current Assam movement. Analysing the facts he has pointed out how our nationalism has been developing at two levels "Great nationalism grounded in a feeling of all India unity; and the little nationalism based on that of regional linguistic unity. The former essentially suited to the interest of the

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid. p.33.

22. Ibid.

Indian big bourgeoisie and latter largely related to the small bourgeoisie - the regional middle class."²³

But, inspite its two level development, both the nationalisms had played an important role during the freedom struggle. As Indian nationalism in its struggle against the British acquired an anti-imperialist character, the regional nationalism too in its struggle against internal colonization acquired an anti-colonial progressive character. Therefore these two levels, however were not separate but to a large extent remained reciprocal.

(According to Guha, "Assamese nationalism began to take shape since nineteen fifties through political mobilization by the Assemya middle class on the language issue and later on the job and land issue. As the Assamese middle class emerged stronger and more ambitious than ever after Sylhet (Bengali majority district) was shaken off - its back, its little nationalism started degenerating into Chauvinism and minority baiting."²⁴)

But this statement of Guha has been refuted by Udayan Misra ^{who opines} by pointing that, Sylhet was never a part of

23. Anandendu Guha "Planter Raj to Swaraj" op.cit. p.334.

24. Anandendu Guha : "National question in Assam - Little nationalism turned Chauvinist: Assam's anti-foreigner upsurge, 1979-80) op.cit. pp. 1701-1703.

Assam till 1874 and Sylhet was to quote Guha himself "historically as well as ethnically an integral part of Bengal"²⁵ (Planter Raj to Swaraj "1977, p.27). It was only in 1874 that Sylhet was incorporated into the province of Assam to make the latter economically viable. There was a wide scale protest in Sylhet against its seperation from Bengal and its incorporation with backward region.²⁶ The Assamese people too wanted Sylhet to be restored to its earlier status in a district of Bengal and "public opinion in both valleys emerged united on the transfer question".²⁷ In his article, Guha seems to give quite a contradictory statement to substantiate his argument of Assam Chauvinism.

Analysing the Assamese-Bengali conflict, and Assamese fear from the immigrants, Guha argues that while before independence there was an objective basis for Assamiya fear of being overwhelmed by outsiders, now there is none. Pointing out the Assamese-Bengali conflict, it is said that "they and their Assam based Bengali rivals operate at the margin of the big capitalist dominated economy in petty industries, petty trade, profession and administrative

25. Amalendu Guha : "Planter Raj to Swaraj" op.cit. 25 as cited in Udayan Misra's "Little Nationalism turned Chauvinist" a comment". In Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XI, No. 8, Feb 21, 1981, pp.290-92.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

services."²⁸ "It is these economic circumstances and not land relations that largely explains the traditional anti-Bengali edge of Assamiya little nationalism."²⁹ While this is true in the case of the Bengalis who came during the British period, this argument does not hold true in the case of those people who came from erstwhile east Pakistan (now from Bangladesh) and whose occupation is agriculture. Therefore another area of conflict centres round the question of land. The fact is that as a result of unchecked immigration of landless peasants from neighbouring areas, the pressure on land in Assam has increased at an unprecedented rate. This pressure has become so high that in certain areas indigenous peasants have had to surrender their own villages to the immigrants.³⁰

Substantiating his argument Guha has pointed out that "from 21 lakhs in 1931, the number of Assamiya speaking population leaped to 50 lakhs in 1951 and 89 lakhs in 1971 while Bengali speaking population, has been growing more

28. Guha, op.cit. p.1705 (These Bengali people came during the British period to dominate the administration during the early part of British rule).
 29. Ibid. p. 1705.
 30. Udayan Misra : "Little Nationalism turned chauvinist" - a comment in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.xvi No. 8, February 21, 1981, pp.290-292.

modestly with its base in the total population of reconstituted Assam today, steadily declining from 30 percent in 1931 to 21 percent in 1951 and 20 percent in 1971. During the 1951-71 period, the status of Bengali linguistic group expanded only 7% while Assamiya linguistic group expanded 80%."³¹ Thus his contention is that the population influx in general and the Bengali influx in particular has not created linguistic imbalances. Hence the theory of the Assamiya language and culture being in danger today is, therefore more "a myth ^{than} and reality".

Not convinced with the Guha's conclusion, Udayan Misra points out that - while referring to the sharp decline of the Bengali speaking population, Guha should have mentioned that the chief reason behind this was the separation of Sylhet, the most populous speaking district from Assam. At the time of partition Sylhet alone had a population of approximately 2 million as against the rest of Assam's population of approximately 9 million.³²

Moreover, while comparing population figures of pre-1947 and post 1947 Assam, it must be borne in mind that the reconstitution of territory attendant on partition resulted in total changes in the population base of state.³³ Besides,

31. Guha, op.cit. p. 1710

32. Udayan Misra. Op.cit. p. 291

33. Ibid. p. 291

the official statistics may not be a reliable index, for there may be settlers in interior parts who were not enumerated in ^{the} census. Guha too has realised "the inadequacy of data, official confusion over the heterogeneity of dialects and language and, frequent changes of mode of collection and presentation of such data and mis-recording."³⁴ As an example of this language fluctuation, we can mention the case of Goalpara district where at first Goalpara language was accorded as a separate identity by the census of India. In the later census reports people of Goalpara were shown as Bengali speaking. Of late the people of Goalpara realised that they would get some special privilege, as a consequence, they have preferred to show Assamese as their mother tongue.³⁵ This fluctuation also can be explained by the fact that a large section of immigrants Bengali Muslim have returned Assamese as their mother tongue for political and other reasons in the past census.

Not being convinced that Assam's anti-foreigner movement is a product of chauvinism, Gail Omvedt³⁶ raises some pertinent questions. She suggests that to understand the event correctly, we need to make an analysis of the

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34. Amalendu Guha : "Immigrants and Autochtones in a Plural society" in S.M. Dubey (Ed) op.cit. p.45.
35. S.M. Dubey : North Eastern Region - a sociological Study, concept publishing company, Delhi, 1978.p.25
36. Gail Omvedt : "Aspects of Assamese Problems Frontier. Vol.12 No.41, June 7, 1980, pp.5-7.

"fundamental class/national characteristics of the society and the movement" as well as of the "objective basis" for the "autochthons" fear that "they and their cultural-national identity may be swept by the Bengali influx." She concludes that the agitation is one of "national self-determination." She further states that the basic Assamese fear is not so much of losing jobs to Bengali (or to other outsiders), but of losing their land. This is a much more basic issue, because it calls into question one of the defining characteristics of nationality, that of a territory; and the loss of territory to people who settled on, it tends to be permanent. Thus, Gail Omvedt, rationalises the agitation in terms of supposed dangers from the Bengali influx to the autochthon's cultural national identity.

Similarly analysing the problem of Assamese national question Apurba Boruah has commented that "the current mass movement in Assam is a manifestation of Assamese nationalism".³⁷ According to him, regional nationalism of this nature is not characteristics only in Assam or of the North-East. The history of the Indian nation state is "chequered with struggles of the regional and linguistic components unit."³⁸ Though the

37. Apurba Baruah : Indian Nationalism and the Assamese National Question, North-East Quarterly, Vol. 1 No. 1 August 1982. p.14

38. Apurba Boruah, op.cit. pp. 22-24.

Specificity* of the problems are different, he says that these are the results of the pattern of uneven development of the Indian economy, under the British rule. He points out that on the eve of the British conquest the economy of Assam, in comparison to the rest of the country, was very backward. As we have already mentioned, certain major economic changes were initiated by British imperialism and its agents, but these changes benefited chiefly British imperialism and its agents. Most of these agents were immigrants.

These immigrants came to dominate the economic life of in Assam in such a manner that the local Assamese entrepreneurs found themselves in a very insecure position. The failure to compete with immigrants, who enjoyed the patronage of the rulers, and the apprehension of losing their own national identity made it necessary for to Assamese middle class to articulate the Assamese national aspirations. 39

* Apurba Boruah, Op.cit. pp. 22-24.

* Some of the small nationalistic of the Indian Nation-state have been fighting for the right of self-determination, others are pressing for special constitutional protection of their linguistic and cultural identities, while others are launching powerful movements for the creation of separate states on the basis of their linguistic and cultural identity.

39. Ibid. op.cit. 25

Baruah opines that until the sixties of this century the Assamese middle class was too weak economically and numerically to articulate the spirit of Assamese nationalism. Moreover, the pressure on land in Assam during British period was not too high to make the peasantry aware of the danger of large scale immigration. That is why he opines that "during the British rule Assamese middle class could not emerge as a powerful force."⁴⁰ But in the post Independence period its strength was demonstrated in a series of popular movements launched by the Assamese middle class over socio-economic issues.* Thus he concludes that these conflicts over jobs and occupation of land coupled with the fear of the Assamese of being outnumbered by the immigrants added to fervour to the sentiments of Assamese nationalism.⁴¹

Discussing the problem of small nationalities, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya comments that "there is no divergence between the Assamese viewpoint which emphasises its fact of survival in their own homeland and the view point of safe guarding territorial integrity and

40. Ibid. op. cit. 25

* After independence mainly from sixties onwards there were several movements in Assam on the issues like recognition of Assamese as the official language of Assam, introduction of Assamese as a medium of instruction and establishment of refineries to refine the crude produced in the region itself).

41. Ibid. op. cit. 26

sovereignty.⁴² He further says that these views are two sides of the same coin. There is no basic difference between the Assamese and the Indian mind. He has analysed it as a relationship of one and many, which is the essence of Indian civilisation. He finally concludes that a small nationality's fight for survival is adding a new dimension to Indian democracy.⁴³

In another contribution to this issue, Sanjib Kumar Baruah,⁴⁴ too refuses to take note of the chauvinist and middle class character of the Assam movement and holds that, despite contradictions, it is in essence a legitimate, non-violent and peaceful movement of the Assamese society for self-expression. Like Gail Omvedt, Baruah too rationalises the movement in terms of supposed dangers from the Bengali influx to the autochthons' cultural national identity but with one difference. He avoids the term "self-determination", and instead talks of "Assamese sub-nationalism". Baruah has used the term 'plural society' as a conceptual tool to understand the Assamese society and polity, which has been based on exceptional immigration. Moreover, in the nationality question, Baruah brings into focus not the social classes but categories like ethnicity, demographic imbalance and plural society as the key determinants of the logic of political power in a given situation. According

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42. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya ; Indian Citizen vs. Foreign Nationals, Assam Jagrity; Lam Road Gauhati 25th January 1980, p.13.
43. Bhattacharyya, op.cit. 14.
44. Sajib Kumar Baruah, "Assam: cudgel of chauvinism or tangled nationality question?" EPQ, 15 Mar. 198 p.543-45.

to Baruah, the students (AASU) and "social cultural and literary bodies" (AAGSP) have initiated the Assam movement for the preservation of their cultural identity against the foreigners.

