

**REGION TO STATE:
ETHNIC PLURALISM AND THE MAKING OF ASSAM 1874-1972**

Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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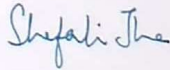
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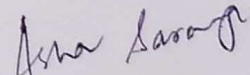
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Shyamjyoti
Shyamjyoti Saikia

“Historians of yore
Recount
exploits of Kings and queens
But history to-day
is the story
of liberation.”

- Dr. Bhupen Hazarika

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List of Abbreviations

ACOER Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report (1925)

AICC All India Congress Committee

AITUS All India Trade Union Congress

ALAP Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings

ALCP Assam Legislative Council Proceedings

ALECR Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report ,1921-22.

APCC Assam Pradesh (Provincial) Congress Committee.

APTUC Assam Provincial Trade Union Congress

AS Assam Secretariat

BPCCBengal Provincial Congress Committee

CIDCriminal Investigation Department

CP Central Provinces

IAR Indian Annual Register

INA Indian National Army

ITA Indian Tea Association

MLD Member, Legislative Assembly

NIA National Archives of India

NMML Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

RTC Round Table Conference .

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Introduction

The intractable question that has confined Indian federalism is how to accommodate deep pluralism in the regions with a viable political unity with the more substantial federal unity of India. One of the responses in this context has been to recognize sub-regional aspirations with distinct federal units by carving them out as a state. Such intervention has led to the massive multiplication of demands of separate statehood. In fact, that does not seem to be an end to such applications. One of the great experiments that were tried out in this response is in Assam. This study goes into the deliberative process, and institutional framework adapted to wield great diversity into a federal unit. While there can be disagreement concerning the substantive process that led to regional consolidation, the procedures adaptable for that purpose need to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Assam can offer a case of high complexity for this purpose.

The idea of Region:

There is no universally accepted definition of the region, as defined by Norton Ginsberg, "except as it refers to some portion of the surface of the earth."¹ In the conceptualization of the region, non-physical phenomena like social, historical, cultural, linguistic and historical variable have an essential stake. The region, like in the context of the nation does not base on the identity somewhat depends on the consideration of the individuals, what matters they possess as important. The quest for the self-determination is a driving force in both the cases. Socio-cultural homogeneity contributes a strong foundation for a region as it carries a universal historical perspective and experiences. It overshadows other identities, insisting that every process, institution, and attitude of its inhabitants ought to be fitted one way or the other to the state.² Nation-state, the highest entity, serves as the organizational framework for shaping the political life. As argued by Young,

Nation building can only move forward through an ongoing consideration al bargaining and compromise. There is simply no escape from the existing state system, as the political frame within which mankind must seek a better life ...The

¹Norton Ginsburg, "The Regional Concept and Planning Regions in Asia and the Far East," mimeo.prepared for U.N.Seminar of Regional Planning in Asia and the Far East.Tokyo.1958.1,

²Ibid.

sensitive application of wisdom accumulated in the observation of the politics of cultural pluralism is not beyond the reach of the statesmanship.³

The state formation in India has a different trajectory from European states, as argued by Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, as the ideology and reality of the nation-state have been far less potent in Asia than Europe. After the Second World War, "Europe has sought economic and political means to approximate a sub continental political order."⁴ They further argued that in India, the state formation is different as they stated in the following manner:

Waves of invaders, colonizers, and conquerors reinforced an already established process of social and state formation exemplified in caste and community compartmentalization, and regional kingdoms. Social and state formation was characterized by cultural syncretism that included the state and was protected by the good king.⁵

In that way, the imperial state absorbed the indigenous ethnic groups unlike Europe, where the feudalism was subsumed or obliterated by sovereignty seeking states. In the context of India, region or for that matter the nation identifies with the symbols to which people in the different situations identify with and thus use them for the achievement of particular purpose.⁶ The region, "a perceived segment of the time-space continuum "is not static, rather a changing cognitions of different agents, inhabitants, observers, etc. Nationalism and the nation-building in the third world have been preoccupied for the last three decades. Nationalism can be studied either in the form of political integration into large units or in the way of decentralization into small groups.⁷ However, India could not be successful in replacing the plural community structures with the small political community structure. In that context, linguistic sub-

³Crawford Young.Politics of Cultural Pluralism, quoted in Doy Ronen, The Quest for Self – Determination.New Haven: Yale University Press,1979.p 19

⁴Lloyd I.Rudolph and Susanne Hobber Rudolph. The Subcontinental Empire and the Regional Kingdom in Indian State Formation in Paul.Wallace eds. *Region and Nation in India*.Oxford &IBH Publishing Co.2006.

⁵Ibid .55.

⁶Ray.Ramashray. Region and Nation. in Indian State Formation in Paul.Wallace eds. *Region and Nation in India*.Oxford &IBH Publishing Co.2006.

⁷Bernstorff Dagmar. Region and Nation: The Telangana Movement Dual Identity in David Taylor & Malcom Yapp eds. Political Identity in South Asia.Curzon Press:1979.138.

nationalism has been more successful than nationalism itself.⁸ This process has cultivated tension among the states. Andhra Pradesh became the first linguistic state with strong regional identities. These developments led to the view of the organized political space in the regions of the post-colonial era. Then the question arises, what is the basis of the region?

It speaks of democratic involvement in societal decision making (participation) and efficient societal control over the allocation of resources (planning). The Nation –State smells of rules, armies, history, and blood. The region recalls geography and rational administration.⁹

The cultural unity and the region are closely related. Cultural identity sometimes can confer the better understanding of the region. However, it can't be the criteria for the formation of the region since potential conflict may arise due to the multiethnic character or the antagonistic interest. The rise of the identity-based regional movement for the demand of the separate statehood is a common phenomenon due to the shared ethno cultural relation. There is a critical need to undertake socio-political redefinition of a region away from the traditional spatial definition. The developmental imbalance is one such area of the concerned. Despite various attempts have been made for the different groups in Assam; a significant trust deficiency is prevalent among them. Homogenized development policy is another affected area of the region, where, sometimes different social groups don't find their required space. In that condition, the essential characteristics of a socio-cultural community have come under threat. Thus, it poses a challenge towards the legitimacy of the state. The growing demands for the separate statehood in Assam explain the raising political consciousness and assertion of the hitherto discriminated or marginalized section of the society. In that way, they demand their autonomous socio-cultural-political space required to articulate their concerns for respective regions. The region is dynamic as a result of its integration with the socio-geographic specificities. The change in the region continues as a result of human activities. The specific character of the region encourages the movements of politics of resistance. The neglect or discriminatory attitude displayed by the policy makers led towards the division of the region. Mizoram famine or for that matter

⁸Ibid.

⁹ Raimondo Strassoldo and Renzo Gubert, eds. *Boundaries and Regions*. Gorizia: Institute of International Sociology, 1973. P 32.

imposition of the unified language can justify such instances. As a result, there was the crystallization of separate statehood. Gradually there has been a shift in the demand for the different region where identity plays a more significant role than the linguistic or cultural basis. Claiming their share in the political and economic powers becomes the main driving force behind mobilization and subsequent assertion of the of the identity groups. Regional imbalance in the political sharing power and also in the development triggers for the demand for the separate region. Economic neglect of the indigenous communities like Mishing, Rabha, Karbi, etc. should be taken into account. Thus, socio-economic and-cultural –political factors have rekindled the demand for the separate region in India in general and Assam in particular. Samir Das has argued how identity plays a vital role in broadening the country's democratic base. He describes in what way identity being included in the public agenda of rights tries to disperse the hegemony of the constituent states.¹⁰ "Suspension and Distrust" of the plain tribes was the cause stated by the State Reorganization Commission in 1950, by which the hill tribes in North East India demanded autonomy. The suspension and distrust developed in a different context, social, political and economic. The initiative was made for the separate region against the "other identity" that highlighted the socio-cultural distinction. The marginalized tribal groups faced deprived social security and at the same time flow of the outsiders was a challenge for their identity and land. However, under the colonial regime, the effort was made for producing colonial documents. Charles Elliot, 1881, issued instructions for the compilation of grammar, vocabularies, phrasebooks of the leading tribal groups and also the records of their customs and their institutions.¹¹ Grierson led the Linguistic Survey of India.¹² The Chief Commissioner of Assam, Bampfylde Fuller in 1903 proposed for a series of monographs on the tribal groups and the castes in Assam. Simon Commission visit was the essential phenomenon happened in the context of the tribal group's self-assertion. Of course, various tribal groups organized before the commission also, for example, Jaintia Darbar, 1900; Naga Club, 1918; Khashi National Durbar, 1923. However, the Commission was a significant step in the political development of the tribal groups. From the 1940s onwards, there were many organizations that came up representing the

¹⁰Das, Samir. "Regions Within but Democracy Without A Study on India's North East " *Rethinking State Politics In India*. Ed. Ashutosh Kumar.New Delhi: Routledge, 2011. 246-247.

¹¹T.C.Hodson, *The Meithei*,1908 reprint.Delhi:2009.ii.

¹²G.A.Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* .1903.Vol I, II,III.Delhi:2005.

particular groups and in that way assertion of identity became stronger, such as Plain and the Hill Tribes and Races Association, 1945; Hill Leaders Union, 1945; Karbi-A-Darbar, 1946, etc.

Identity Formation amidst Diversity in Assam:

The diverse cultural pattern interweaves Indian society, especially Assam, in spite of sharing the same geography. According to the census data 1961, the Assamese language speakers were 57 per cent of the total population. It is basically confined to the six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley. Outside the Brahmaputra Valley, there was less than one percent Assamese speakers. While there were 78 per cent Bengali speaking people in the Cachar district, Surma Valley. Hills districts were also never homogenous. Four hills districts are inhabited by diverse tribes, languages, culture and even religion.¹³ There are many sub-tribes as well. Similarly, huge diversity prevails among the plain tribes.¹⁴ However, the protective measures extended to the plain tribes

¹³The generic tribal nomenclature of Nagas have at least twenty three sub tribes. They are Angami, Ao, Chakesang, Chang, Chirr, Khamngan, Konyak, Lotha, Makware, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Tikhir, Yimchunger, Zeliang. Other tribes living in Nagaland are Kuki, Boro, Dimasa and Karbi.¹³ The Mizo sub tribes who are divided between the two countries are Chins, Khami, Masho, Asho, Pongui, Sawhan, Kayam and Hemi, Zou Tlan, Ralte, Pawi, Pang (Pualnam), Paite, Mara or Lakhar (in Burma they are called Shamtu Zo and Miram), Magh, Lugei, Singphos in Hualngo (Chak-Chwaka). The Singphos, Kukis, Phom, Chang of Naga hills and the Konyak, Tangkhul, Phom and Yimchunger Nagas living in the Burmese border of Manipur. Five major Naga tribes live in Burma. In fact the entire Somra district of Burma is inhabited by Naga people. The major communities in the southern Khasi and Garo hills are Khasi, Garo and Jaintia. Khasis are dispersed in Khasi hills, both Brahmaputra and Barak Valley of Assam and Tripura. They are divided into Khasi, War Khasi, Lyngam, Pnar, Jaintia, Syateng, Khyntium, Bhoi Khasi, and Khasi Muslim. Besides the Khasis there are Garo, Rabha, Banai, Koch, Lalung, Hajong, Man, Dalu, Bodo and Mikir tribes also in the state. In the Mizo hills the major tribe are the Mizos which is a generic name of a number of subtribes, like Biate, Lusai, Mara, Pang, Riang, Tlan, Bauri, Hualngo, Paite, Pawi, Ralte, Hmar and Lakher. The other tribes living in Mizoram are Pnar, Chakma, Magh and Thadou. (Sajal Nag, 'Ethnic Processes in North East India, 'unpublished paper.)

¹⁴The major tribal groups of Assam are the Boros, Barmans, Chakma, Deori, Dimasa, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Hojai, Kochari, Khasi-Jaintia, Kuki, Lakher, Lalung (Tiwa), Man (Tai), Mech, Mikir (Karbi), Miri (Mishing), Rabha, Zemi (Naga), Rongmei (Naga), Oran, Khaira, Gond, Munda, Santhal, Savara, Thadou. The Garos and Khasis were historically earlier settlers. The Kacharies or Bodos, the Chutiya, Lalung and Mech whose chiefs became rulers of the country but adopted the language and civilization they found there. Then there are Khamptis, Singphos, Mishmis, Chuikota Mishimis, the Padamam the Hill Miris, plains Miris, Dophlas, Akas or Hrusso, the Nagas of upper Assam, the Nagas of West Doyang River, The Kukis, the Manipuris, the Koupous, the Mikirs, Jyntias, Khasis, Garos, Kachari or Bodo, Mech, Dhimal, the Koch, the Bhutias, Lepchas, Tippera and Chittagong tribes of north East India. Ahom, Aka, Angami and their subdivisions, Anzang, Rengma, Ao, Hatikuri, Hatigoria, Samaina, Ni Somemeh, Arleng or Mikir, bhotiyas, Chin, Ching-Meg- Nu or Tamlu, Ching-Mi or Towang, Chingpoh, Kachin, Chutiya, Dafla, Kachari, Kasia, Khamti, Koch, Kolita, Kuki, Kyon- Tsu, Lalung, Mande or Garo, subdivisions of Mande, Mech, Mishing, Mishmi, Mitali or Meetei, Nagas, Rabha, Shan, Sin-teng,

were not considerably enough. Ethno-cultural consciousness is one of the constant and challenging issues in the context of Assam. As a result, there has been a continuous reconciliation difficulty over land, language and more importantly over identity. In that way, disputes have been a widespread phenomenon among different ethnic groups. The assertion of ethnic identities, however, was rooted in the cultural diversities. The anti-colonial movement led the foundation of a regional class, who accepted the Indian nationalism but with the same time believed in the region based identity. For the protection and the promotion of the ethnic identity various organizations were formed, for example, Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, 1873; the Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha, 1888; Assam Association, 1903; Asom Chattra Sanmilan, 1916, etc. It was also the time when massive immigration from the East Bengal added insecurities among the people of Assam. During the time of early twentieth century, the plain tribes organized themselves in different front to protect their identity. For example, some of these were Koch-Rajbonshi Sanmilan, 1912; All Bodo Chattra Sanmilan, 1919; Kachari Sanmilan, 1921; Mattak –Maran Sanmilan, 1937, etc. However, these forums could not offer much protection to the respective tribes. The plain tribes demanded adequate safeguard for the preservation and the protection of their identity during the late phase of the anti-colonial movement. Cultural identity grew among the tribal population only after independence when they were not adequately represented. Further, the imposition of the unified language worsened the entire fabric of the tribal and nontribal identity. The tribal middle class came up with their demands and aspiration and organized themselves on different levels. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 1952 was the culmination of such efforts. The concept of identity, however, is an evolving phenomenon. As argued by Girin Phukan, identification of a group is determined by specific symbols, varied periodically, and territorially.¹⁵ Identity is not restricted to particular feature instead it is based on the current dominant historical elements. Manorama Sharma argues how identity evolves through the process of societal evolution based on the dominant influences. She further contends how despite being a long historical presence, Assamese identity is the product of the late nineteenth century and intensified in the

Suma or Sema, Zemi and so on. They were co-habited by the Mishing tribes, the Deori, Rabha, Tiwa (Lalung), Sonowal Kachari, Thengal Kacharis and the Mech etc. Ibid .

¹⁵Girin Phukan, 'Politics of Identity and Nation-building in Northeast India: A case of Assam' in Girin Phukan (ed.), *Politics of Identity and Nation-building in Northeast India* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers Pvt.Ltd., 1997, 124.

twentieth century.¹⁶ It is the formulation of the Assamese middle class, to achieve its own identity and class interest. Thus the idea of Assamese identity began to permeate the whole Assamese society as the middle class through its hegemonic exercises had been able to make its value the most dominant value in the socialization process of Assamese society.¹⁷ The dominant Assamese identity has been challenged gradually with the rise of simultaneous middle-class consciousness among other groups. Bodo identity evolved from the 1930s onwards and was followed by different tribal identities in the same process. Thus the increase of group consciousness led to the manifestation of the multiple identities among the diverse communities in Assam. Udayon Mishra lauds the resurgence of the Assamese nationalism in the development and the preservation of the tribal culture in Assam.¹⁸ He has acknowledged the role of Assamese elite in the process of accommodation of the tribal in their quest for Assamese identity. Of course, he has the reservation to the point that Assamese middle class acted in a chauvinist way and argued that the Assam movement was just an arbitrary disposition of the middle class. Assamese middle-class elites were able to mobilize the Assamese masses as they had a rural basis as well. The assertion of identity from time to time has been a constant phenomenon in the context of Assam. The Assamese elites faced fierce competition in the hands of the Bengali elites. The Bengali elites even were successful to remove the Assamese language as the official language. Apurba Baruah has argued that the Bengali elite was responsible for the growth of the anti-Bengali sentiments in Assam with their language imposition.¹⁹ Sajal Nag refers that the blame goes to the Bengali functionaries for considering Assamese as a variant of the Bengali language.²⁰ Amalendu Guha has argued that the colonial state was responsible for the growth of the community consciousness among the Assamese with growing immigration from the Bengal and afterward with the imposition of the Bengali as the medium of the language.²¹ The inclusion of the Sylhet district in 1874 further added the Bengali speaking people in the colonial Assam. The

¹⁶Manorama Sharma. "Identity: Inherent or evolved?" in Girin Phukon (ed.), *Politics of Identity and Nation-Building in North-East India*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1997. 20

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Udayon Misra, *North East India- Quest for Identity* (Guwahati, New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1988. 59

¹⁹Baruah, A.K. *Social Tensions in Assam Middle-Class Politics*. Guwahati: Purbanchal.1991.

²⁰Nag, S. *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Questions in North East India*. New Delhi: Manohar.1990.

²¹Guha, A. *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research.1977.

chauvinist attitude of a section of the Bengali community in Assam, according to Hiren Gohain, has attributed the growth of the consciousness among the Assamese people who had a fear of being marginalized. ²² Guha and Gohain share the same sentiments on the issue of the economic impulse that led to ethnic mobilization in Assam. The Bengali immigrants posed a challenge towards the dominant Assamese middle class for jobs and land. However, the Assamese language was revived in the post-colonial period, and now the hegemonic role has been exercised by the Assamese elite not recognizing the ethnic groups, their identity, and culture in the same way.

Culture plays an essential role in the formation of the ethnic identity. Cultural values bind members of the groups into a social category. For Horowitz, "ethnicity embraces groups differentiated by colour, language, and religion; it covers tribes, races, nationalities, and caste."²³ He considers ethnicity as an identity-seeking instrument and thus categorized ethnicity into "centralized" or "dispersed" forms. In the dispersed form, the population comprises small ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic groups, and these groups encourage inter-ethnic harmony and consensus. The conflict between groups becomes common with the rise of the ethnic identity consciousness. Weber argues that ethnic group is "primarily a political community, no matter how artificially organized that inspires the belief in the common ethnicity."²⁴ According to him,

An ethnic group is based, in this view, on the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent. [. . .] race creates a 'group.' Only when it is subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens just when a neighbourhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some shared experiences of members of the same race are linked to some antagonism against the members of an obviously different group.²⁵

They agree that ethnic identity is present everywhere and is invoked by the deprived communities at the time when they experience denial. However, this viewpoint has

²²Gohain, H. *Assam: A Burning Question*. Guwahati: Spectrum.1985.

²³Horowitz D. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley. University of California Press, 1985.53.

²⁴Weber, M. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.1978. 35.

²⁵Weber, M. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.1978. 35.

been challenged by Jenkins., According to him, ethnicity is "about collective identification based on perceived cultural differentiation."²⁶ He refers that ethnicity is produced "by communication and interaction across boundaries."²⁷ However, culture or the common feature like language is not necessarily the core factors of the ethnicity. The spatial contribution may lead to the unique identity formation in various contexts. Sanjib Baruah argues how the colonial geography shaped the Assamese sub-national narrative.²⁸ He refers that the colonial government treated Assam as the frontier land of Bengal and thus introduced the Bengali as the official language. The inclusion of Sylhet and large-scale immigration encouraged considerable demographic change where language became a highly controversial issue.

Social Exclusion and the Ethnic Consciousness in Assam:

Social exclusion is the multidimensional phenomenon, as argued by Arjun De Haan, where exclusion or deprivation is the part of all social relations.²⁹ The exclusion may be social, economic, and political or it may happen in the different social, groups. Hiren Gohain explains that the social exclusion led to the consequences of the political and also causes of ethnic mobilization in Assam.³⁰ In Assam, social exclusion of the ethnic groups is based on different issues. Political monopoly of the Assamese middle class is one such issue, where there was an exclusionary exercise of the political power. Along with culture, the economy also plays a vital role in the whole development. For example, the demand for the recognition of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction led robust environment of exclusion among Bodo people. David Brown explains that the state plays the role of the influencing and distribution of power, status and wealth in the society and thus it influences the situational insecurities and threats faced by the individual and groups.³¹ Thus the state is mostly responsible for the ethnic exclusion. The ethnic mobilization is not the only outcome of discontent instead it

²⁶Jenkins, R. 'The Limits of Identity: Ethnicity, Conflict and Politics', Sheffield University, available online at <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/socst/Shop/2jenkins.pdf>>.2003.7

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Baruah, S. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.2001.