Unlike Guha, Baruah is of the opinion that the immigration into Assam is on a scale that has few parallels anywhere in the world, within a relatively short period.⁴⁵ He substantiates his argument by saying that the Assamese fears and aspirations finding expressions in the present movement are not far-fetched or unreasonable if one takes into account the recent Assamese history and the predicament of small frontier peoples everywhere. The example of Tripura, where the native population became a minority within three decades due to the domination of immigrant Bengalis, makes the Assamese fears very real. "A Tripura-like process is unmistakably at work in Assamese political life as well."⁴⁶ According to Barua, the Assam movement is basically a protest movement of the inhabitants of a small, non-dominant, backward, peripheral region. These people are essentially trying to defend their rights as the basic population of a territory to which they are bound by cultural and historic ties.⁴⁷

45. Susanta Kumar Das, quoted in Baruah, op.cit. pp.850-51

46. Sajib Kumar Baruah, Little nationalism turned chauvinist - a comment. EPW Vol.xvi, No. 15, April 11, 1981, p. 676.

47. Ibid, p.677.

While most of the writers support the halt of further immigration to the state as solution to the problem, there are differences of opinion regarding the assimilation part of it.

It is explained that what has developed in Assam is not a composite society of people who mingle with one another, but a plural society of "separate communities" and that politicians have hardly contributed to a genuine integration of the communities and evolution of composite cultural pattern." Thus there is little scope for the assimilation in the present Assam situation.⁴⁸

Problem of Assimilation

The question of assimilation of the various communities into the Assamese society and the distinct nature of the problem in regard to the assimilation of the Bengali nationality in Assam is more analytically explained by Udayan Mishra in the following way :

(But the immigrants in general and the Bengali immigrants with their numerical strength and cultural distinctiveness not only resisted assimilation, but also competed with the Assamese for an equally dominant role in the valley. In their bid to resist assimilation the

48. Sanjib Kumar Baruah: (a) Assam: cudgel of chauvinism or tangled nationality question? EPW, 15 March 1980, pp 543-545; (b) Little nationalism turned chauvinistic - a comment" EPW vol.xvi, no.15, April 11, 1981, p.676.

Bengali immigrants started concentrating in certain locations or pockets, and today in Assam there are some villages and townships which are inhabited predominantly by Bengalis. This in turn has resulted in the fact that the need for a healthy introduction between the Bengalis and the local Assamese population has greatly diminished.⁴⁹

The case of the early Bengali migrants (during the Ahom period and early years of British rule) into the Brahmaputra valley was different because they were just a handful and the condition of communication routes had virtually compelled them to cut off links with their home land. Hence, they merged with the Assamese nationality. This explains the large percentage of Assamese of Bengali origin both among the Hindus and the Muslims. But the same cannot be said of the large Bengali population of Assam today. The Bengalis, whether of Bangladesh, West Bengal or Assam, very much constitute a nationality bound together not by religion but by language.⁵⁰

The poor landless peasants from East Bengal who came to settle in Assam in the early part of the century succeeded in assimilating themselves with the Assamese people. But in later years when these peasants came in large numbers and settled down in certain areas often occupy-

49. Udayan Misra, 'Asom Andolonar Brani Charitra' (Class Character of the Assam Movement), Angikar, (Assamese), Vol.vii, Nos.103, July-August, September-Oct., 1980, pp.30-31.

50. Ibid, p. 31

ing land, the process of assimilation was checked. Their concentration in a particular region, and a homogeneous ethnic background tended to give a distinctive issue of identity to these peasants, who started functioning as a separate and distinct community from that of the Assamese peasantry.

Moreover, emerging educated class of people from among the peasants along with rich peasants, started wielding a large degree of political influence in the state. What was initially a quiet struggle for occupation of land now became a struggle for a share in the politics of the state.⁵¹

Therefore, it may be concluded that the large-scale influx from East Bengal and later on Bangladesh not only checked the process of assimilation but also because of numerical strength and possession of land, the Bengali peasant's relationships with his Assamese counterpart tended to become an antagonistic one. (It has been explained in detail in Chapter III).

Historical Perspective:

Besides the nationality question, the problem of Assam has also been looked from its historical perspective. This viewpoint argues that "the ruling classes in Assam have tried to exploit certain historically determined

51. Udayan Misra, *Ibid*, pp.31-32.

weaknesses that have hampered the emergence of a distinct and well defined Assamese nation to create among the Assamese people a lack of confidence in their cultural destiny. The problem in Assam is not whether the linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities will swamp the Assamese but whether the Assamese people will see clearly the strength of their numbers and the maturity of their culture to gain the confidence of these minorities so as to peacefully integrate them into the Assamese nation.⁵²

Bipan Chandra⁵³ also has looked at the Assam's problem from a historical perspective. He developed the idea of national unification as a process of a "nation in the making." He says that historically some sort of cultural-cum-geographical unity was always present in the Indian subcontinent, but it was not until the 19th century, anti-imperialist struggle that the notion of "the Indian people" emerged with ^{connections} connections of common interest and popular sovereignty. This process continues even now, in an environment of world imperialism, he adds.

Chandra denies the preexistence of an Indian culture. According to him it is a "culture in the making". Thus there

52. KN Sharma, "The Assam question : a historical perspective" EPW, Vol.xv, no.12, March 22, 1980, p.1321.

53. Bipan Chandra "Anti-Foreigner Agitation in Assam: A Historical Perspective." "Free Thinkers Discussion Forum Lecture," in ANTIPHONE, Vol.1, No.3, March 1980, p.6.

can be no "Indianisation" of the various regional cultures but a simultaneous development and gradual synthesis. Likewise the concept of "Indian economic development" wherein the different regions are made to sacrifice their own development is a mere myth.

In the context of above analysis, Bipan Chandra spoke of the Assamese people's feeling of being neglected in every field, geographic isolation and indifference to the development of their language at a time when Assam is going through a cultural renaissance. The current influx of foreigners in this context had created the fear that the Assamese would be reduced to a cultural minority.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the 'Assam movement' has been analysed from different viewpoints and all of them in their articles have tried to rationalise their own approaches.

Besides the national and cultural identity problem, the literatures on the subject reveal some other pertinent issues as well.

Feeling of Alienation

Analysing the feelings of the people. S.C. Dube has pointed out that "a terrible sense of isolation pervades this part of the country. The sense of maturity is enhanced because the region is sandwiched between a strong and unpredictable China and a temperamental Bangladesh,

both hold the olive branch at one moment, adopt menacing postures at the other."⁵⁴ He further points out that this feeling of isolation is accentuated also by the slow development of means of transformation and communication. Much has been done in this field, but most of these programmes had an eye on defence needs. The functioning infrastructure was so miniscule that the massive financial inputs in transport and communication practically seemed to have achieved nothing.

Most important of all, there is a nagging suspicion of neglect in the race of development. Some critics of the development policies of the government of India strongly feel that the North-East is being treated as an internal colony.⁵⁵ The region is rich in resources, but resources can contribute to the national wealth only if they are effectively and efficiently exploited. The view has often been articulated that "this part does not get a fair share for the current use of its natural resources. They have a feeling-right or wrong - that they are second class citizens of Indian nation".⁵⁶ The term "national

54. S.C. Dube, 'A Simmering Discontent', Hindustan Times Weekly, New Delhi, 3 January, 1981.
55. Tilotata Misra, 'Assam - a colonial hinterland' EPW, 9 August 198 pp. 1357-64. Hiren Gogain, 'Assam : Fallout of underdevelopment', EPW 22 March 1980, pp 589-90 M.V. Kamath, 'Neglected Assam', The Illustrated Weekly of India, Vol. C13.
56. Dubey, op.cit.

mainstream" has particularly upset them as they wonder how in spite of the fact that they belong to it they are considered as being outside ^{of} it. He points out that despite the necessity for national integration, the rest of the nation appears to be doing little to integrate them.

According to Dube: "integration is a two way process, both sides must simultaneously extend their hand of friendship and take positive steps towards a union of hearts. This feeling, it must be added is held strongly both by non-tribals and the tribals, more so, by the latter, who react adversely to the condescending and superior postures adopted by those coming from outside the region."⁵⁷

In this context the role of the national political parties are important. Anguish against the national parties and the past state government is very clearly manifested by the movement. They feel that the national parties have not been able to deliver goods to the Assamese people. The Centre, according to ^{them} people, neglects the Assam's interests, and various governments in the state have been responsible for the large scale influx of foreigners which upset the demographic patterns in the state and led to a large scale unemployment.⁵⁸

57. SC Dube, op.cit.

58. KN Malick, Regional Roots of Assam agitation, Times of India (Delhi), 31, 1979.

After independence, while the issue was contained in the background of political horse trading, what evolved in Assam was not a melting pot but a plural society of separate communities. National and sub-national upsurges are often forms of political intervention of the masses when institutional channels fail to articulate public grievances.

Thus Assamese sub-nationalism has evolved through recurrent mass movement focussing on the twin themes of under-development and cultural identity. Whether it is the demand for Assamese to be official language, for jobs, an oil refinery, for a broad-gauge railway or a bridge over the river Brahmaputra. It is through the mobilization of sub-nationalism that students and cultural and literary organisations have articulated demands, sidekeeping conventional politicians.⁵⁹

Thus from the foregoing reviews of literature, it appears that various approaches have touched upon the Assam problem from different angles. Emphasising on the class dimension of the Assamese society the Marxian perspective has emphasised the evolution and growth of "Little nationalism" and nativist chauvinism." But Marxist-Leninist approach has seen the Assam movement

59. Sanjib Kumar Baruah; 'Assam for Assamese - logic of frontier sub-nationalism, 'Statesman (New Delhi), 13 December, 1980,

from a different perspective. They believe in self-determinism of a nation even in the Indian context.

On the other hand the pluralists believe in the preserverence of ethnic identities, the mobilization of the elite, and on the ethnic groups sense of relative deprivation. The others have attempted to explore its causes by presenting historical and socio-political and economic account.

CHAPTER - 3SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROOTS OF THE MOVEMENT

As we have already stated that the issue of foreigners or immigration is not an isolated item of discontent; it is the culmination of mounting frustration born out of genuine grievances spread over the decades. In this chapter, an endeavour will be made to deal with the socio-economic genesis of the movement. The following socio-economic factors are referred to.

- 1) **Lop-sided development of the Indian economy converted Assam into a colonial hinterland.**
- 2) **Ever since the late nineteenth century, the rate of the inflow of immigrants to Assam has been such that now it threatens to disturb the ethno-linguistic balance and the polity and economy of the state.**
- 3) **Indifferent attitude of the centre with regard to various important socio-political decisions has led to the feeling of relative deprivation among the people, and the same is manifested in the present movement.**

**Lopsided Development of the Indian Economy Converted
Assam into a Colonial Hinterland:**

India is a developing country, but the pace at which she should have developed after independence is disappointing. The central feature of the post-independent development in India is the slow rate of India's development not only in comparison with the advanced countries but also in comparison with the Third World taken as a whole.¹ Even in this period of slow rate of development two phases² of development is visible - the first phase from 1950 to mid-sixties and the second phase from mid-sixties onwards. The first phase in comparison with the colonial period, experienced the development of industry, building of infrastructure, extension of area under agricultural production, growth of administrative-technical network under the independent state, expansion of education and increase in employment. This was a period of rising economic and political expectations. The growth of parliamentary institutions generated hopes of greater participation in the decision-making processes of the state. Every section of society produced new generations of political leaders and activities from its ranks.

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1. S.J. Patel, "India's Planned Economic Development: 1950-1975", Mainstream, Annual Number, 1980. 9
 2. Rudder Datt and K.P.M. Sundaram (Ed) Development Issues of the Indian Economy S. Chand and Company Ltd. New Delhi 1979, p.504.

The second phase from mid-sixties onwards, though one of increase in food production, is characterised by structural retrogression in Indian economy. Industry went into recession. The job opportunities shrank, the rate of inflation rose and the expectations generated earlier turned into frustrations. During this period, a decline in political legitimacy of the system as well as of political leadership has also been observed.³ The blocked nature of India's development and the decline in political legitimacy are the two factors that can be held responsible for bringing social tensions to the surface. In the recent past such issues have given rise to a number of regional movements and conflict-situations in different parts of the country. For instance, Shiv Sena in Bombay, J.P. Movement in Gujarat and Bihar, movement of tribals against Bengalis in Tripura, the discontentment among Rajbansis and Nepalis in West Bengal, etc., and the tension in the whole of north-eastern region are the expressions in different forms of the generalised phenomenon of the blocked nature of India's development and the decline in political legitimacy.

A common feature of most of these movements has been that the national political parties have been pushed aside by new regional political parties or movements. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the existing national

3. Pramod Kumar, Pritam Singh "Assam Movement Towards a Framework of Analysis", in North East Quarterly Vol I, No. August 1982, p. 34.

parties have vested interests which adversely effect^{ed} economic and political structure. The intensity, the pace and the form of each of these movements can be understood in the light of the problems specific to each of these movements, but this specificity cannot be comprehended outside the general context and pattern of India's development.⁴

The low level of development of India as a whole is further characterised by the pattern of uneven development. Certain regions such as, Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra and Gujarat experienced relatively high rates of agricultural and industrial development; while other regions such as Bihar, Eastern UP, Orissa, M.P., and whole of North-east ~~regions~~ remained relatively under-developed. This uneven development has further provided fuel to the growth of social and regional tensions. The movement in Assam is also the manifestation - of problems created by the limited and uneven development. The rate of this uneven development can be traced back to ^{the} colonial period.

Colonial Legacy

Some basic characteristics of the region are required to be noted in the analysis of the process of development in the area.

It was in the year 1826 that independent Assam passed into the hands of the British East India Company from those of the Ahoms under the stress of repeated Burmese invasions.⁵

4. Singh op. cit. p. 35.

5. Hem Baruah, The Red River & The Blue Hill, Lawyers Book Stall, Gauhati, 1962, p. 2.

At the time of British occupation Assam's economy was very backward. It was a semi-tribal, semi-feudal society of petty producers. The British monetised the economy with the foreign capital entering the field of tea, coal, oil and transport. But direct or indirect effects of many of these industries on employment, income investment and further development in the state continued to be very limited, with substantial portions of income and surpluses from them continuing to be sent outside the state.⁶ Thus the changes that the British brought about benefited chiefly the British rulers, their supporters or agents in India. Most of these agents were immigrants. In the opinion of Amalendu Guha, "Marwari Trader-cum-moneylenders monopolised the internal trade as agents of the British trading Houses of Calcutta, who in turn worked for their metropolitan counterparts in London. Bengali clerks, doctors and lawyers, with the advantage of their early initiation to English education and the British-Indian administrative system monopolised Government jobs and professions".⁷ This situation has been inhibiting the realisation of the state's full growth potential and of the flow of benefits to the people of the state.

6. Amalendu Guha, "Planter Raj to Swaraj - Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947", Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 56-64.

7. Guha, op. cit., p. 25.

Even after the 34 years of Independence this colonial legacy still lingers. For an analysis of this trend, we can discuss the following aspects of the present economy.

Although Assam produces 4.6 million tonnes of crude oil in a year, which is one-third of the country's production, yet its revenue from oil is pegged at a very low royalty of Rs. 42 a tonne. Assam Sahitya Sabha argues "Every year we get Rs. 22 crores as royalty for Rs. 840 crores' worth of crude oil. The difference alone would have raised Assam's per capita income by Rs. 454 every year".⁸

Inspite of the establishment of two refineries, and two petrochemical complexes in the post-independence period, the impact of the industry on the regional economy and its contribution to the growth of the regional savings and capital formation have been negligible. Moreover, the scale in which they have been planned and the manner they have been organised, their impact on the regional economy, particularly in terms of employment generation and revenue yield, is also marginal.⁹

In the case of tea, coal and plywood also the situation has not much changed. Like oil, tea industry had also its

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8. Assam Sahitya Sabha, "Eclipse in the North East - An Analysis of the present agitation in Assam", (Booklet), 1980, p. 6.
9. Parameswar Sarma, "A Region of Neglected Potentialities and Unrealised Opportunities", in Assam and the Assamese Mind, edited by Hagen Saikia, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Gauhati, 1980, pp. 101-102.

origin in the early British period. This industry continues to be the largest employer accounting for 61 per cent of the factory employment in 1976. The 756 tea estates of Assam grow 26.3 per cent of tea worth Rs. 400 crores. The bulk of it is sold and distributed in Calcutta and London by a system of auctioning that brings no benefit to the state. Moreover, head offices of nearly 90 percent of the tea gardens are located in Calcutta.¹⁰

The plywood industry which now comprises saw 40 mills is the fastest growing forest industry in the state. However, as a probe by the Employment Review Committee of the Assam Assembly revealed, this important forest-based industry which has been subsidized by the state Government or various financial institutions is also operating in the same colonial pattern.¹¹

The revenue accruing to the state from this major forest industry is a meagre Rs. 35 lakhs by way of sales tax, as against Rs. 6 crores accruing to the Central Government. As regards employment in the plywood industry, the committee's findings are revealing: 76 percent of the positions in the managerial and senior staff have been filled in with recruits from outside the state.¹²

10. P. Sarma op. cit., p. 107.

11. Ibid., p. 107.

12. Ibid., pp. 107-108.

An analysis of the state's employment situation would give us an idea as to why the nativist feeling has given rise to the movement. As we have stated, the domination of the immigrants in the field of employment opportunities continued all through the British period. Even today the 'outsiders' have a very strong hold over opportunities of employment and occupation.

Myron Weiner¹³ has shown that even in 1961 about 57% of the employees in transport and communication were immigrants. The dominant position enjoyed by the immigrants in the job market has been pointed out by the employment review committee of the Government of Assam itself. In its third report, the committee submitted that in a survey of 28 units comprising seven public sector industries, 16 private sector industries and 5 Banks, with a total strength of 29,537 employees, only 14,368 or 49 percent had their birth places in Assam and only 10,473 or 35 percent had Assamese as their mother tongue. The committee further notes that of the 2095 employees in the class I and II only 762 or 36 percent had their birth place in Assam.¹⁴ (ERC 1973, p.50).

Those who have been trying to rationalise this state of affairs have been arguing that jobs, especially lucrative ones, go to outsiders because there is a dearth of specialists among the indigenous population. This is belied by the fact

13. Myron Weiner, "Sons of the Soil: Migration & Ethnic Conflict in India", Demography in India, 1978.

14. Report of the Employment Review Committee, Dispur, Assam, 1973, p.50.

that in most cases persons occupying class I and II jobs do not have any specialised knowledge. For example, we can take the plywood industry and the oil and natural gases commission as test cases. The Employment review committee in the 8th report surveys the plywood industry. Here out of 87 senior officers, 66 persons or 76 percent are from outside Assam. And of these 66 persons, 60 persons or 90 percent have only general education and only 5 have engineering degrees and one with certificate of Engineering Trade. As regards general education, 6 or 9 percent have master's degree; 29 or 44 percent are graduates; 12 or 18 percent are intermediates; 15 or 23 percent are matriculates and 4 or 6% are below matric standards.¹⁵ (ERC 1979, pp. 10-13).

In the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, Nazira, 148 Class I officers, with birth places outside Assam, joined during 1969-74. Of these 61 percent had no technical qualifications; 24 percent had degrees in Engineering and technology; 8 percent were diploma holders; Of the 61 percent officers with general qualifications, 36 percent had master's degree; 35 percent were graduate; 21 percent were intermediate or P.U.C. passed and 8 percent were matriculates.¹⁶ (ERC 1976, pp. 22-23). While hundreds of persons with general educational qualifications were being appointed in lucrative jobs from outside

15. Report of the Employment Review Committee, 1979, Assam pp. 10-13.

16. Report of the Employment Review Committee, 1976, Assam pp. 22-23.

the state, the live register of employment exchanges of Assam showed in 1973 a total of 32,391 educated job seekers.¹⁷ (ERC 1973, Table No. 26, p. 27). This is possible mainly because most of the recruitment centres for major public and private sector industries are situated outside Assam, and even in the industries which have recruitment centres in Assam itself, key positions are occupied by non-Assamese persons.

There is no wonder that in such a situation the most influential section of the Assamese society, the Assamese middle classes, would feel deprived and begin to harbour grievances against the immigrants. The grievances are so strong today that "jobs to the sons of the soil" has become a common slogan in Assam. Besides the unemployment problem, the state's backwardness also can be viewed from the following indicators.

Industry: In spite of a rich and diversified resource base, this region is backward in industrialization. There are only 12 medium and large scale units in the entire region. Nine large scale units are in the process of being set up. In the small industries sector, there are 2,653 units employing 27,000 people with an investment in fixed assets amounting to Rs. 1,415,00 lakhs. In industry the value of output is only 1.6 percent for Assam compared to the population of 2.7 of the country.¹⁸

17. Ibid., 1973, p. 27.

18. Parameswar Sarma, op. cit., p. 102.

It may be recalled that immediately after Independence, Assam was completely cut off from the rest of the country, as the road and railways had to take a detour through East Pakistan. As the Railway and Road link did not develop for the first 10 years, naturally the industrial development was impossible during that period. This big gap of industrial development between Assam and the rest of the country still continues. Besides this, various other factors are responsible for causing this backwardness.

Assam was conquered by the British long after they had occupied Bengal. As such jute mills, paper mills and other industries were set up in Bengal and Assam was meant only to supply raw materials to them. The Britishers did not take much interest in industrialisation of the country except to the extent that some of them were directly connected with the industry. The geographical isolation and transport and communication bottleneck are also equally responsible for its backwardness.

Transport and Communication

A major hurdle to the exploitation of the abundant natural resources of the region is the transport and communication bottleneck. A network of good transport and communication system is vital overhead, which accelerated the process of development. In Assam this overhead, is still under-developed and "the state has been hamstrung to

a considerable extent by this deficiency."¹⁹ At present the railway serves as the main communication system between Assam and rest of India. Except the negligible length of 105 km in Broad Gauge, the entire system in Assam is in Metre Gauge and that almost single track. There is upto now no electric route in N.F. Railway. Assam with a route kilometrage of 2193 account for only 3 percent of the total route kilometrage in India. The position of Assam in the Railway map in India may be observed from the table given in Appendix. There has been no addition to the total kilometrage in Assam since 1973. In its 723 km. course through Assam, the Brahmaputra is at present spanned by a single bridge."²⁰

In a report²¹ submitted by the state to the Planning Commission, some of the inadequacies in state plan, central assistance, public sector investment and investment by banks have been highlighted.