²⁹De Haan, Arjan. *Rescuing exclusion from the poverty debate: Group disparities and social transformation in India*. International Institute of Social Studies, 2011.

³⁰Gohain, Hiren. "Ethnic Unrest in the North-East." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1997): 389-391.

³¹Brown, David. *The state and ethnic politics in Southeast Asia*. Vol. 10. Routledge, 2003.2.

starts with the political mobilization against the state hegemony. The post-colonial Indian state has witnessed a series of ethnic movements based on the ethnic or the linguistic identity. Ethnic movements, as explained by Dipankar Gupta, are the outcome of the nation-building exercise in India.³² However, Indian nation-state is unable to adopt the western model of the nation-building, argued by Weber, where ideally, language, religion, and political sovereignty had coterminous boundaries.³³ In the multiplication of the different identity, there has been growing concern on the issue of the social exclusion. As a result, there has been growing discontent among Missing, Karbi, Rabha, Dimassa, Moran, Chutiya and other groups in Assam. The socio-economic-cultural marginalization of the ethnic groups widens with the gain of the state power in the hands of the dominant Assamese elite.

Assamese Middle class and the rise of Nationalism:

Anderson and Gellner conceptualized nation regarding cultural artifact, claiming nation as a conscious creation. Nationalism, as Gellner refers, is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; instead, it invents nations where they don't exist.³⁴ He emphasized that the nationalism has its link to the process of modernization and thus it was the need of particular social condition or circumstances. He stressed that the emerging industrial societies provided the opportunity for social mobility, competition or self-striving as opposite to the pre-modern societies where loyalties or feudal bonds were the structure of the day.³⁵ Thus modernization, specifically the process of industrialization is related to the notion of the nationalism. However, Anthony Smith has challenged the idea of the relation between modernization and nationalism. According to him, nations are historically embedded, thus rooted in a shared cultural heritage and language, etc. In the long run, that may lead to the quest for separate

³² Gupta, Dipankar. "Ethnicity and Politics," in Sudipta Kaviraj eds. *Politics in India*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications.1999.228.

³³Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford University Press, 1976.

³⁴T.B. Subba, "Ethnicity, Culture and Nationalism in North-East India: A Conspectus" in M.M.Agarwal (ed.), *Ethnicity, Culture and Nationalism in North-East India* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996), 42

³⁵Ernest, Gellner. "*Nations and Nationalism*." Paris, Payot 1983.

statehood or even for the national independence.³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, on the other hand, highlighted the issue of the nation as the invented tradition and argued that belief in the historical continuity or cultural purity was nothing but a myth.³⁷ Anderson states that the nation is an imagined community where “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of communion.”³⁸ Indian nationalism is the modern phenomenon where the anti-colonial movement was an important context in the formation of the Indian nation-state. Partha Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism was an idea that is not self-perpetuated by Indian masses. Rather, Indian nationalism has derivative discourse with the western roots of the apparatus of knowledge. Chatterjee acknowledged the idea of Anderson's theory of nationalism. However, he shares the opinion that Anderson too failed to recognize the "twists and turn, the suppressed possibilities, the contradictions still unresolved."³⁹ Amalendu Guha explains that ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indian nationalism has been developing at two levels. At the all Indian level based on the pan Indian cultural hegemony and anti-imperialism shred in common. The other development was at the regional level, for example, Bengali, Marathi, Assamese, Oriya etc, on the regional cultural homogeneity.⁴⁰ Anderson stated, that nation-ness, nationality or nationalism are cultural artifacts of a particular kind, so are "notoriously difficult to define, let alone analyze." An overview on the rise of the Assamese middle class would be helpful to explain the rise of nationalism in Assam. Sajal Nag had referred that when the British took over Assam, there did already exist an intellectual class. With the advent of the British, land resources were taken away from this spiritual aristocracy. As a result, they led their people along with the Ahom nobility in defense of their old order and privilege with the reestablishment of the Ahom monarchy. Hiren Gohain stated,

The new middle class was not formed from the ranks of the former nobility. The advantages of British education and the new avenues of employment and trade were cornered by caste Hindus who had served the former rulers as their

³⁶ Smith, Anthony D. "The ethnic origins of nations." 1986: 249-264.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: CUP. 1983. 13-14.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 1983..6

³⁹ Partha Chatterjee. "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World," Calcutta, 1985.50-51.

⁴⁰ Guha, Amalendu. "Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist: Assam's Anti-Foreigner Upsurge, 1979-80." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1980): 1699-1720.

clerks and bureaucrats. The situation is strongly reminiscent of the decline of the Muslim nobility in India. What seems to have struck the Ahom feudal nobles a deadly blow was the abolition of chattel slavery and the general forced labor that supported them. The British did grant meager pensions to as many of them as they could, but the rot could not be stopped.⁴¹

Imported Bengali functionaries filled ahom nobility, who were terminated by the British. This group recognized the importance of the English education. With the influence of the Renaissance at Calcutta, the educated class of Assam attempted the similar introduction in Assam as well. This educated group initiative was much recognized in Assam. The foundation of the first social elite in Assam was initiated with this educated group. On their return, they were appointed in the British administration. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Ram Dutta Barua, Hemchandra Sadarmin, Bhola Nath Barua, Jagganath Barua, Manikchandra Barua, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Bolinarayan Borah, Hemchandra Borua, etc. were few members of that group. Overall the emergence of the new middle class in Assam was the product of the changing economic, administrative and also education system.

Language, of course, has a different stake in the rise of early middle class in Assam. The Bengali language was introduced replacing the Assamese language in Assam. It was primarily for the smooth running of the administration. The colonial administration argued that the Assamese language was merely a dialect of the Bengali language. Assamese along with Baptist Missionaries opposed the British decision and asserted the separate identity of the Assamese language. It was also the time when the solid basis of the Assamese language and literature was created.⁴² Asomiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha (Society of the Progress of Assamese Language) was formed on 25

⁴¹Gohain, Hiren. "Origins of the Assamese middle class." *Social Scientist* (1973): 11-26.

⁴² Anandaram Dhekial Phukan published a fremarks on the Assamese language in 1855. Hemchandra (1835-96) came up with the monumental work, *The Grammar of Assamese language* 1856 and *Hemkosh* (Anglo-Assamese dictionary) in 1900. He also wrote *Adipate* and *Pathmala*, a textbook for Assamese students. Gunabhiram Barooah (1835-97) produced *Assam History* in 1884, the earliest work on history; the first Assamese modern drama, *Ram Navami* in 1857; the first Assamese biography on Anandram Dhekial Phukan in 1880. He also started the first Assamese journal, *Assam Bandhu*. They were called Trinity of the Assam. In 1859, Anandaram wrote *Lora Mitra*, and with this, he demolished the British idea that Assamese was not a standard language.

August 1888 by a few Assamese students in Calcutta.⁴³ Soon branches of this society sprang up in the various corner of Assam. Jonaki (1889) an Assamese monthly became the mouthpiece of the society.⁴⁴ Jonaki era becomes synonymous with the age of Assamese Renaissance. It was also the time when with the changing economic situation, the process of modern Assamese nationality formation began. As argued by Sajal Nag, language was the means which was used, to bring about the ideological unification of the people where organic intellectual took up the initiative.⁴⁵ Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-59), was the first one who had used language as the unifying symbol of modern national consciousness. An ideological unity emerged when Assamese educated class came together to back the question of the Assamese language. Thus the nationality formation of the Assamese began by the linguistic identity assertion. The Assamese middle class was the product of the transformation of the mode of production. It combined the diverse professional groups like writers, politicians, planters, ethnic representatives, industrialist, etc. As Sajal Nag argues,

The combination of such diverse professional groups and heterogeneous elements in the middle-class category was nowhere more prominent –either national or regional level–than in Assam. As a class, their ethnic and cultural affiliation was the common factor. The other common factor that brought them on a single platform was their hopes, aspirations, inhibitions, dissatisfactions as well as opposition.⁴⁶

Maniram Dewan and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan submitted a memorial to A J Moffat Mills, in 1853. This marked the rise of modern political consciousness in the Brahmaputra valley. By then Maniram had taken an anti-British position despite his early collaboration with the colonial government. The last of the old aristocracy, Maniram, who was the Dewan⁴⁷ with Assam Company, advocated local gentry to establish an Assam tea garden, alongside British capital. After he left his job in the Assam Company in 1841, he delivered a scathing critique of the colonial policies.

⁴³It came out with the numbers of books. Psalm of Life was translated into Assamese and such work.

⁴⁴Editors were the doyen of the Assamese literature like Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Hemchandra Goswami, Lakshminath Bezbarua.

⁴⁵Sajal Nag. *Beleaguered Nation*. Delhi: Manohar. 2017. 255.

⁴⁶Sajal Nag. *Beleaguered Nation*. Delhi: Manohar. 2017. 300.

⁴⁷ He worked as the Dewan (Land Agent) for the company . In fact his local knowledge helped the tea enterprise.

Eventually, his association with 1857 Revolt led to his execution for treason. Even in the context of his time, Maniram Dewan didn't subscribe to an ideology that was progressive enough. He was not even a very consistent freedom fighter throughout his career. In fact, he had an objectively progressive entrepreneurial career.⁴⁸ In the memorials submitted to Moffat Mills, he argued for the restoration of the Raja's domain in the upper Assam. He also pointed out an unjust system of taxation and explained that the government's sale of abkari opium had made people unfit for agriculture. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, influenced by the contemporary Bengal Renaissance, was the product of the modern age of enlightenment. He had put his long drawn effort for the due recognition of the Assamese as a distinct language. Hemchandra Barua(1835-1896), a young social reformer of the day, played an important role in promoting progressive ideas. Gunabhiram Barua (1834-1894), Padmahas Goswami(1829-1879) were associated with the Brahma Samaj and thus was dedicated social reformer. Ram-Navami, the first Assamese drama in the western style was written by Gunabhiram in 1857. They worked to make people aware of social evils like opium addiction, the practice of polygamy, the plight of widow especially in the of Brahmin, Kayastha and Daivajna caste. Educated people and social reformers promoted the ideas of scientific knowledge. Jagannath Barooah (1851-1907), and Manik Chandra Barua(1851-1915) were two strong voices of the day in promoting peoples interest. Hem Chandra Barua along with Lambodhar Bara, Satyanath Bara, Lakshminath Bezbarua, and Gunabhiram Barua were regular contributors in Orunadai (1846-1882) and traced the beginning of the modern Assamese pores. Lakshminath Bezbarua, on whom countrymen conferred the title of "Sahityarathi" was the main architect of the modern Assamese literature. Upendranath Barooah, who translated Hemchandra Barua's Kaniyar Kirtan into English and presented to the Royal Commission, 1893. The growth of the Assamese middle class was not only in the Bengali atmosphere but under the umbrella of its Bengali counterparts.⁴⁹ Till 1874, Assam was within the Bengal presidency, and hence an already emerged Bengali middle class inspired the Assamese middle class. After the imposition of the Bengali language only, there was separate existence became stronger. The various organizations formed to protect Assamese language, culture, identity and territory and

⁴⁸A. Guha, "Impact of Bengal Renaissance on Assam 1825-75, IESHR, 9 September, pp.288-304.

⁴⁹Ibid.

thus these organizations provided a platform to the emerging middle class.⁵⁰ Subsequently, transfer of the three Bengali speaking districts to Assam and it has created confrontation between the emerging Assamese middle class and the relatively advanced Bengali middle class. Assamese middle class found themselves subdued and suppressed.⁵¹ It was the time of the total economic transformation where the plantation industry appeared to be prosperous. The resources of Assam were being drained out. Introduction of the ryotwari system didn't provide feudal benefits to the emerging class of Assam. In trade and mercantile economy also Assamese didn't have the share. The government services were also the monopoly of the Bengalis. Assamese was reintroduced as the official language in 1873. However, Bengali was in the domain as most of the government officials were Bengali. Sanghamitra argues,

The politics of Assamese linguistic nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century relied on the ability of the local intelligentsia or negotiate sufficiently with the project of colonial cultural production and to coalesce its interests into a social class.⁵²

She further argues that in the process of determining the boundaries of the Assamese language, vernacular textual production emerged “as the primary site of conflict in a contest that was marked for the exclusion of other counter discourses from the region by this intelligentsia.”⁵³ Thus, there was a movement for the revival of the Assamese language and literature. From 1909 onwards, the introduction of the electoral politics provided an opportunity for a "neo-middle class."⁵⁴ Some of the Assamese members emerged as the prosperous planters themselves.⁵⁵ The credit goes to the Assamese middle class for successful formation and development of the Assamese nationality as a movement. The social, political, linguistic, and cultural ties of the space have led to

⁵⁰An organization formed during that period were – Assam Desh Hitashadhini Sabha,1855; Gyan Pradayini Sabha, 1857; Assamese Literary Society, 1872; Jorhat Sarvojanik Sabha,1884, etc.

⁵¹B.Bhattacharya, "Language Controversy in Assam: Socio-Economic Background," in *North Eastern Research Bulletins*.Vol.IV.1973.

⁵²Misra, Sanghamitra. *Becoming a borderland: The politics of space and identity in colonial Northeastern India*. Routledge India, 2013.138.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴" The electoral system was an opportunity for the influence class to exploit their social position and get elected to the representative institutions. Thus they become dominant in the electorate system.

⁵⁵ Sajal Nag. "Working Class Alienation in Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation: A Reflection of the Class Character of Nationalist Movement in Assam 1095-24" in *Proceedings of the East India History Association*, Imphal Session.Shillong .1983.

the formation of the broad horizon when locality still exists. The acknowledgment of the diversity in the region has been persistently baked up with assertions about binding commonalities that justifies the North Eastern region politically and culturally. One such effort was the formation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1971. In 2004, the Ministry of the Development of North Eastern Region came up, and thus the role of NEC become significant in the context of the providing coordination of the eight states. As Zoya Hasan argues, from the 1970s onwards, there seems the exploration of the tension between the centralizing structure of the Indian state and democratic aspiration of the civil society.⁵⁶ This shift has been significant in the study of the political-cultural issues about regionalism. The North East MP Forum is one such platform for the collective bargaining over the product of the strong regional sentiments. Thus the planter's region has transformed to the North Eastern region - a geographic, cultural entity and political identity.

Objectives of the study:

The study will be based on the following objectives -

1. To study the principles employed to form a shared basis of life in a region of great ethnic complexity.
2. To highlight the nature of public institutions to accommodate ethnic pluralism.
3. To discuss the defense of a differentiated region in the conception of a nation.
4. To study the responses of ethnic leaders to regional unity.
5. To understand the complicated political bargain in the context of democratic accommodation.

Methodology:

The study focuses on the idea of Assam, and how the concept of a unified /composite Assam came to be promulgated and what were its constitutional effects. It will discuss the notion of the composite province by addressing the issues of immigration, ethnic identity, language, culture, and custom, etc. The relationship between ethnic identity and the idea of the region will be the primary pursuit of this work. Considering the

⁵⁶Hasan, Zoya, ed. *Politics and the State in India*. Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2000.

nature of the study, qualitative research method has been used. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Sources of the study are.

Archival Source: Major part of the study is based on the Archival sources. Data collected from the National Archive, Delhi; the State Archive, Guwahati.

Reports and Records: Reports and records related to Assam have been widely consulted. Report of the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub Committee, 1947; Assam Language Act, 1960; Assam *Reorganisation Act*, 1969; Census Reports, Policy of Ministries, Pataskar Commission Report, Memorandum submitted to the Cabinet Mission Plan, Dhekial –Phukan’s Memorandum to Mills.

The Constituent Assembly Debate: The Constituent Assembly Debate on the making of the Sixth Schedule, Volume IX.

Personal Account: Gopinath Bardoloi’s personal papers, his correspondence to Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad. Personal accounts of Ambikagiri, Lakshminath Bezbarua.

Government Sources: The Official Gazetteer of the Government of Assam and the Government of India, Accords.

The study covers a major section of literature and official documents from Assamese sources. Jonaki and Arunodoi were widely circulated Assamese newspaper and magazine. The content analysis method seemed to be best suited for this study.

Overview of the Chapters:

The introductory chapter engages with the prevailing literature on the concept of region and identity from various protective. It studies the growth of Assamese nationalism amidst profound diversity.

The first chapter outlines the geo-cultural situation of Assam and its entry into the British Empire in 1824 as part of the Bengal Presidency. It presents how the eastern frontier was desired to be a separate province only to safeguard the plantation economy, the overseas investment into the tea plantations and the territorial adjustment

it underwent under the British regime. Assam thus emerged from a frontier region to a planter's state under the careful protection of the raj.

Chapter two devolves into the functioning of the Assam province from 1874 to 1931. It studies how the British prevented democracy and federal principles not to take root in Assam by manipulating the political processes and allow ethnic diversities and religious groups to play divergent roles from 1874 onwards. It also explains the politics of immigration and how both the British encouraged peasant immigrants into Assam and how it affected the land and demographic structure of the province allowing people to be drawn into a conflict over land and national aspirations.

Chapter three discusses the how on the eve of Indian independence, the Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi effectively tried to neutralise the dissenting and secessionist forces. As the chairman of the Tribal subcommittee, he tried to accommodate the tribal aspirations by formulating the Sixth Schedule while at the same time placating the indigenous Assamese and tribal sentiments.

Chapter four discusses the ethnic politics of Assam from 1947-1952. The Govt of India Act 1935 had demonstrated the awakening of a large number of ethnic and national groups in Assam and their political aspirations in the emerging polity. The Assamese, Bengali, indigenous tribal groups, immigrants and tea labour all such groups were politicised. The 1937 election results and the formation of several ministries within a short period with conflicting interests complicated the political process on the eve of independence. The colonial state pretended to be a great patron of tribal groups while playing a communal card at the same time. The polity of Assam was fractured, and its future as an Indian federated state was uncertain.

Chapter five analyse the balancing state and the region. How the changing spatial structure has changed the ideal of Assam. It will explain the trajectory of Assam from a frontier region to a cauldron of ethnicity to a federation of enormous diversity.

The concluding chapter discusses the finding of the study and gives remarks on the need to reframe the issue of the identity. How the idea of Assam was crafted amidst deep diversity, what are its limitations and possibilities as a region and state.

Chapter one:

Frontier Land to the Planters Land: 1824-1874

This chapter will discuss the geo-cultural situation of Assam and its entry into the British Empire in 1824 as part of the Bengal Presidency. It will explain how this eastern frontier was desired to be a separate province only to safeguard the flourishing tea plantations and the overseas investment into these plantations and the territorial adjustment it underwent under the British regime. Assam thus emerged from a frontier region to a planter's state under the careful protection of the Raj. In fact, it was a period of transition towards a colonial phase of Assam where the British Capitalist class started building their infrastructure. As stated by Amalendu Guha,

“Collaborating traders, bankers, lawyers and clerks from other Indian Provinces came as camp followers. Bullock carts, a novelty for the region, were introduced, the economy was monetized. The closed society was exposed to the immigration of labor, new vices, and the new ideas...”¹

The Diwani of Bengal in 1765 led to the direct contact of East India Company to the medieval kingdom of Assam although the whole area containing Manipur, Jaintia, Cachar, Assam as well as the tribal communities of the adjacent hills was left undisturbed until the Burmese invasion happened during 1817-1824. In 1823, David Scoot was appointed as the Agent to the Governor General on the North East Frontier of Bengal. Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826 forced Burmese to surrender their claim over Assam. Subsequently, kingdoms of Jaintia, Cachar, Assam, Khasi Hills (Independent tribal states) were annexed².

Peasants to Planters: Transformation under the British Raj

The 1833 Charter allowed Europeans to hold land outside the Presidency towns on a long-term lease or with freehold rights. Technically, it was the beginning of the colonial plantation economy. On 22nd July 1833, Francis Jenkins advocated for the

¹Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj-Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. ICHR: New Delhi. 1977.20.

²The subjugation of North Cachar Hills in 1845, Annexation of a part of Naga Hills in 1866, Lhota Nagas land in 1875, of Angami Nagas in 1878-80 and Ao Nagas in 1889. Tha Garo Hills was made a separate district in 1869. The Lushai Hill was brought under control during the years 1871-89. See E.A.Gait. *A History of Assam*. Simla. 1926. XIV & XV.

settlement of the Englishmen of capital on its wastelands. Jenkins, who was appointed as the Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General for Assam and North East of Rangpore, wanted the settlement of a group of European planters to produce sugarcane, indigo, and such other plantation crops³. Jenkins justified this colonization thesis of the plantation ingeniously. He argued that,

A large number of the local peasants had no means to provide ploughs, seeds, and cattle for themselves and the colonist would be able to make necessary advances for the former for growing the export crops.⁴

Jenkins even wanted displacement of the local peasants with the discriminatory land revenue policy for the settlement of the European peasants. The plantation economy by the British Raj started with the first joint stock company in India; the Assam Company was established under the Act of Parliament, 1845. Till 1850, it was the only planter in the region. By 1859, there were more than 50 tea estates under distinct proprietors.⁵ The tea plantation in Assam increased from 2, 3111 acres in 1841 to 8,000 acres by 1859. The output of the tea increased from 29,267 lbs to more than a million lbs. The major share was still in the hand of the Assam Company.⁶ It was the time when the Company adopted every decision for the interest of the planters. Increase in land revenue and banning the cultivation and sale of opium can be referred to in the interest of the tea plantation. There was 15 to 30 percent increase in the land revenue on the dry crops land of the four districts-Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang, and Nawgaon.⁷ In 1860, cultivation of poppy was banned.⁸ Tea plantation was the prime focus of the colonial government, and hence for the growth of the tea industry, the government initiated various measures to attract the local peasants for the cultivation of the tea.