Inadequate State Plan:

The Report stated that from 1951 to 1977-78 the per capita cumulative state plan outlay in the state was only Rs. 541, ranking 17th amongst the 22 states in the country. The average per capita plan outlay for all these 22 states was Rs. 603.

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19. Economic Survey, Assam, 1978-79, Department of Economics & Statistics, Government of Assam, Gauhati, p. 32.
20. Parameswar Sarma, op. cit., p. 100.
21. Report of the Government of Assam to the Planning Commission, October 1980, p. A-12 - A-13.

Inadequate Central Plan Assistance

The per capita central plan assistance to Assam from 1951 to 1978-79 amounted to Rs. 485 being the lowest amongst the special category states, the highest being Nagaland (Rs. 2.727). This per capita central assistance was almost the same as that for a relatively more advanced state like Punjab. (R. 443).

Low Investment by Banks:

The per capita credit sanctioned by banks in Assam was as low as Rs. 38 in 1976 whereas Maharashtra received Rs. 443.

A Stagnant Agricultural Economy

Though agriculture, (as we have stated in introduction, Part II) is the mainstay of the state's economy, it is characterised by relatively small holdings, low crop intensity, low-level of technology and low average yields which have stagnated, if not fallen, over the last decade.

Thus the net result of the historical geo-political and other factors has been that the state has remained backward and poor. The cumulative impact of the various factors briefly indicated above is to be found in the low and trailing growth of per head income in this state. Relatively, the most developed state in the north eastern region, the per capita income of Assam (at current prices) in 1977-78 was Rs. 866 against 1163 for the country as a whole. Moreover,

between 1970-71 and 1977-78, the per capita income of Assam rose by 2.6 percent while that of the country as a whole rose by 8.6 percent, (both calculated on the basis of 1970-71 prices), thereby showing an increasing lag in relation to the national average.²²

Immigration and its impact on -a) Agricultural Economy
b) Ethno-linguistic balance

It is now a well-known fact that Assam has witnessed a tremendous growth of population particularly during the post-independence period. Assam's population growth rates looks very high when compared with those of all India and other states. There is no doubt that this tremendous population growth is caused in part by a large, and almost continuous, flow of immigrants into Assam. It has been experienced that this heavy and continuous immigration has produced many adverse effects in the socio-economic life of Assam. Especially marked is the impact on the agricultural economy. This fact has been revealed by many survey reports and studies undertaken on the agricultural economy of Assam.

A major indicator of the mounting pressure on the sector is the rapid tumbling of land-man ratio. In a single decade : 1961-71, the per capita agricultural land declined from 0.27 hec. to 0.20 hecter against 0.30 hec. to 0.25 hec. for all India, as per the data of the world

22. Economic Survey, Assam, op cit., p. 7.

Agricultural Census (1970-71).²³ According to NSS 17th Round (September 1961 - July 1962), the average size of the ownership holding in the rural sector of Assam was not only lower than the national average, but was significantly lower than the national average, but was significantly lower than the figures for most states. The survey also indicates that until partition agricultural land was not as scarce as in Assam today, which has the largest percentage of landless agricultural household among the Indian states. The acute dimensions of the problem in Assam even relative to West Bengal and all India are revealed by the following figures.²⁴

Table No

Landless Agricultural Households as percentage of State/National total of Agricultural Households

Assam	27.77
West Bengal	12.56
All India	11.68

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23. World Agricultural Census (1970-71) as cited in Seminar paper by Parameswar Sarma, "Socio-Economic Impact of Immigration in Assam: An Overview", held in Gauhati, (unpublished).
24. National Sample Survey (Sept. 1961-July 1962) as cited by Parameswar Sarma, p. 4 ;

See also K. Alam, "Land Scarcity and Agricultural Economy in Assam", North Eastern Economic Review, Vol. I, No. 1, Jan.-March, 1977.

The explosive population growth as a result of influx is also making its pressure visible on the food budget of the state. The decline in per capita availability of the foodgrain from internal production revealed in the following table provides a measure of the pressure.²⁵

Table No.

	Per Capita Availability of Foodgrains (Kilograms per year)		
	1973	1974	1975
Assam	144	126	124
All India	155	165	152

Source : Basic Statistics, NEC (1977) - Table J. 5 p. 117

As the combined result of unrelenting pressure of population of land and lack of diversification of the rural economy, disguised unemployment has been steadily on the increase in the agriculture sector. As calculated by the A.K. Neog and M. Borkakaty, the magnitude of unemployment in the rural sector of Assam has increased by an appalling 640 p.c.²⁶

25. Basic Statistics, NEC (1977), Table J.5, p. 117; P. Sarma, op. cit., p. 5.

26. A.K. Neog & M. Borkakaty, "Strategies for Integrated Rural Development in Assam : Problem & Prospects", as cited by P. Sarma; Also see A.K. Neog, "Rural Unemployment Problem" (Seminar paper).

This continued inflow of migrant agricultural labourers from Bangladesh has also influenced the factor of productivity and farm wage in the state. This impact is pronounced in areas with high concentration of immigrant population. Parameswar Sarma in his study of the Goalpara district in 1975, found that the daily farm wage was as low as Rs. 1.50 plus the mid-day meal. Similarly, in a survey conducted by B.K. Nath at the same time, it was noted that in the area of high concentration of immigrant population in the Goalpara district the daily wage of agricultural labour was Rs. 3.00 or even lower, whereas in some of the other parts of Assam where there was no immigrant population, the daily farm wage ranged upto Rs. 8.00²⁷

Besides immigration, there are other internal factors also which can be held responsible for the low land-man ratio.

The uneconomic size of the great majority of land holdings, inequality in the ownership and use of land and landlessness of a considerable portion of population, are some of the serious defects of the agrarian structure in Assam.²⁸ The Report of the Survey of the Rural Economic

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27. B.K. Nath, "Immigration & Its Impact on Agricultural Production & Productivity in Assam", (Seminar paper) as cited by P. Sarma.
28. National Sample Survey Report of land holdings (Eighth Round) No. 66, p. 10 as cited by Narendra Chandra Dutta Land Problems and Land Reforms in Assam, S. Chand and Co. Delhi, 1968, p. 74.

Condition conducted by the Government of Assam during the period 1948-49 shows that in the districts of Darrang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Newgong 11.26 per cent to 18.48 per cent of the household are landless, 31.81 per cent to 37.66 per cent households have holdings below 10 bighas, and 12.21 per cent to 17 per cent households have holdings between 10 and 15 bighas.²⁹

The pattern of land holdings in Goalpara district and Karimganj sub-division of Cachar district is revealed by N.K. Dutta,³⁰ in his survey of the area in the following way : 10.09 per cent of the households are landless, 11.01 per cent have less than 1 bigha and 45.42 per cent have holdings between 1 bigha and less than 10 bighas. This, he points out that 66.51 per cent households are either landless or owners of holdings below 10 bighas. Only .92 per cent of the households own holdings between 75 and 125 bighas. He has concluded that " there is a disparity in land ownership. While 56.43 per cent of the households having less than 10 bighas of land own together on 20.72 per cent of the total land area, 2.75 per cent households having land between 50 and 125 bighas own as high as 20.28 per cent of the total land area."³¹

29. Narendra Chandre Dutta : Land Problem and Land Reforms in Assam. S. Chand and Co. Delhi, 1968, p. 74.

30. N.K. Dutta, op. cit., p. 75.

31. Ibid., p. 76.

Though Government had taken steps to reduce the disparities in the ownership of land, to increase the size of uneconomic holdings by redistribution of land by fixing of ceiling, it could not fulfill these objectives. According to Dutta, fixation of ceiling at 150 bighas for all classes of land and inordinate delay in the implementation of legislative measure, rendered the ceiling legislation ineffective and incapable of achieving its objectives.³²

He opines that "defective legislation and its ineffective implementation led to the frustration and disappointment of the small holders, share-croppers and landless people on the one ^{hand} ~~hand~~ and enabled the well-to-do sections to evade law, on the other."³³ In this situation the continuous flow of immigration has given a new shape to the problem.

From the foregoing discussion we have observed that until ^a couple of decades ago, agricultural land was not as scarce in Assam as it is today. As a result of this scarcity it has given rise to a number of social problem. As land is the main source of livelihood for the rural population, it has become a question of life and death for them either to lose or gain a piece of land. This situation forces them to settle their land dispute at any cost even without any regard for loss and life.

32 H.K. Dutta op. cit. p. 85

33 Ibid. p. 129

Land has also become the source of extreme poverty and insurmountable miseries of life in a different way. To meet the contingencies occasioned by death, sickness, marriage etc. many of the rural families alienate their lands to others through mortgage or sale. In this way many families eventually become landless and have to live on doing casual labour without any regular income. This process further aggravates their poverty rendering them almost destitutes. This paucity of land and poverty have become the main contributing factors of crimes among the rural people of Assam.³⁴

Thus, this adverse effect of the immigration on the agricultural sector, helped the leadership of the movement to mobilise the rural population. This large immigration has also its impact on the ethno-linguistic balance of Assamese society and a discussion on it follows.

Immigration and its Impact on Ethno-Linguistic Balance

As we have already stated, the people of Assam are agitated by the problem of influx of foreigners from neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. There is a feeling among the people of Assam that if this immigration will continue at the present rate, then the Assamese Community will lose their cultural identity in the near future. Herein we shall deal with only those aspects, which have created this fear.

34 D. Doloy "Patterns of Crime in Assam" in S.M. Dubey North-East India - A Sociological Study. Concept Publishing Company, Delhi 1978, p.602

The harmful effects of continuous immigration are evident in every sphere of life. The main fear is that as 'votes' are the ultimate deciding factor in the present decision-making process, so the continuous inflow of foreigners might influence the existing political set up of the 'state'. A report published in the Statesman would throw a light on the threat to problem. "An off-shoot of this population explosion has been a sudden change in the composition of the district's (Goulpara) electorate. The immigrants are in absolute majority in seven of the nineteen Assembly constituencies in the district. In five more constituencies they are numerous enough to be crucial for an electoral victory. There is almost a similar transformation in the smaller border district of Cachar, which returns 19 legislators to the 126 members' state Assembly."³⁵

Thus it is quite possible that majority of immigrants and the leaders behind them are determined to create instability in the region to serve their own interests.

Besides this political problem, the immigration today also checks the process of assimilation of the Assamese society. Though the assimilation is a historical process for the Assamese society, the present influx of Bengali nationals in Assam has thrown up some special problems which are stated as follows :

1. The Bengali (both Hindus and Muslims) form a well defined distinct nationality marked by a highly developed language and culture, bound together by a common history, a common economic pattern and common national bond.

2. The Bengali concentration in the Brahmaputra valley has been of such a pattern that certain linguistic/cultural 'pocket' have been formed, thereby greatly diminishing the need for healthy assimilation with neighbouring Assamese areas.
3. The fresh waves of immigrants from erstwhile East Pakistan and present Bangladesh have tended to upset the little degree of assimilation that had been taking place in certain areas.

The case of the early Bengali immigration (during the Ahom period and in the early years of British rule) into the Brahmaputra valley was different because they were just a handful and the condition of communication routes had virtually compelled them to cut off links with their homeland. This explains the large percentage of Assamese of Bengali origin both among the Hindus and the Muslims. But the same cannot be said of the large Bengali population in Assam today. The Bengalis, whether of Bangladesh, West Bengal or Assam, very much constitute a nationality bound together not by religion but by language.³⁶

Even in the case of poor landless peasants from East Bengal who came to settle in Assam can be viewed ^{in the} same way. Those who came in the early part of the century succeeded in

assimilating themselves with the Assamese nationality. But, in later years when these peasants came in large numbers and concentrated themselves in certain areas after occupying land, the process of assimilation was checked. As a result of it, these peasants started functioning as a separate and a distinct community from that of the Assamese peasantry. The emerging new generation from among this peasantry, along with middle and rich peasants, started wolding a large degree of political influence in the state and moreover, the occupation of the fertile riverine belts by the immigrants led to growing tension between the nation and the immigrants. The conflict over land further halted the process of assimilation.³⁷

However, if the immigrants had assimilated with the Assamese society these tensions would not have created an explosive situation. But immigrants in general and the Bengali immigrants with their numerical and cultural viability in particular, not only resisted assimilation but also completed with the Assamese equally dominant role in the valley.³⁸

Thus, the people of Assam consider these immigrants a threat to their ethno-linguistic identity specially because they have before them the example of Tripura, where the Bengalis who were once an insignificant minority now constitutes over 70% of the state population.³⁹ These fears becomes all the more worse because e the Bengali speaking population in Assam has

37 Ibid.

38 Udayan Misra, op.cit. pp. 31-32

39 Gail Omvedt, "Aspects of the Assamese Problems", Frontier, Vol.12, No.41, June 7, 1980, p.5

recently been growing at a rate higher than that of the Assamese.⁴⁰ If the present trend continues, there is indeed a danger of the Assamese being swamped by the immigrants.

Centre's Apathy and Feeling of Relative Deprivation

Besides these, there is a sense of alienation⁴¹ and feeling of relative deprivation among the people. They feel that they have been neglected by the Centre in many ways. Thus, the Centre's apathy to the problems of that part of India created a feeling of antagonistic attitude among the people. These feelings are reflected in the various literatures published, during the course of ^{the} movement. Observing the feelings M.V. Kamath opines that "The Assamese have sufficient grounds for feeling that their fellow countrymen in the rest of the India may not quite have their interests at heart. They point out that even Mahatma Gandhi in his Book Hind Swaraj should ^{ved} abysmal ignorance about them (the Mahatma later graciously corrected himself), that during the crucial period of the transfer of power, the Indian National Congress agreed to the cabinet Mission's proposal to include Assam in Group 'C' (East Pakistan now Bangladesh) and might have been turned over to Jinnah had

40 Udayan Mishra, "Little Nationalism turned Chauvinist", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XI, No. 8, Feb. 21, 1981, pp. 290-92.

41 Ghanshyam Paradeshi, "Assam-Crisis: Exploitation and Alienation Assamese View", Mainstream, 22nd March, 1980, pp. 9-10

not the late Gopinath Bordoloi^{olo} plunged into a rescue operation, or that faced with the Chinese invasion, Jawaharlal Nehru made a pathetic address of farewell to the Assamese over all India Radio on November 21 1962.⁴²

There are other political decisions which had given rise to this feeling such as the demand made by the immigrants before the state organization commission (1953-1955) to incorporate the district of Goalpara in West Bengal and to carve out a new state from Assam in the name of Purbachal. The effort to covert Assam into a bilingual state in 1960 etc.⁴³

What the people feel is that these demands would ^{not} have ^{been} possible if they were politically strong and economically viable. One of their grivences is that to this day they are not being taken as seriously. What they feel is that for every due share in the present political and economic set up they have had to fight. For example, one can mention of the issue of languages, establishment of Refineries, broad-gauge line, Bridge on the Brahmaputra river, etc. The table given in Appendix would highlight the relative neglect of the state.

The present issue of foreigners or illegal immigration is also a result of the indifferent attitude of the government. In the subsequent chapter we shall deal with the problem of how this has given rise to the present movement.

✓ 42 M.V. Kamath "Neglected Assam" The Illustrated Weekly of India. Vol. CL.3, January 20-26, 1980. p.8.

43 Khanin Boruah, Critical Days of Assam, Sreeguru Press, Gauhati, 1972, p.1-8.

Chapter IV

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMPONENTS OF ^{THE} MOVEMENT : SOME HIGHLIGHTS

After having discussed the socio-economic conditions of the State which have generated a feeling of discontent among the people, our aim in this chapter is to present an account of the salient events of the movement. Herein, we shall analyse the various components of social movement with reference to the movement going on in Assam. However, in analysing the same it will be useful to throw light on the historical background of the immigration problem which has ignited the movement.

Historical Background : Pre-Independence Period :

The problem of immigration which has given birth to the present movement in Assam - is a historical process which can be traced to very ancient times. Over the ages Assam has been receiving migrants coming from various parts of India and even abroad, particularly the regions of South-East Asia. The principal races of people that have migrated are the Austro-Asiatics, the Dravidians, the Tibet-Burmans, the Mongoloids and

the Aryans.¹ Notwithstanding diversity of origin and differences of race, religion, language and culture, these migrants coming at different times of history have participated in a unique process of socio-cultural fusion. The socio-cultural identity of the Assamese people today is the consummation of this age-long tradition of assimilation and synthesis.²

While immigration into assam is a long historical process, it was mainly in the latter part of the last century that it started gathering pace and continued to date.

Of the two major streams witnessed in the process, the one of epochal significance is the stream originating in erstwhile East Bengal which was then a part of this country. It has been observed that the influx of large number of firm settlers from East Bengal into Assam valley was "the most

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1. Hem Boruah, The Red River and Blue Hills, Lawyers Book Stall, Gauhati, 1962, p.45
 2. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, The Place of Assam in History of civilization of India, Department of Publication, University of Gauhati, 1970 pages 11 & 55

important event in the state of Assam in the first quarter of the present century."³

This influx was not caused without any reason. Low density of population in Assam, abundance of virgin fertile land, the open uncultivated 'chars'² and the benign land tenure system were powerful pull forces, while in East Bengal the deteriorating agrarian conditions, the mounting pressure on land and the oppressive zamindari system acted as equally powerful push forces. The tagging of Assam to East Bengal in the year 1905, and the development of railway communication in this state, led to further acceleration of migration process by increasing spatial mobility.⁴

Whatever might have been the impact of their arrival on the socio-cultural milieu of the state, the early migrants from East Bengal by and large made tangible contributions to the agricultural economy of the state as recorded in the Census of India 1931, Report on Assam. The large chunk of these migrants worked towards their acceptability to the native population, and are today an integral part of the

² Uncultivated land near riverside.

3. H. Goswami, "Migration of landless labourers from East Bengal to Assam Valley", Assam Economic Journal, Vol. II, No. 1, 1976, as cited in Parameswar Sarma's, "Socio-Economic Impact of Immigration into Assam : An Overview" (Seminar Paper).
4. Parameswar Sarma, "Socio-Economic Impact of Immigration into Assam : An Overview", (unpublished),. A paper presented in the Seminar on Assam Movement, Gauhati, 1980

larger Assamese community.

Post Independence Period :

Partition marked a new epoch in the history of migration to Assam. Migration from East Bengal which till then was a case of internal migration assumed the character and complications of international migration. Initially these new migrants consisted mostly of refugees, but in the later waves non-refugee immigrants came to predominate. The latter were generally pushed out of the country by the rapidly increasing demographic pressure in East Pakistan.

The impending danger of this large scale immigration was felt by the Assamese people long ago. Tyagbir Hemchandra Boruah and Omeo Kumar Das, the leading freedom fighters of Assam were the first to highlight the dangers posed by unbridled immigration. In 1940, Boruah remarked : "Assam has already reached a point where its role of or capacity for absorption has far exceeded its assimilation capacity."⁵ Similarly Omeo Kumar Das pleaded in the constituent Assembly in 1947 to include the subject of 'migration' and 'naturalization' in concurrent list which would give the

✓5. Quoted by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya "Roots of Assam Movement" Mainstream, Vol. XXI No. 13, November 27, 1982, p.9.

authority to state governments to exercise check over the migration.⁶

The problem of immigration has also been observed by census commissioners in their respective census reports. In 1951, R.B. Vaghaiwalla, the then Census Commissioner, pointed out that "even after independence, despite the present political, constitutional and psychological climate of Assam and despite the passport system and other difficulties, many Muslim immigrants will yet run the grundle of these legal and administrative barriers and attempt to settle down in Assam".⁷ That prophecy appears to have come true as is borne by the figure of the 1961 census.

The census report of 1961 gives a picture of immigration problem in the following way :

".... From 1901 to 15 August 1947, the movement (of people from East Pakistan to Assam) was of Indian citizens from one part of India. After independence, the movement may have been a continuity of the past, but legally, it becomes the movement of foreigners into the Indian territory, be they Hindus, Muslims or any other religious community."⁸

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6. Ibid. p.9.
 7. Census Commissioner's Report of 1951.
 8. Census of India, 1961

As a result of the publication of the Census Report of 1961, which had focused once more on the problem of infiltration by the foreigners, the central government was reported to have decided to adopt certain effective measures to check the influx of foreigners into Assam. But in practice it did not show any concrete result, and the influx of foreigners continued unabated as the Census Report of 1971 recorded a further rise in the growth of population.⁹ (See appendix).

This inflow after independence (mainly between 1952-1964) was on account of the communal riots out there and again another flow came after the Indo-Pak war of 1965. The civil war in 1971 which subsequently created Bangladesh paved the way for settlement of thousands of refugees in Assam.¹⁰

The rapid growth in population of Assam as a result of influx from the neighbouring countries is also reflected in the tremendous rise in electrorate between 1957 and 1979.¹¹ (See Table 2). Although the

9. Census of India, 1971.

10. "In Assam, Meghalaya : 11 Lakh Bangladeshis Stayed Back After Liberation War", in Assam Tribune, 28th November 1979, Gauhati.

11. Memorandum submitted by AASU to the Prime Minister, 2nd February 1980, p.5.

authorities were aware of the inclusion of the names of foreigners in the voters' list, this fact was established and accentuated when S.L. Shakdher, the then Chief Election Commissioner of India, commented on it in a meeting of electoral officers of states held at Ootacamund in October 1978. Referring to the alarming situation in North Eastern Region in general and Assam in particular, he stated - "In one case (Assam) the population in 1971 recorded an increase as high as 34.98 percent over the 1961 figures and this increase was attributed to the influx of a very large number of persons from neighbouring countries."¹² He further said, "I think that it may not be a wrong assessment to make, on the basis of the increase of 34.98 percent between the two censuses, the increase that is likely to be recorded in the 1991 census would be more than 100 percent over the 1961 census. In other words, a stage would be reached when the state may have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may probably constitute a sizeable percentage if not the majority of the population of the state."¹³ As a remedial measure, Shakdher proposed issuing of identity cards to

12. Ibid., p.9; Quoted from Press Note (No.881 by Chief Election Commissioner, September 18, 1979).

13. Ibid., p.9.

the electorate, but his proposal went unheard.