³ E., A Gait. History of Assam, p. 298.

⁴ Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government at Fort William, 22 July 1833, Foreign Political Proceedings, February 1835, No. 90 National Archive of India. Delhi.

⁵ Guha, Amalendu. "Colonisation of Assam: Second Phase 1840-1859." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 4.4 (1967): 289-317.

⁶ A Guha. *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, New Delhi: Tulika Books. 1977.

⁷ See H. Barpujari, 1963:205.

⁸ However, sale on the North Indian opium was not forbidden. There was an increase in the sale price of this opium from 14 per seer in 1860 to 20 in 1862 and 23 per seer in 1873. Barpujari, 1963:207.

Commercial Journey of the Assam tea:

Tea discovery in Assam catalyzed East India Company's effort at transforming Assam into the "British Empire's tea garden."⁹ The discovery of tea has transformed the making of Assam into an imperial garden where different stakeholders acted for their particular interest. The East India Company, Baptist, the Assamese gentry, tea entrepreneurs, etc. articulated their improvement in a competitive manner. Thus between 1820 and 1850, the political, economic transformation of Assam happened with the incorporation into British India centering the plantation economy. The rice fields were surrounded by the vast tea estates and thus the transformation of peasant's land into the use of imperial enterprise. Discovery of tea in Assam dates back in 1823, with the evidence of the pre-modern tea use in Assam by the Singpho and Khamti tribes. The wild tea plants grew on the Assam Burma frontier was discovered by Charles Bruce, formerly a naval lieutenant and Robert Bruce, formerly a major in the Bengal Artillery Corps traded. Andrew Charlton was credited with discovering the potential of the Assam's jungle with the discovery of the tea that was successful in obtaining recognition of the product by bringing official notice. Charlton has sent the leaves and seeds of the tea he had grown to the Tea Committee, Calcutta. He has reported that particular plant was endemic to Assam. The plant grew wild everywhere, all the way to the Chinese province of Yunnan. Subsequently, in 1834, the Tea Committee announced that discovery as the most valuable and essential in the context of agricultural and the commercial resources.¹⁰ Two years later, a scientific delegation headed by Nathaniel Wallich and William Griffith traveled to Assam for the formal study of the Assam tea forest and thus agreed for a strategy to cultivate tea. Charles Bruce was placed in charge of the experimental tea enterprise which was acquaintance with the natives of Upper Assam and the local languages as well. In January 1838, the first batch of the processed tea sent by Bruce reached London after a long voyage. The British Public well accepted it. At the auction a record price of 21 to 38 shillings a pound was paid which was twenty times the usual price for China tea. Assam Tea Association met in London in 1839 and ascertained what support the East India Company might provide. Promoters exulted that Assam tea required the application of European Capital and

⁹Sharma, Jayeeta. *Empire's garden: Assam and the making of India*. Duke University Press, 2012.30.

¹⁰British Parliamentary Papers, Vol.39(1839), paper 63: Tea Committee Letter to Revenue Department, 24 December 1834, quoted in Jayeeta Sharma: 2012.

enterprise to make its an excellent source of Profit.¹¹ Assam Company, a new joint stock enterprise was formed with the capitalization of 500,000 pounds, 8,000 shares were earmarked for British and 2,000 for India. Subsequently, the firm of Carr, Tagore, and Co.had established in Bengal Tea Association and in July 1839, the London and Calcutta merchants agreed to merge into a single Assam Company. However, the with the intention of the reaching out to the resources of Assam like timber, coal, and oil, the promoters intentionally left tea out of the firm's name. By 1840, Assam Company was granted permission to produce tea and also approved two –thirds of the experimental tea establishment rent-free for ten years, along with the agreement to settle on another land.¹² Thus, the Assam Company gained the status of the chief tea producer under the British East India Company. By the year 1881, tea industry becomes organized business lobby with the formation of Indian Tea Association. Thus, in the colonial Assam, tea become the neo currency in the agro-industrial enterprise.

Burmese invasion was a disaster for much of the prosperous, growing economy, as well as caused severely damaged the very infrastructure in communication built by the Ahom. With the entrance of British, there was a transition from a mostly not monetized economy to the cash economy. British introduced new cash payments of land revenues in the barter oriented, money short Assam where rice was cultivated for subsistence. Peasants turned to mustard and thus acquired cash to pay colonial taxes and also to buy essential goods like salt. Gradually mustard was overtaken by the cultivation of opium. It was the time when the Kayas or Marwaries, the migrant traders helped the peasants by providing cash for the opium cultivation.¹³ Opium was cultivated widely, and by 1852, Nawgaon was the main poppy growing district with more than three thousand acres opium cultivation land it was the two percent of the cultivated acreage, under the plant.¹⁴ It was a significant concern for the colonial state since it was directly affecting their expansion of tea cultivation. As a result, selling and cultivation of opium were banned.¹⁵ Banning opium with the establishment of a licensed outlet forcibly dragged a large number of peasants to the labormarket who otherwise was not ready to work.

¹¹ Antrobus, A History of the Assam Company, 263-66.

¹² Antrobus, A History of the Assam Company, 35-40.

¹³ A J M, Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, 29.

¹⁴ Assam Administrative Reports, 1881-82: 14.

¹⁵ “Opium they will have but to get it they have to work for it” was the policy adopted by the British.

Meanwhile, there was a shift in the workers' recruitment, when upper Assam peasants recruited socially and economically backward Kachari cultivators from the Lower Assam.¹⁶ Kachari gained lavish eulogies from the colonial officials. Of course, it didn't take long for British enterprise to evanesce their fascination with Kachari workforce. In 1854, there was demand for an increase in wage by the workforce in the Assam Company leading the conflict between employer and labor and the conflict to become only intense when Kachari peasants joined in 1861 Phulaguri peasants uprising to protest against the prohibition of opium and imposition of the agriculture tax. British considered Kachari workforce as primitive bloodthirsty.¹⁷ Despite the increasing demand for farm products from plantations and development in transportation, the condition of the peasantry during 1880 can't claim to be prosperous. As per the Census Report 1891, out of 9,801 professional money lenders in Assam, 7,902 were from the Surma Valley. Only 1,793 were from the Brahmaputra Valley where 1,211 from the Kamrup.¹⁸ Land transfer remained within the range of 12,000 to 29,000 cases, and the acreage transferred varied from 40,000 to 85,000 acres, except for the year 1886-87 when 1,52,000 acres changed hands.¹⁹ Even in 1886-87, the amount of land transferred was less than 5 percent of the total under cultivation.²⁰ The condition of the peasants further worsen during 1891-1901, the devastating earthquake of 1897 added to their miseries.

Planters in the local administration:

The Chief Commissionership of Assam was referred to as a regional administration in the official terminology rather than a provincial government since the Chief Commissioner administered the province as a delegate to the Governor –General. But in practice, the Chief Commissioner enjoyed the supreme authority in all matters - legislation, finance and the administration. During 1874-1905, there was no opportunity for the people to participate in the legislative activities as Assam had no legislature of its own. Planters being the chief body of the nonofficials were asked by the government to participate in the local committees such as road, school and

¹⁶Jayeeta Sharma,2012:65

¹⁷Home police Proceedings, Dundas to Botham, 23 April 1921, NAI.

¹⁸Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj,p 39.

¹⁹ It shows that these figures were not significant in the context of the province's total cultivated acreage of around 3.4 million acres. See *Land Transfer and Agricultural Indebtedness in India*,1895.

²⁰Ibid.

dispensary committees those were set up at the district level from 1874. After the promulgation of the Local Rates Regulation, 1879 nominated committees were replaced by a single district committee with not less than six members, of who one-third were to be resident nonofficials. The members of the district committee were appointed by the Chief Commissioner on the recommendations from the district officer. There were also branch committees each with minimum three members.²¹ Eight district committees formed in 1880, shows that the British planters were dominating in such committees. Local people particularly zamindars of Sylhet and Goalpara opposed the government's initiative to promote planters interest and demanded general funds from the government without special taxation for the committees. The government of India Resolution, 1881 suggested that non-officials should constitute as much as one-half to two-thirds of the total membership of the local body. The government of Assam Resolution, 1882 contemplated a nonofficial chairman although no restriction was put against an official Chairman. Sub-divisional boards (local board) were constituted for all the nineteen subdivisions of the plains districts with eight to twenty-four members each. At least half of the nonofficial resident members were to be elected by the planters in all the important tea districts.²² In the local boards, thus, planter's representation was much higher than that of the local representatives.²³ Planters were not very dominated in Municipalities since their interest was not directly involved in municipal affairs. Municipalities were constituted with two laws-Bengal Municipal Act of 1876 and Bengal Municipal Act of 1884. Under both acts, Municipal commissioners were to be nominated, and in the case of particular cases, they could also be elected.²⁴

Francis Jenkins in a report on 22 July 1833 advocated the settlement of wastelands. He wanted the settlement of a class of European planters with capital who would produce

²¹V.Venkata Rao, A Hundred Years of Local Self –Government in Assam, Guwahati:1963; A.Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj:1977. 24.

²² Ibid. All other Indian members were to be nominated by the Chief Commissioner except in Sylhet, Kamrup, and Sibsagar. In these three districts, members were elected.

²³ “In 1883, out of 300 members of sixteen sub-divisional boards, 25 percent were planters elected representatives, and 15 percent were official members. In tea districts, planters representatives were of course very high then this average. In most of the local boards, British formed a coalition with Indian official and nominated non-official members, constituted the majority. In 1903-04, out of 364 members of nineteen local boards, 133 were elected, 60 ex-officio and 171 nominated members. Of this total membership, 132 or 36.3 percent were from Britons." A.Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, 2007, p 25.

²⁴Out of 125 municipal commissioners in 1885-86, only 59 and out of 144 in 1900-01, only 53 were elected members. V.K.Rao, Hundred years of Local Self Government, p185.

sugar cane, indigo, and such other plantation. Jenkins even wanted the displacement of the local peasants from their land through discriminatory land revenue policy to promote colonial interest. He argued that such systems would help local peasants in the long run. He was concerned about the issue that the native people would not be available as tenant cultivators under the European superintendence and thus the commercial interest would be inhibited if the government assessments upon the natives were not substantial.²⁵ Wasteland settlement was based on the colonial thesis since the native peasants didn't have the resources in that case the colonial government had always upper hand to control the land. Jenkin's thesis of colonization was supported by the Board of Revenue and the Lieutenant –Governor of Bengal to promote British enterprise, capital, and skill in agriculture. A successful manufacturer of Assam tea in December 1837 made Jenkin's colonization scheme more acceptable and that resulted Wasteland Rules, 1838. Two third of the government experimental tea gardens were transferred to the Assam Company and declared as tax-free for initial years.