The foreigners' problem has been aggravated further by the issuing of citizenship certificates in the neighbouring states of West Bengal and Tripura.¹⁴

The Turning Point

The names of foreign nationals were first detected when the voters' list was being revised on the eve of a bye-election in Mangaldai parliamentary constituency of Darrang district. During the process of revision of the electoral rolls undertaken in 1979, out of a total electorate of six lakhs, objections were raised against about 70,000 names and out of those as many as 45,000 were found to be foreigners by the due process of law. The people realised the impending danger of the problem and felt that the situation could be same or even worse in the other constituencies, specially in the districts of Goalpara, and Nowgong and Barpeta subdivision where infiltration has been at an extremely high level.¹⁵

It has been observed that inspite of the official admissions, declarance and assurance authorities

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14. Memorandum to the President of India on "Problems of influx of foreign nationals into North-Eastern Region particularly Assam", submitted by Assam College Teachers' Association, ACTA House, ~~XXX~~ Salepur, Gauhati, p.4
15. The Assam Tribune, 19th December 1979, "Problems of influx of Foreign Nationals into N.E. Regions, Part II, p.3

had not initiated any effective and adequate steps either to prevent large scale infiltration of foreigners or to prevent inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls. As a result, infiltrators entered into the state and got their names - included in the draft electoral rolls by dubious means and thus become a political threat to the native people.

Mobilisation of the Masses

The All Assam students Union (ASSU) brought this to the notice of the people and appealed to the authorities to delete the names of foreign nationals from the voters' lists and demanded their subsequent deportation. Other regional parties and socio-cultural organisations also supported this move. A question which haunted most of them was - "How could the people of Assam let their fate be determined by lakhs of foreigners in the electoral rolls?"¹⁶ People of Assam expected the CEC to delete the name of the foreigners from voters' list. Unfortunately, contrary to his previous statement CEC directed the authorities to

16. Voice of AASU - Mass Upheaval in Assam - by All Assam Students' Union, Gauhati, p.5 (These numbers vary from different sources) (Pamphlet).

stop deletion of foreigners' name and said - ..."scrutiny of electoral rolls can be taken up after the election is over..."¹⁷

The people of Assam felt that it was like putting the cart before the horse. They would not accept the argument put forward by the CEC.¹⁸ This open disregard of the authorities forced the student community to launch a statewide movement on a massive scale.

Keeping in view the above facts, it can be said that the indifferent attitude of the government and the wheel election machinery, caused discontentment among the people. The point to be noted here is that mere discontentment may not give rise to a social movement unless it is transformed into a generalized belief system. Therefore, it is essential to mobilize people for collective action. Mobilization means bringing the "affected group into action."¹⁹ It is the process whereby people prepare for active participation for a cause which they

17. Ibid., pp.5-6

18. AASU Memorandum, p.9 - It has been stated in their memorandum that Dignity of the Constitution must not be lowered. Foreign nationals cannot be allowed to participate on Indian politics at any cost".

19. Neil Smelser : Theory of Collective Behaviour; New York, The Free Press 1963, p.17

see as consonant with their interest. It is in this stage that leadership and organization emerge to shape the expression of discontent.

Accordingly, the student community (with the support of some other organisations) took up the matter and articulated the sentiments of the people. The All Assam Students' Union subsequently called a meeting of the various organizations, wherein a resolution was passed demanding detection, deletion and deportation of the foreigners. This meeting was called because they wanted to give a wider base to the movement. They finally succeeded in their effort by forming the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) on 27th August 1979.

Ideology

Ideology is a generic name given to those beliefs which mobilize the people into action for social movement. In this sense it is very difficult to locate a clear-cut ideology in the context of the Assam movement. The basic idea behind the movement, as stated by the leadership, is that as a result of

continuous inflow of foreigners - the native Assamese might lose their majority status and cultural identity in near future.²⁰ The question of Assamese nationality according to the leadership should not be seen as a mere manifestation of parochialism. Moreover, they have declared that it is their legitimate right to fight for their own cultural identity, if the constitutional methods are unable to solve the problem. Thus it can be stated that the question of Assamese nationality has been indirectly reflected in the movement.

They believe in the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and satyagraha as a means to achieve their ends; that is preservation of their culture from the clutches of foreigners. Though the issue involved with the movement is national in nature, from the organisation and participation point of view, the feeling of Assamese nationality is much reflected in the course of the movement. An analysis of the leadership and organisation would give an idea of this feeling.

Leadership and Organization

Among all the organisations which have been spearheading the movement, the 'AASU' is one of the

20. India Today, February 16-29, 1980, Vol. V, No.4, ~~*Assam and the North East~~; "The Danger of Secession" p.39

most organised and strongest organisations. It consists of democratically elected students from all the school and college Unions. AASU claims to represent 75 percent of Assam's 13 lakh school and college students including children at primary school. While playing an active role in the social and political life of Assam, ever since its inception (like its predecessor the "All Assam Students' Association"); that has always been trying to keep petty party interest - at bay. This is why it enjoys the patronage of the people of Assam. Moreover, because of its organizational ability it could penetrate into the remotest village and bring the masses into the street. These two organizations have always been in the forefront in the past struggle on issues such as the establishment of a new university, construction of a new bridge over Brahmaputra, setting up of a refinery at Noonmati, agitation for Assamese as a state language and medium of instruction, setting up of petro-chemical complex at Bongaigaon, etc. So when a cause as the foreigner's issue presented itself, the student leaders along with some other local parties and organizations took it up as a nationalist and patriotic duty. Their non-political nature and lack of vested interest earned for themselves massive support from the people of all walks of life.

As we have already mentioned although AASU had initially started the movement, representatives from all walks of life were called upon to broaden to base.

As a result AAGSP was formed. It consists of eleven constituents of which AASU is a major part.

The regional parties are also associated with it. One of them, the Assam Jatiyatsabadi Dal (Assam Nationalist Party) is a recently formed local party confined only to a few places. There too it is divided into three groups. The other party, Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (Eastern People's Forum), was set up in 1977 under the leadership of Nibaran Bora. The Jatiyatabadi Dal propounds a narrow outlook by thinking in terms of the sons of the soil only. While The PLP has a wider vision of integrating the states of the North Eastern Region for overall economic development, it propogates the idea of unity of the seven sisters.²¹ Therise of the regional parties is the outcome of the long standing neglect which the national parties had shown to this region.

The movement has immobilised all the national political parties. No legislator belonging to any party is able to address a public meeting or even visit his constituency. The feeling of regionalism is very

21. (Seven states, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal and Tripura are situated in North Eastern region of India. These states are popularly known as 'seven sisters').

much reflected in the course of the movement. Bora, once actively associated with Socialist Party, feels that the national parties have not been able to deliver the goods to the Assamese people. The Centre, according to him, has neglected Assam's interest. And various government officers in the state are responsible for the large scale influx of foreigners which has upset the demographic pattern in the state and has led to large scale unemployment.²²

Bora, however, admits that his party caught the imagination of the people only during the current movement and as yet the FLP has no hold on the rural population. But he is establishing party cells in rural areas in the Brahama putra valley especially in the four districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong, where there has been a maximum infiltration of foreigners.²³

Besides these, 'The Assam Sahitya Sabha', a cultural and literary organisation, plays a dominant

22. K.N. Malik, "Regional Roots of Assam Agitation" Times of India, New Delhi, 31st December, 1979.

23. Ibid.

role in mobilizing public opinion. The Karamcharies, the main aid of the civil services, too, are won over by the agitators. There are also hundreds of local organisations and units of the above mentioned parties and organizations which are actively involved in the present movement throughout the state.

Thus, the movement started by the students, is being carried out by the active support of people from all walks of life. The middle class has always been in the forefront where the lower strata of the society remain unorganised. It is noteworthy that - the middle class leadership in Assam succeeded in appealing to the illiterate masses and brought about a political consciousness among them.

Now we shall discuss the various programmes which have been undertaken by the leadership in the various phases of the movement.

Phases of the Movement : Some Political Events

AASU Rally:

The first programme of the movement started with a rally of students at Gauhati on November 6, 1979. It was followed by a week long satyagraha ending on

17 November 1979. The streets of Gauhati and other towns and villages of Assam witnessed people of all age-groups thronging to lodge their protest and court arrest. By contrast the Cachar district of Assam, which has a population of predominantly Bangladesh-origin, refused to cooperate in anything that the rest of the state did.

Between November 27 and 30, 1979, the people participated in mass-picketing. Assam Bandh was observed on December 3 and 4 and this was again followed by four days of peaceful picketing. Requests were again made to the Chief Election Commissioner to postpone elections but it was rejected by him. The people were determined, however, to see that no nominations were filed from Assam for the Lok Sabha election. No one wanted representatives voted by foreign nationals in parliament. Prospective candidates like Begum Abida Ahmed, D.K. Borooah and Bedabrata Baruah were gheraed by peaceful picketers with the view to prevent them from filling their nominations.

It was reported that peaceful women picketing around Begum Abida's residence at Lakhotokia (Gauhati), were beaten up by the police. The civic authorities imposed curfew in the area. People picketed at various points along the Gauhati-Barpeta highway to prevent Begum Abida Ahmed from filing her nomination paper at Barpeta.²⁴

24. Sanjaya, Assam - A Crisis of Identity, Spectrum Publication, New Delhi, 1980, p.26-28.

The Government imposed curfew around her residence, drove away the picketers by merciless lathicharge and teargas and tried to take out Mrs. Ahmed to Barpeta. However, Government succeeded in enabling to file her nomination.

December 10, 1979 was the last date for filing nominations. Out of fourteen constituencies, candidates in ten constituencies had already bowed to the wishes of the people. Incidentally, Begum Ahmed's nomination papers were rejected on a number of grounds. Thus no nomination papers were filled in respect of eleven constituencies out of fourteen. In Diphu, where four candidates were on the fray, two withdrew from the election on request from AASU and AAGSP. Thousands of volunteers from all over Assam rushed to Karbi, Anglong and North Cachar (both are two autonomous hill districts) to prevent the election. Their efforts were successful. The election commissioner was bound to declare a adjournment of election in that constituency on December 31, three days before the day scheduled for the elections.

All requests to cancel the election in respect of the two constituencies of Cachar district - Karimgang and Silchar - went unheeded. The indigenous people of Cachar including Dimacha Kecharis, Manipuri and Muslims did not

fully participate in the election.²⁵ Thus, twelve out of fourteen constituencies in Assam are not represented in the parliament.

Even after the Election, the peaceful movement continued as before in support of the demand for detection, delection and deportation. But no constitutionally tenable solution to this problem has come up so far.

Participation in Satyagraha

Thousands of meetings were organized throughout the state to make the people conscious about the problem. Rallies were held, mass picketing and satyagraha received mass support with a sense of belongingness to the region. Non-cooperation was successful. The participation of people in the various phases of the movement was significant. Observing the participation Mr. M.V. Kamath says that - "The mass Satyagraha was unique event of a peaceful, disciplined protest by lakhs of people from all walks of life covering all communities, language and religion. Complete co-operation by all the government and non-government employees throughout Assam (except the Cachar district) was an evidence of the deep feeling and the total support of the entire population."²⁶

25. Ibid., p.29

26. M.V. Kamath, "Neglected Assam", in The Illustrated Weekly of India, January 20-26, 1980, pp.8-9.

Oil Blocade

There was a feeling among the leaders that even such a long drawn out movement failed to bring any positive response from the central government and no national awareness on this vital national problem seemed to be evident. Thus, the leaders of the movement thought of preventing the flow of raw materials including oil to the rest of the country as they were convinced that only coercive method of this kind, which would lead to some deprivation for the rest of the country, was likely to force attention to their own problems.

Since December 27, 1979, not a drop of oil has flowed through the Narangi pipeline to any part of India. The cost to the national economy has been estimated by then Union Petroleum Minister as nearly Rs. 3 crores per day. In the opinion of the Prime Minister, the country is being held to ransom by the agitators and that their actions are hurting the common man.²⁷ The leaders of the stir conceded that picketing of the oil facilities was affecting the country but they said that "without it, people in Delhi or Bombay, would never have realized the magnitude of the problem here".²⁸

27. Sanjaya, op.cit., p.30

28. Neerja Choudhury, "Assam Movement : Comparison needed, not cudgel", Himmat, 25 April 1980, p.9.

It was observed that the feeling of alienation of the people of Assam as well as of the N.E. Region as a whole is not a result of the mishandling of any solitary episode. It is the result of long standing accumulation of grievances not only economic and social but distinctly psychological as well.

Administrative Countermeasures :

During the course of the movement various repressive measures have been taken by the Government to suppress it. As already stated, on 10 December 1979, Sri Khargeswar Talukder, a student leader, lost his life as a result of brutal police lathi-charge. Similarly at Naharkatia a teen-aged school boy named Purna Nirmalia became the victim of merciless assault at the hands of miscreants. In retaliation of this event, a Bengali bank employee in Tinsukia was also killed.²⁹

There were riots in Nalbari where at least 42 persons were killed in Assamese Bengali clashes. For three long days in the month of January, 1980, there was a complete reign of terror wherein the army men committed all sorts of insults and assaults on the innocent villagers of the North Kamrup. *A number of women were raped by the army personnel; the victims included unmarried girls and pregnant

housewives. These atrocities have been revealed by an independent Inquiry Commission and also by reporters who visited the villages and talked to the women".³⁰

The only reason why these victims were not regarded as outcasts by their people was a word from AASU which saved the day. The AASU leadership said that the women would be regarded as martyrs by the movement in the same mould as those who were killed during the movement.³¹

Immediately after the North Kamrup atrocities, on January 18, 1980, C.R.P. men opened fire on more than seven thousand peaceful picketers who were squatting in front of oil installation at Duliajan to stop flow of crude from Assam. Protests were voiced all over the state against these atrocities in North Kamrup, Duliajan and other places and stern actions were demanded against the guilty persons but it was in vain.³²

As the movement in support of the demands for solution to the foreigners' view made its way, it gathered support from all sections of the people, thereby giving a broad base to the movement and making the same a real social movement.

30. Ibid., p.31

31. Ibid.

32. S.Jaipal Jhala, "Violence in Assam Oil fields - The Duliajan tragedy", Himmat, 1st February 1980, p.7.

Discussion with the Government

Within a month of her taking office as Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi invited the students for talks on the foreigners' issue. A delegation from AASU participated in a discussion and they handed over a detailed memorandum to the Prime Minister, stating out their demands, aims and convictions. But nothing positive came out from the discussion. The students returned to Gauhati and held mass rallies to explain the differences in the respective stands. Meanwhile several discussions took place between the Government and the leadership of the movement, but not consensus has been reached; as a result the movement still continues.

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Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Society and individual are mutually dependent for their respective existence and maintenance. The variety of functions performed by the individuals strengthen the social bonds and in turn they too have certain expectation from the society. A cleavage between the expectations and the actual achievement gives rise to a state of tension, which may have diverse connotations. Such a state may continue till the time a fresh development or event aggravates the already tense situation. The affected groups begin looking for some means for the redressal of their grievances. There are many institutionalised methods of expressing a grievance and pressing for solution to social problems. When the institutionalised methods fail to solve any problem the organized mobilization of people with some agreed programmes leads to the launching of a social movement either for partial or total change in the social set up.

The launching of a social movement in Assam was the culmination of a long process of frustration, relative deprivation and overall tension on the part of the people of the state. The uneven development of the economy coupled

with ^{The} indifference of the government machinery could be considered ^{as} the root cause; whereas the recent rise in the infiltration of the foreigners into Assam can be considered as the immediate factor leading to a mass movement. Judging by the tremendous response from the general people, the present movement has few parallels in modern India, in its strategy and in its continuation to such a prolonged period.

In the first part of the introduction, discussing the theoretical perspective of social movements in general, we have observed that sociologists have been looking at the genesis of a social movement mainly from the two aspects. Some of them give importance to the structural conditions of a society while others look at it from the point of view of socio-psychological or motivational forces which give rise to a movement. Herein we have also presented a brief socio-economic profile of the state which reveals that ^{The} state's economy is mainly dominated by agriculture and for the lack of infrastructural facilities the state still remains industrially backward.

In the ~~end~~ ^{second} chapter we have presented a review of literatures on the movement. Most of the literatures under review highlight mainly three aspects of the problem e.g. Demographic aspect, problem of Assamese nationality and finally the economic backwardness of the state and the

feeling of alienation among the people. It is found that immigration is one of the major factor responsible for the high growth of population in the state. The most of literatures reveals the problem of Assamese nationality question, and many of them have tried to rationalise that there is an objective basis of Assamese fear that their cultural identity might be indanger if the the inflow of immigration continues at the present rate. Finally some of literatures have pointed out that economic backwardness, geographical isolation ^{are} have also equally responsible for the feeling of alienation, relative deprivation among the people which caused tension in the region.

In the IIIrd chapter we have traced the socio-economic roots of the present movement. It has been discovered that since the British days, the economy of the state has been neglected and that there was no significant change in the post-independence period. The infrastructure was not properly developed which led to a stagnation in different spheres of the state's economy. The inflow of the foreigners' further compounded the problems of the state . Considering all this we find that the existence of the native population seem to be in danger. The realization of this state induced people to go for an organized collective action.

A socio-cultural account of the present movement has been given in the IVth chapter. In this chapter,

discussion is mainly centred on the vital issue of the foreign immigrants and the demands for the deletion of their names from the voters list. We have tried to penetrate deeper into the cultural bases of this problem. We have noted that many irregularities on the part of the government machinery resulted in the mass settlement of the foreign nationals in Assam. They could adjust well in their new place of residence and began working to strengthen their hold, wherever they could. We have discussed the various phases of the movement and sufficient light has ^{been} thrown on the circumstances forcing the students to assume the leadership, especially in the initial stages of mobilization.

It has been observed that AASU leadership has been playing a dominant role in the course of the movement. The rise, of a few regional parties, is also a significant development. This is the outcome of the longstanding neglect which the national parties had shown to this region to maintain their status quo all these years. They kept neglecting the local issues for vested interests. Under these circumstances, the AASU could fill up the vacuum and was successful in winning the confidence of the people in general. The student leaders could raise the basic issues, and agitate for the common man. They could arouse the requisite consciousness among the masses. This resulted in the breakdown of class barriers and all came under the common banner to fight for the common cause.

The means adopted ⁱⁿ by the movement are non-violent although traces of violent incidents cannot be denied.

The participation in the various programmes of Satyagraha, Gherao, Boycott etc. are significant. The non-violent nature of this movement certainly puts it in a different category, if a line of comparison with other social movements launched in other parts, is drawn. Violence had been resorted to in movements like Shiv-Sena in Maharashtra 'Telengana movement in Andhra Pradesh and tribal movements in different parts of North Eastern India. Although the issues involved in those movements have similarity with that of Assam, e.g. conflict between natives and outsiders yet the present mobilization in Assam is wider in perspective. Though the purpose of the movement is to serve the indigenous interests, yet the issues involved with it are unique in nature. This movement is distinct because, for the first time after independence fighting against the illegal foreigners has been heralded.

The second point of difference is that those supporting the Assam movement want the solution of the problems within constitutional means, and are not secessionist unlike other tribal movements in the North Eastern Region. The struggle of the people of Assam is for certain rights regarding citizenship as enshrined in the country's constitution. As per the spirit of the constitution, they aim at preventing the foreigners from participating in the elections and thereby adversely affecting the existence of the people living in a part of the country for centuries. Hence the demands for identification of the

foreigners, the deletion of their names from the voters' list and their subsequent deportation have been raised and stressed upon time and again.

The process of counter/mobilization by certain minority organizations too has been witnessed in the recent past. Their main aim is to oppose the movement and to highlight what they prefer to call the dangers posed to the rights of the minorities by such movement. Their claims are bolstered by certain political parties who have expressed solidarity with them. This development has introduced some complications into the already troubled state. On the other hand the leadership of the movement is of the opinion that in the guise of minorities the foreign nationals should not participate in the elections. Such arguments and counter arguments have often resulted in conflict and violence. But, by and large the movement has been able to retain a peaceful character.

As the Assam movement is an ongoing one, it is difficult to ascertain its impact on the future social set up in the state. The movement may continue in the present manner or it may take somewhat different turn. However, the failure of the movement may have following repercussions :

- The political power in the state would be dominated by the foreign nationals or the groups supporting their cause, as a result of which indogenous people will be a minority in their own state.

- the government jobs would be confined to such individuals whereby the share of the native would be taken away.
- It will have an adverse effect on the land-ownership and land-man-ratio within the state.
- Last but not the least it might give rise to communal tension and violence.

Before concluding the study, we would like to point out certain areas for the further field of research in the state. **Suggested*

1) Politics and the problem of immigration in Assam :

The problem of immigration can also be viewed from the political aspect. In the study, this aspect, importance should be given to the impact of immigrants in the state politics, and how they are becoming a political threat to the local people. In this context, changing power structure of the state also can be viewed.

2) Socio-cultural roots of the antagonistic relationship between Assamese and Bengali :

This is one of the vital issues of social relationship in the Assamese society. The root cause of the conflict between the two linguistic groups can be studied from a socio-historical perspective. Their relationship in the present context also can be analysed on the basis of the same.

3) **Problems of small ethnic groups in Assam :**

There are problems among the different ethnic groups within Assam. Their problems also can be studied from the view point of the pattern of uneven development and the feeling of relative deprivation from the other developed ethnic group within the state.