On 6 Mach 1838, Wasteland Rules were applied, under this wasteland, for forty-five years conditional lease was allowed to the applicants where a quarter of the area must be cleared within five years else land was liable to resumption. Rules were framed to promote only the colonial interest where indigenous aspirants were the worst sufferers. No grants for the agricultural purpose could be made for less than 100 acres at a time and to one who didn't possess capital or stock worth at least Rs 3 per acre. Under these conditions, only Europeans could avail themselves of the opportunities.²⁶ Wasteland Rules 1838 was revised in 1854 to attract more European Capitalists. It provided

A lease for 99 years on more liberal terms and the minimum area of land for which one could apply was raised up to 500 acres. Later the limit was reduced to 200 acres and relaxed to even 100 acres in exceptional cases, if native applicants could satisfy the Collectors of their ability to bring ryots from outside Assam.²⁷

²⁵Jenkins to Secretary to the Government at Fort William, 22 July 1833, Foreign Political Proceedings, 11 February 1835, No.90, National Archive of India.

²⁶Revenue and Judicial letters from India and Bengal, 14 March 1837, No 5, cited by Barpujari, Assam in the Days of Company, p 212; Gait, History of Assam, p.359; Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p 11.

²⁷Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, 2007. P 11.

In 1861, a system of free simple grants was introduced to facilitate the land grabbing. With this land was sold at rates ranging from Rs 2-8 acres to Rs 5 acre. There was no clearance condition attached and twenty years purchase payable at the time of commutation. From 1862 onwards, grants were put on auction sale and from 1876, the sale of fee simple land was stopped and introduced a new system of thirty –years leased was introduced.²⁸ By 1870-71, about 0.7 million acres of land had been settled with planters in Assam (with 56,000 acres under tea), 6, 25,780 acres were held by the planters under the concessional grants and 33,761 acres under ordinary settlement rules.²⁹ Nominal land revenue increased for the planters. They were paying Rs 3 to Rs 5 as per acres, annually in 1870.³⁰

Assam attracted a significant number of migrant groups from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth including Marwari traders, Bengali clerks, Nepali soldier –graziers, and East Bengali Muslim peasants journeyed to Assam to seek a livelihood.³¹ Tea collies were the largest migrant group. In 1858-59 four hundred laborers reached Assam from Benaras, Ghazipur, Chota Nagpur, and Bihar.³² And subsequently, the number of migrated laborers steadily rose as the region aided labor import. In the late nineteenth century, a thousand of British recruitment happened for the managerial post in the Indian tea sector, mostly direct recruitment at London or Calcutta.

Steamer and railways were other important aspectsof the growth of the colonial tea cultivation in Assam. The India General Steam Navigation Company and River Steam Navigation Company were the first regular operated steamer service on a weekly basis during 1861. Subsequently, government subsidized the steamer service under the growing pressure from tea industry and thus two lines of weekly steamer service between Assam and Calcutta sustained. In upper Assam, a range of mail steamer was operated up to Dhubri and was connected with the Bengal railways. Assam Railways and Trading Company's first routes were designed to carry passengers and goods

²⁸Gait, History of Assam,p 359-60; Barpujari, Assam in the Days of Company, p 212-14, Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p 11.

²⁹Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Lower Province, 1870-71,p 43-44.

³⁰Gait, History of Assam, pp 342-43, Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj,p 12.

³¹Jayeeta Sharma, 2012:80.

³² Fielder, C. (1869). On the Rise, Progress, and Future Prospects of Tea Cultivation in British India. Journal of the Statistical Society of London, 32(1), 29-37. doi:10.2307/2338875.

connected with the tea industry over short distances.³³ There was Assam Bengal train after 1911. Railways and steamers helped the movement of the tea equipment and products, at the same time it facilitated a wide range of migration.³⁴ Reports of the commissioners on the tea cultivation of Assam 1868, states that the Bengal Legislative Council enacted the regulation of immigration to the districts of Assam, Sylhet, and Cachar, to make sure that the contractors or their agents had not deceived the labourers recruited for the tea district; and the fearful mortality previous to arrival at the tea districts.³⁵ By 1884-85, only 5.5 percent workers were appointed from Assam, whereas 44.7 percent workers were from Chotanagpur, 27.2 percent from Bengal, 21.6 percent from United Provinces and Bihar, 0.2 percent from Bombay and 0.7 percent from Madras.³⁶

There was an acute cash crisis during the early years of the colonial rule. Opium cultivation was in a way savior to the British ruled Assamese peasants in the payment of the excessively heavy demand of the government taxes. During that time only opium and mustard were the cash crops, and in contrast to mustard, opium demand was growing in every year. The average price of the opium after harvest price in 1840 was Rs 5 acre, and the retail price raised to Rs 80 acre during the last months.³⁷ Excessive use of opium led to indolence which was a significant concern for the colonial state. Infact, the East India Company itself had a long-standing relationship with opium.

“The prosperous trade between China, Britain, and India largely depended on the sale by British traders of India Opium in China.”³⁸ Colonial state in a way failed to earn any

³³ Jayeeta Sharma, 2012:80.

³⁴ In 1867-68, 22,800 out of 34,433 laborers were already imported.

³⁵Cholera was a big killer for the coolies in their long journey from the recruiting deports in the Bengal presidency. In 1867, Times compared the death rate of Assam (21-30 percent) to the rate of 2.5 percent in British Guinea. In 1886-99, an improvement in the mortality rate (5.32 percent) over the previous years was recorded although much higher in other plantation regions.

³⁶Assam Administrative Report, 1884-85:168.

³⁷Notes on some industries of Assam from 1884 to 1895. Comp. in the office of the secretary to the chief commissioner of Assam, and pub. By authority.

³⁸Silver that Britain obtained from China in return of the Indian opium was remitted as profit back to Britain since 1773. The smuggling of the Indian opium into China sharply increased after Britain's success in the opium war with China. East India Company wanted another market in Eastern India from Bengal, Bihar to Malwa for surplus opium supply marketing. From 1840, East India Company arranged to sell imported opium in Assam through government agents. Since there was abundant and cheap local supply, outside sale remained limited. See Jayeeta Sharma, 2012:65.

profit from the opium market. To limit opium use, increase the tax on home-grown opium was considered.³⁹

Local indolence and a shortage of the tea laborers were a significant concern for the colonial state. In 1861, opium cultivation and sale were banned, and in 1874 the state introduced retail sales at licensed outlets.⁴⁰ Opium was the massive source of revenue then.

In 1870-71, when the Raj had revenue of 51 million dollars, opium contributed over 8 million dollars of this sum. British administrators treasured the opium finds as the only source of direct taxation other than the politically explosive salt tax.⁴¹

In 1868, the Pharmacy Act restricted the opium sale in Britain to professional pharmacists. From 1874 the Anglo-Oriental Society was quite critical regarding British opium policy. The society alleged that the drug addiction had affected the legitimate trade between China and India. It, therefore, demanded that the empire should serve as a moral prophylactic against the contamination of the Oriental society.⁴² In 1893, a Royal Commission was formed to enquire into opium use in India. A large number of witnesses participated in Calcutta including British government officials, planners and representatives from Assam gentry. The reformist, however, argued that the total prohibition of the opium would be cruel since the common Assamese people believed in the medical efficacy.⁴³ Many Assamese planters including Jagannath Barooah, Munchi Rahat Ali supported this view of the British. Jagannath Baruah, the president of Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha⁴⁴ viewed that prohibition of opium would lead to great hardship to the opium users, as opium was necessary for the treatment of many diseases.⁴⁵ He was afraid that people would not tolerate more taxes to replace the excise gap.⁴⁶ In 1884, Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha appealed for revocation of the opium cultivation ban to

³⁹David Scott and Francis Jenkins suggested for the increase in tax on opium.

⁴⁰In that year only 5,070 shops received a license to sell opium.

⁴¹Brown, J. (1973). Politics of the Poppy: The Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, 1874-1916. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8(3), 97-111. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260282>.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Jayeeta Sharma:2012.

⁴⁴Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha, was the leading organization of the landholders in Upper Assam.

⁴⁵John Butler, A Sketch of Assam:2016

⁴⁶Report of Royal Commission on Opium, Vol.2,"Evidence, Jagannath Barooah 22 December 1893.

avoid further taxes.⁴⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, there was Gunabhiram Baruah, Upendranath Barooah,⁴⁸ Representatives of Assamese Students' Literary (ASL) Club of Calcutta who vehemently denied that opium had any medical value. They supported the ban on opium and wanted to rehabilitate people from the drug. In 1894, Royal Commission retained the status quo of the colonial state on opium. Colonial state position on opium was primarily because of the overreaching importance of opium in revenue. British India didn't take any substantive step to ban opium consumption. As a result, the anti-opium campaign started in Assam led by a majority of young people.⁴⁹ Subsequently joined the campaign adding significant appeal to the movement. Activist like Chandra Prabha Saikiani⁵⁰ moved the anti-opium resolution in public session, many joined handed to aware people against the opium consumption. Eventually, Congress led the anti-opium campaign by 1920 that attained prominent support from all section of the society.

Peasants Resistance against Increasing Land Revenue:

The increase in the land revenue was driven by the agenda of the colonial government to enhance the plantation laborforce. The Assam Company was started in 1839, and till 1850, it was the only tea planter in Assam. ⁵¹The total acreage under tea in Assam proper increased to 8,000 acres in 1859 from 2,311 in 1841, and the output of the tea to more than one million lbs from 29,267 lbs. Assam Company still accounted for 60 percent of this acreage and was facing acute labor crisis,⁵² With the request of the planter's community in 1859, the government enhanced the land revenue to solve the labor crisis because then only poor peasants would work for a wage as plantation labor. The government ordered a 15 to 30 percent increase in the land revenue rates on the dry croplands of four districts –Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang, and Nagaon.⁵³ And subsequently ban on poppy cultivation, but the monopoly sale of north Indian opium

⁴⁷Ibid, "Memorial of Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha"

⁴⁸Upendranath Barooah translated a widely popular book by Hemchandra Barua, *Kaniyar Kritan* into English and presented to the Royal Commission to show the anti-opium sentiment in the society.

⁴⁹Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha (Society for the Progress and Regeneration of the Assamese Language) formed in 1888. It is the precursor of the ALS.

⁵⁰Chandraprabha Saikiani (1901-72) was the first to move an anti-opium resolution at a public meeting in Assam, that of the Asom Chattra Sanmilian at Tezpur in 1919.

⁵¹By 1859 the Jorhat Tea Co. and many other began.