4) **Sociological study of economy of Assam and its impact on Assamese Society:**

This issue can be studied ^{as to} how the modernization of the economy can have an impact on the society. The effects of traditional production relation and there consequences in the present society also can be viewed.

Appendix - I

Percentage increase of population in different states, 1901-1971

Unit	Growth rates (percent per decade)							
	1901-11	1911-21	1921-31	1931-41	1941-51	1951-61	1961-71	1901-71
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
INDIA	+5.75	-0.31	+11.00	+14.22	+13.31	+21.51	+24.80	+129.67
1. Andhra Pradesh	+12.49	-0.13	+12.99	+12.75	+14.02	+15.65	+20.90	+128.17
2. Assam	+16.99	+20.48	+19.91	+20.40	+19.93	+34.98	+34.95	+344.58
3. Bihar	+3.67	-0.66	+11.45	+12.20	+10.27	+19.76	+21.33	+108.33
4. Gujarat	+7.79	+3.79	+12.92	+19.25	+18.69	+26.89	+29.39	+193.55
5. Haryana	-9.70	+1.95	+7.14	+15.63	+7.60	+33.79	+32.23	+117.10
6. Himachal Pradesh	-1.22	+1.65	+5.23	+11.54	+9.42	+17.87	+23.04	+80.20
7. Jammu & Kashmir	+7.16	+6.75	+10.14	+10.36	+10.42	+9.44	+29.65	+815.79
8. Kerala	+11.75	+9.16	+21.85	+16.04	+22.82	24.76	+26.29	+233.75
9. Madhya Pradesh	+15.30	-1.38	+11.39	+12.34	+8.67	+24.17	+28.67	+147.05
10. Maharashtra	+10.74	-2.91	+14.91	+11.99	+19.27	+23.60	+27.45	+159.97
11. Manipur	+21.71	+10.92	+16.44	+14.92	+12.80	+35.04	+37.53	+277.11
12. Meghalaya	+15.71	+7.21	+13.83	+15.59	+8.97	+27.03	+21.50	+197.10
13. Mysore	+3.60	-1.09	+9.38	+11.09	+19.36	+21.57	+24.22	+124.43
14. Nagaland	+46.76	+6.55	+12.62	+6.04	+8.60	+14.07	+39.88	+238.30
15. Orissa	+10.44	-1.94	+11.94	+10.22	+6.38	+19.82	+25.05	+112.99
16. Punjab	-10.78	+6.26	+12.02	+19.82	-4.58	+21.56	+21.70	+79.61
17. Rajasthan	+6.70	-6.29	+14.14	+18.01	+15.20	+26.20	+27.83	+150.30
18. Sikkim	+48.98	-7.05	+34.37	+10.67	+13.34	+17.76	+29.38	+255.58
19. Tamil Nadu	+8.57	+3.47	+8.52	+11.91	+14.66	+11.83	+22.30	+113.09
20. Tripura	+32.48	+32.59	+25.63	+24.14	+24.56	+78.71	+36.28	+797.93
21. Uttar Pradesh	-0.97	-3.08	+6.66	+13.57	+11.82	+16.66	+19.78	+81.67
22. West Bengal	+6.25	-2.91	+8.14	+22.93	+13.22	+32.80	+26.87	+161.58

Source : Census of India, 1971 Series-I India Part II-A (U) General Population Tables P. 124-125.

APPENDIX - II

Population Growth in Assam, 1901-71

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Decadal % variation Assam</u>	<u>Decadal % variation India</u>
1901	3,289,680		
1911	3,848,617	+16.84	+ 5.75
1921	4,636,980	+20.19	+ 0.32
1931	5,560,371	+20.05	+11.02
1941	6,694,790	+20.45	+13.51
1951	8,028,856	+20.12	+14.02
1961	10,837,329	+34.99	+21.63
1971	14,625,152	+24.71	+24.57

Source - Census of India, 1971, Series-3, Assam, Pt. IIA.

POPULATION GROWTH IN THE DISTRICT OF ASSAM, 1951-71

State/ District	Population	Population	P.C.	Population	P.C.
	1951	1961	Increase 1951-61	1971	Increase 1961-71
Assam	8,028,856	10,837,329	34.97	14,625,152	34.71
Kamrup	1,490,329	2,062,572	38.39	2,854,183	38.38
Goalpara	1,108,124	1,543,892	39.32	2,251,05	44.22
Nowgong	886,955	1,210,761	36.51	1,680,895	38.83
Darrang	923,562	1,289,670	39.64	1,736,188	34.62
Sibsagar	121,224	1,508,390	24.43	1,837,389	21.81
Lakhimpur	1,126,294	1,563,842	38.85	2,122,719	35.74
Kikir Hills					
North Cachar	165,440	279,726	79.21	379,310	68.28
Cachar	1115865	1,378,476	24.29	1,713,318	24.29

Source : Census of India, 1971, General Population, Tables Series, J-Assam, Part II-A.

THE POSITION OF ASSAM IN THE RAILWAY MAP OF INDIA

Head	1976-77 Total	1977-78		Total
		M.G.	B.G.	
1. Assam				
a) Diesel & Stream	2193	2088	105	2193
b) Electrified	--	--	--	--
c) Total	2193	2088	105	2193
2. N.F. Railway				
a) Diesel & Stream	3628	2923	639	3650
b) Electrified	--	--	--	--
c) Total	3628	2923	639	3650
3. India				
a) Diesel & Stream	55946	26588	34783	65652
b) Electrified	4720	221	9139	9360
c) Total	60666	26809	43922	75012

(M.G. = Metre Gauge, B.G.=Broad Gauge)

Source : N.F. Railway, Gauhati as cited in Economic Survey, Assam, 1978-79, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati.

RISE IN NUMBER OF VOTERS IN ASSAM

Year	Voters	Increase	P.C. of Growth
1951	40,66,940	--	--
1957	44,93,357	4,26,397	10 (in 6 years)
1962	49,42,816	4,49,459	10 (in 5 years)
1966	55,85,056	6,42,240	12.99 (in 4 years)
1970	57,01,805	1,16,749	2.09 (in 4 years)
1971	62,96,198	5,94,393	10.42 (in 1 yr.)
3/77	72,29,543	9,33,345	14.82 (in 6 yrs.)
11/77	79,74,476	7,44,933	10.30 (in 1 yr.)
1978	85,37,497	5,63,021	7.06 (in 1 yr.)

Source : Office of the Election Commission, Gauhati, as cited
ACTA & AASU Memorandum.

ANNUAL PRODUCTION OF MINERAL RESOURCES IN ASSAM

1.	Production of Coal	Tonne	5,58,288
2.	Crude Oil (60% of Indian Production)	Tonne	42,96,000
3.	Value of Crude Oil	Rs.in crore	840
4.	Royalty received by Assam from Crude oil at the rate of the Rs. 42.00 per tonne	Rs. in crore	22
5.	Royalty earn by Berauni from Assam's Crude oil	Rs. in crore	60
6.	Refining capacity	In ml.Ton	
	(a) Noonmati .77	(b) Digboi	.58
	(c) Bongaigaon .46	Total	1.81
7.	Refining Capacity of Berauni	in Tonne	3.60
8.	Natural gas production per day	Million cft.	60
	Gas Burn out per day for non development of Industrial Plan	Million cft.	30
9.	Length of Pipe line from Noonmati to Naharkatia	Km	416
	(b) Length of Pipeline from Noonmati to Berauni	Km	1,158
10.	Establishment cost of Gauhati Refinery	Rs.in crore	18
<u>Tea Industry</u>			
1.	Total No. of tea Gardesn in Assam	Nos.	756
2.	Area under Tea gardens	Hectare	1,89,338
3.	Production of tea per year (Assam Products 55% of Indian Tea)	Tonne	2,76,304
4.	Value of tea produced per year	Rs.in crore	400

5. Tea dealt through Gauhati auction market (1/9th of the total production) Rest 8/9th production is sold through Calcutta and London auction market	Tonne	35,140
6. Royalty received by West Bengal from Centre for Assam's Tea per year	Rs. in crore	42
7. Royalty earns by Assam	Rs. in crore	20
8. Employment opportunity in West Bengal for Assam tea	No.	3,00,000

Forest Product and Industry

1. Plywood factory in Assam	No.	40
2. Production per year (Assam produces 60% of the total production of India)	Sq. metre	2,37,06,000
3. Yearly income from Plywood	Rs.	80,00,00,000
4. Yearly tax earned by Centre from Assam plywood	Rs.	6,00,00,000
5. Yearly tax earned by Assam	Rs.	35,00,000

Source; Sri Nilima Dutta & Kumar, Kishore, Agony of Assam, Gauhati, 1980.

The Demands of AASU and AAGSP

- 1 Foreign nationals must be detected and deported from our country.
- 2(a) Names of foreign nationals must be removed from the concerned electoral rolls before holding any election in Assam.

(b) Inclusion of names of foreign nationals in electoral rolls in future must be made impossible with the help of adequate and strong election machinery.
- 3 Borders of India with neighbouring countries must be fully protected to effectively check infiltration.
- 4 Indian voters residing in Assam should be issued identity cards with photographs affixed.
- 5 Necessary constitutional safeguards should be provided to the people of North-Eastern region for the next 15 to 20 years by making necessary constitutional provisions for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people of the region.
- 6 The government of Assam should be free to reject any (citizenship) certificates issued by the District authorities of West Bengal and Tripura.
- 7 We demand that the authority to grant citizenship certificates be delegated to the State Governments

should be withdrawn by the Central Government from the state government, so that those foreigners who are detected and deported do not come back armed with citizenship certificates issued by other states.

(to quote the noted columnist B.G. Verghese. "None of these demands are secessionist, anti-Bengali, anti-national or parochial"...India Today, April 16-30,80)

Additional Demand

- 1 Fresh nominations must be invited, when election for Karbi Anglong and North Cachar is announced after detection and deportation of foreigners.

Some of our proposals

- 1 The National Register of Citizens(NRC) of 1951 should be made up-to-date by taking into consideration the additions to the number of each family since the time of compilation of the Register.
- 2 The comparison of the NRC of 1951 with the successive electoral rolls since 1952 will also be helpful in making it up-to-date.
- 3 A free zone devoid of trees and houses should be created all along the border and any one crossing it
~~will~~

without valid travel document from either side must be shot at . We attach great importance to this suggestion. We have reached a stage when threat to the state of Assam and to the country can no longer be ignored.

- 4 Birth and Death Registers at all levels in Blocks, Villages, Towns etc. should be strictly maintained in order to prevent further infiltration into the voter's lists.
- 5 The number of check posts should be increased so as to enable one check post to be visible from the other.

Four of our demands were accepted on principle though the moot point regarding the base or cut-off year for the determination of foreign nationals was not gone into. Though a broad agreement was reached and even after the Government made a press announcement to that effect nothing constructive could be achieved. The AASU and AAGSP decided to intensify the movement as the assurances were unsatisfactory to the people of Assam. Consequently, several rounds of discussions were held with the Government of India at Delhi and Gauhati which proved infructuous - the bone of contention being the cut-off year.

Source : Quoted from the memorandum to the Prime Minister of India submitted by AASU on 2nd Oct, 1980.

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