⁵²A Guha, 'Colonization of Assam: Second Phase 1840-1859', IESHR, 4, December 1967; A. Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj* 1977.

⁵³Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*, p 205.

continued. The sale price of this opium was increased from Rs 14 per seer in 1860 to Rs 20 in 1862 and Rs 23 by 1873.⁵⁴

The peasants economy of the largest opium-producing district Nawgaon affected the most by the ban on poppy cultivation. Along with this increase land revenue on dry croplands in 1861 left peasants into total indignation. Again there was government call to impose a tax on betel nuts and paan cultivation. All these led an agitation in the district of Nowgaon, especially in the area of Phulaguri, an area mainly with Lalung people, a tribal community. There was a peaceful demonstration in September 1861 before Magistrate when about fifteen hundred peasants marched to the district town and presented a petition to the District Magistrate. October 1861, a Raj Mel⁵⁵ was organized at Phulaguri, scheduled for five days to ensure participation from the distant villages. Irrespective of a constant attempt by police forces to disrupt the assembly approximately 1,000 peasants assembled on 15th October, 500-600 of who were armed with lathis,⁵⁶ till 17th October about four thousand peasants gathered in spite of some of the leaders of the assembly were arrested on that very day. Next day British officer Lieutenant Singer initiated a discussion with the leaders of the assembly.

They reiterated, through a spokesman named Jati Kalita, their complaints about the ban on opium cultivation, and their apprehensions about the income and paan taxes. They ordered that as the District Magistrate had not attended to their grievances, they were contemplating means of carrying their complaints to the higher authorities in the mel. Singer ordered them to disperse and tried to seize their bamboo lathis.⁵⁷

The singer got himself killed in the scuffle. A rumor of an intended attack on the town reached Nawgaon. As a result, the District Magistrate sent armed forces to the trouble spot. There was an open fire causing several deaths. A historic peasant resistance against the bureaucratic mindlessness and in increasing taxes of the British

⁵⁴Ibid ,p 207, J.J.S.Driberg ,Report of the Royal Commission on Opium,1893,Vol 2,p.140;A.Guha,Planter Raj to Swaraj,2007,p 8.

⁵⁵Meaning Peoples' Assembly. However, this connotation has a broader meaning in the context of Assamese society. It is much more than village panchayat "The word raj, in Assamese, means people in general or in the context of a particular locality. It is derived from the phrase Rajya, which meant an administrative or fiscal unit in some part of the medieval Assam. Guha: 1977.

⁵⁶Guha: 1977, p 6.

⁵⁷ Guha:1977, p 6

establishment. Although the colonial scribes portray this episode as “an uprising against the ban on poppy cultivation”⁵⁸ available evidence proves that it was a “deliberate distortion.”⁵⁹ Similarly, a peasant uprising in the wake of new taxation broke out in the Jaintia Hills in the early 1860s. House tax and stamp duty were introduced in 1860. As a result, peasants rose in open rebellion as people were not accustomed to any money tax. The revolt was controlled easily, but then a fresh levy of the new income tax of 1860 instigated the peasants for the further uprising. The introduction of the license tax in January 1862 caused a more serious outburst of revolt where the Khasi people of the Jaintia Hills stood united under the leadership of their traditional chiefs. People armed with bows and arrows fought bravely against two Sikh regiments and an elephant battery.⁶⁰

Enhancement of land revenue rates in 1892 led to widespread dissatisfaction in the rural society. Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha holds a series of meetings from October 1892 to February 1893 to protest against the government decision.⁶¹ The revised rate of revenue in the Brahmaputra Valley was enhanced up to 53 percent, and in many villages, it was increased up to 70 to 100 percent. Knowing the situation on the ground, the Chief Commissioner passed orders to reduce the land revenue to an average 37 percent. The Chief Commissioner didn't pay attention to the Peasants appeal for the postponement of revenue collection until the final orders were received.⁶² As a result, there was a spontaneous protest, and the no-rent campaign started with organized mel in Kamrup district and the central Assam. Mels organized the protest,

The ordinary village panchayat, originally constituted as an authority on social matters had developed into the mel or assembly not only of the members of the village but the whole of the inhabitants of even one or more tahsils. The mels are governed by the leading Dolois or Gossains and by the principal landholders of the district.⁶³

⁵⁸Census of India, Assam, vol. 1, 1891, p.231, quoted Guha:1977, p.6

⁵⁹Guha:1977, p.6

⁶⁰Gait, History of Assam, pp.328-29; H.K.Barpujari, Facts behind the Jaintia Rebellion 1862-64, Journal of Indian History, 51, Part 1(April 1973),pp.141-48.

⁶¹Royal Commission on Opium, 1893.

⁶²Notes in Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p 42.

⁶³R.B.McCabe, District Magistrate of Kamrup, to Commissioner, Home Department, Progs.Public 1(A), Assam Riots, No.2-T, dated camp Rangiya, 12 January 1894 under No.112-A, April 1894, NIA.

Peasants had been pledging their crops to Marwari traders for years to get an advance for paying their land revenue.⁶⁴ So the demand for enhancement of the land revenue led peasants agitation not only against the government but also against the Marwari traders.⁶⁵ A mel was organized at the neighboring village of Belagoan to protest against the enhanced land revenue on 24 December 1893. Immediately after the mel, a group of people looted the Rangiya Bazar. Mel was held in almost all the Mauzas of the Kamrup district directing people not to pay the enhanced tax. Armed police and military forces were posted to control the thousands of agitating people in and around Rangiya. District Magistrate came down to Rangiya on 6 January 1893, but could not achieve to control the crowd. Police arrested about fifteen posters when a mel was in session. As a result, there was a protest on 10 January, in demand for the release of the arrested peasants. About two to three thousand people armed with lathis began drawing close to the police station to release their detained comrades forcibly. Unable to control the crowd, the District Magistrate ordered firing. However, no loss was reported in the firing.⁶⁶

Another remarkable agitation took place at Patharughat in Mangaldai district on 28 January 1894, where thousands of people hold rallies to meet J.D.Anderson, the Deputy Commissioner. The District Magistrate of Darrang went with the armed forces to control the agitation. Peasants assembled on the field facing the rest-house where the Magistrate camped, and they refused to disperse unless their demands were met. There were police firing on the agitating peasants causing deaths, according to official reports, of fifteen ryots and injury to as many as thirty –six. The war of Patharughat, Patharughat Ran as it comes to be popularly known, forced the government to rethink the land revenue policy. The event was one of the significant peasant movement in Assam. Dalipuran, an oral tradition carried the memories of the resistance.It can be seen as,

The event at Patharughat came to play a significant role in the making of modern Assamese nationalistic consciousness. After independence, the narrative of Patharughat assumed special significance in a context when the earlier legacy of Assamese nationalism—defined on the basis of linguistic

⁶⁴Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj,2007.

⁶⁵Home Department Progs.Public (A), Assam Riots, April-December 1894, NIA

⁶⁶ See Amaleudu Guha,2007 for the detailed account of the peasant agitation.

aspiration—gave way to a larger sphere of nationalism, situated and defined by a discourse of economic nationalism.⁶⁷

Peasants agitation didn't last long in the face of the naked repression exercised the colonial government. Villagers were tortured, their properties were destroyed and were forced to pay the enhanced revenue. However, these agitations compelled the government to reduce the initial increase of land revenue to 32.7 percent of the previous demand at the old rates.

Plantation and Press: Movement to Save the Assamese Language:

Act 29 of 1837 allowed the East India Company to replace the use of the Persian language in any judicial proceeding or any proceeding relating to the Revenue with the regional language of each administrative region. In 1837, the colonial state adopted the use of single regional language Bengali and the derecognition of Assamese language during the whole period from 1837 to 1871 naturally caused widespread resentment among the people of Assam. The Choice of the Bengali language as the medium relied upon the opinions of William Robinson, the inspector of school, who believed that the Assamese language was “merely a rustic spoken form of Bengali.”⁶⁸ Baptist Missionaries and local people opposed Robinson’s appropriation of native language. While they agreed that both Assamese and Bengali derived from Sanskrit and thus brought close affinity to each other, they contested the view that local language was a rustic Bengali dialect. They argued that the Assamese language was a centuries-old spoken and written language.⁶⁹They agreed on the point that Bengali was incomprehensible for them. In 1836, the agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier decided that printing Pottahs and Kubooleats will be only in two languages, English, and the Bengali. He argued that,

The Assamese version, I consider to be unnecessary, it is used in none of our official documents, the Bengalee being sufficiently well understood, and it is a point, I think of great importance that we should not assent to uphold a

⁶⁷Arupjyoti Saikia, Landlords, tenants and agrarian relations: Revisiting a peasant uprising in colonial Assam. *Studies in History* 26.2 2010: 175-209.

⁶⁸ Robinson advocated that the refined literary form of Bengali vernacular be used in Assam, in place of solvency and crude local verities, see Barpujari, ed., *The American Missionaries and the North East India*, p 131.

⁶⁹Barpujari, ed. *The American Missionaries and the North East India*, p 128

corrupt dialect, but endeavour to introduce pure Bengalee, and to render this Province as far as possible an integral part of the great country to which that language belongs, and to render available to Assam the literature of Bengal.⁷⁰

It was an attempt to replace "Corrupt Assamese dialect" with "Pure Bengalee" language. By Pure Bengali, they described, the language of the " Bengalee Mohurreers" who were mostly from Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Dacca.⁷¹ Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan first raised the demand for the restoration of the Assamese language as the medium of education and that of the court in place of Bengali language. He affirmed the separate identity of Assamese language against the expansionist claims of Bengali, and thus it became a historical document in the field of Assamese cultural nationalism.⁷² Ananda Ram efforts to establish Assamese language as the public vernacular convinced and at the same time inspired the modernized youth that language along with land and literature were essential for social belonging.⁷³ In 1853, Ananda Ram delivered a persuasive speech before Justice Mill, explaining the failure of the British government in education and language policy.⁷⁴ He argued that popular education would never advance in the country unless the vernacular school is remodeled.⁷⁵ He advocated that the introduction of foreign language in school which is not even understood by the teachers leads no progress. So, the Assamese language is the most suitable medium to introduce modern education system.⁷⁶ In 1855, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan published "A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and a Vernacular Education in Assam" at his expenses to historicize the Assamese language with a long literary history. This work played a substantial role in confronting British unwillingness to consider Assamese as a proper language. He argued with an extensive vocabulary, a literary genealogy and historical origin for Assamese and

⁷⁰Bakhtin, M. (1984), *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington In, p 471.

⁷¹F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue, Assam, to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated Gowhatty, 7 December 1854, No. 236, in 'Correspondence relating to the Question whether Assamese or Bengali Language should be taught in the Assam Schools', (hereafter 'Correspondence'), under Unpublished Sources, Cited in Bodhisattva. Tongue Has No Bone' Fixing the Assamese Language, 2008.

⁷²Moffat Mills, A.J., Report on the Province of Assam, Calcutta, 1854.

⁷³Jayeeta Sharma, 2012, p 183.

⁷⁴A J M Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, Appendix J, "Observations by Anandaram Dhekal Phukan."

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Maheshwar Neog ed., A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language.

Bengali language and demonstrated that both languages were from the same origin Sanskrit. Tracing the historical tradition of Assamese language and its history, Anandaram Phookan argued that extended use of Assamese prose in the buranji chronicles proved that Assamese might be modern than the Bengali language as the Bengali prose works were recent origin as compared to the Assamese language.⁷⁷ The battle for due recognition of the Assamese as a separate language was carried on by American Baptist missionaries. Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter worked in Sadiya until the rebellion of 1839, and then they moved to Jaipur who worked among the Singhphos. Miles Bronson moved up to Namsang, the Naga Settlement. He published his Dictionary in Assamese and English.

Orunodoi (1846-82), is the earliest and the longest surviving Assamese periodical in the nineteenth century. It was published by the American Baptists to fill the vacuum in the Assamese journalism, and at the same time, it served as a useful text.⁷⁸ It has covered all kinds of writings, i.e., creative or political and thus become the prime source of the knowledge of the day. It played a significant role in arousing social awareness and also contributed to societal reform. Orunodoi espoused reforms against the evils of the Assamese society and promoted the ideas by the leaders of the Indian Renaissance. For the first time, it expressed openly about the ideas related to the reforms of the Hindu marriage.⁷⁹ Orunodoi also played an essential role in the history of modern Assamese literature for promoting a secular trend. Anandaram along with Lakshmi Nath Bezbaruah, a prolific writer, a leading spokesperson of the Assamese nationalism was also one of the most critical figures in Assamese Renaissance. Assam Bandhu, a periodical appeared in 1885 was another important platform that challenged the Bengali language hegemony and discussed the future of the Assamese language widely. Gunabhiram Barooah was the publisher and the editor of Assam Bandhu, which was published from Calcutta. In 1872, the Assamese Literary Society was formed in Calcutta at the initiative of Assamese residents. The society submitted a memorial on 21 May 1872 to the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook drawing his attention to the potential resources of Assam. On behalf of the Assamese Literary Society, the memorandum was submitted by Manik Chandra Barooah and Jagannath Barooah, then

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸ Tilottoma Misra, "Social Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Assamese Writing: The Orunodoi." *Economic and Political Weekly* 1985: 1558-1566

⁷⁹ Tilottoma Misra:1985.

student leaders in the Presidency College. They specially requested for the railway connection of the province with Bengal. After a long campaign to convince British policymakers that the Bengali language was unacceptable to most people in Assam, on 9 April 1872, a memorial signed by over two hundred influential residents of Assam submitted to the Lieutenant governor of Bengal asking to declare Assamese as an official language in place of Bengali. American Baptist Missionary based in Assam and the members of the local gentry jointly put effort for this purpose. American Baptist considered that a distinct history, script, and language were possessed in the Brahmaputra Valley. Thus the missionary wanted to introduce new print modernity in association with the Assamese elites.⁸⁰ In April 1874, the Inspector of School received a note from the office of the Chief Commissioner regarding the introduction of Assamese language. It stated that the first and the second classes of the middle –class school, Bengali should be taught as a language, Assamese remaining the medium of the instruction. Also, 1853-73 was the period marked by the Assamese Renaissance. With strong impact from the Bengali Renaissance and in the process of reclaiming the native language Assamese, Assam's new intelligentsia adopted a modern language against the colonial establishment. Organisations for the dissemination of scientific awareness were Assam Desh Hitaishini Sabha, 1855 at Sivsagar; Jyan Pradayini Sabha, 1857-59, at Nowgaon, etc. Institutions associated with social reform was the Brahma Samaj under the initiative of Padmshas Goswami and Gunabhiram Baruah.⁸¹

Planters as Pressure Group:

Indian Tea Association (ITA), 1881 was the first well-organized business apex body for the manufacture, transport, and marketing of the tea, and by the twentieth century, ITA becomes an important Pressure Group with deep influence in government policy. In 1901, when the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Henry Cotton, advocated for the increase in the monthly wage paid to the plantation laborers, ITA lobby campaigned against the decision up to the level that subsequently impeded Cotton's career in the civil service.⁸² It was the only non-official body who worked with the local communities for the development of the infrastructure. With Morley –Minto Reforms

⁸⁰Jayeeta Sharma, 2012.

⁸¹Widow marriage was promoted by the Brahma Samaj and other social reformers in Assam. True to his zeal for social reform, Gunabhiram Baruah married a widow in 1870.

⁸²The government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Emigration, A Proceedings, nos 6-8, file no.90 of 1901, pp.122-136. National Archives of India: New Delhi,

in 1909, ITA with the support of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce was succeeded in pressurizing the government to allocate two seats to the council for the interest of the tea plantation.⁸³ Three out of seven seats were allocated to the tea industry alone in the Assam Legislative Council, 1912.⁸⁴ There were seven European, and two Indian planters representing only 1,319 votes in the Assam Legislative Assembly constituted under the Act of 1935, whereas only four seats were allocated to the tea garden laborers serving 34,279.⁸⁵ European Group of planters had an influential role in the making and unmaking of the provincial government.⁸⁶ ITA occupied such important position in the formulation of the government policies that before passing the Tea Districts, Emigrant Labour Act XXII of 1932 sent its draft to the ITA for their view. The tea industry complained about the government control or restrictions over recruitment or transport of labors and thus wanted amended legislation. The Government of India repealed Act VI, 1901 and passed the Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act XXII, 1932 following the recommendation of the ITA and the Royal Commission. With this Act, the government recruited the Controller of the Emigrant Labour primarily for the supervision of the recruitment of the labor. The Controller also needed to study the manner in which the emigrant labors were transported to the Assam tea estate.⁸⁷ ITA also played a crucial position in suppressing labor strike and exodus during 1921-22.⁸⁸ Assam Government appointed a special officer to supervise the situation and at the same time with planters request deployed Assam Rifles platoons to assist local police in suppressing the Dibru –Sadiya and other strikes in the region.⁸⁹ Thus, the planters in Assam acted as a strong pressure group influencing political and economic aspects of the day.

⁸³ The Report of the General Committee of the Indian Tea Association, 1909, pp. 144–146.

⁸⁴ ITA Report, 1912, Calcutta, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p. 220.

⁸⁶ Griffiths, History of the Indian Tea Industry, pp. 527–528

⁸⁷ ITA Report, 1932, p. 10.

⁸⁸ ITA Report, 1921, Calcutta, p. 5. *ITA successfully lobbied the Assam government to use its propaganda and law-enforcement machinery to suppress labor militancy.*

⁸⁹ The government of Assam, Financial Department, Immigration Branch B, nos 20–112, March 1922, pp. 105–107. Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

Challenging Subversion: Plantation Labour Strike

Shortage of labour was a severe problem when the Assam Company was formed in 1840; as a result, a serious attempt was made to procure labor.⁹⁰ Even after recruitment, there were issues like labor running away or not reaching the destination area after being recruited and dispatched by boat.⁹¹ During 1860 coercion in power hierarchy as well as extra-legal authority domination evolved with the introduction of the indenture system in the plantation.⁹² Misuse of the fund in the plantation often misled promoters. There was corruption in the investment in the gardens. Similarly, colossal corruption in the allocation of the land for the tea plantation. Financing for the gardens that never existed. Even the highly placed civil servants resigned their positions to become planters.⁹³ It led towards large-scale labor mobilization from the other parts of British India. No effort had been made for the communication or for that matter health of the recruited labors; as a result, high mortality rates and that led to high scale desertion from the tea plantation.⁹⁴ The report stated,

In the mad race of speculation, when fresh clearances were made, and acre upon acre covered with tea, to meet the terms of contract entered into with the promoters of new, or to satisfy the shareholders in old companies, no one has suffered more than the unfortunate labourer, for the opening out of new Tea. Cultivation has been too often synonymous with disease and death.⁹⁵

It was mentioned in the inquiry committee report submitted to the Government of Bengal that the excess mortality in the Assam tea estate was attributed to unhealthy environment, sickness, worse housing condition, insufficient food, no drinking water

⁹⁰Chinese labor for tea plantation was not an option as it turned out to be a complete fiasco. Efforts were made basically by the *sirdars* and individual agents, both locally and from neighboring Bengal.

⁹¹Interestingly there was no coercion in the recruitment of labor although wage offered was inadequate.

⁹² “A madness comparable in intensity with that of the South Sea Bubble seized men's minds, and normally level-headed financiers and speculators began to scramble wildly for tea shares and tea lands.” Griffiths, *History of the Indian Tea Industry*, p. 96.

⁹³Rana P. Behal, *Power Structure, Discipline, and Labour in Assam Tea Plantations under Colonial Rule*, 2006.

⁹⁴Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the State and Prospects of Tea Cultivation in Assam, Cachar, and Sylhet (Calcutta, 1868), p. 49.

⁹⁵Ibid.

and above all lack of medical attention.⁹⁶ Deserted labors were referred to as "absconding," and it was an act of serious offense under the existing labor laws. Absconding labor, if caught, was punishable under section 492 of the Indian Penal Court.⁹⁷ Act VI, 1865 empowered the deserted labors to arrest without warrant. Of course, there was an abuse of extra-judicial powers by the planters.⁹⁸ Punishment or exercise of the extrajudicial power by the managers, more commonly by the assistant managers to coolies cultivated rioting cases.⁹⁹ The Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Fuller reported about the planters' power in punishing their laborers, how women labor flogged and stripped by the managers.¹⁰⁰ As a result of the intensification of work norms and laborexploitation, there were assaults, mobbing, unlawful assembly, and rioting.¹⁰¹ Managers were attacked by laborers¹⁰², beaten up badly. Not only reaction to the ill-treatment by the planters, in some cases laborers demanded certain social-personal rights. In Halimguri tea estate, workers attacked the manager who refused their demand for the holiday.¹⁰³ The conflict between laborer and planter become a serious phenomenon; as a result, Government of Assam recommended the withdrawal of the private arrest provision in the Assam Valley. The Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1906 revealed that the penal clauses were responsible for making plantation life unpopular among the prospective emigrants. The committee recommended that out of thirty-one witnesses in the recruiting districts, twenty-eight held the view that the penal contract with its accompanying want of freedom deterred labor from going to Assam.¹⁰⁴ With the recommendation of this committee, the

⁹⁶Ibid. Bengal official account reported that of the 85,000 laborers imported into Assam between 1863-1866, more than 35,000 were reported to have died or deserted. The government of Bengal, Papers Regarding the Tea Industry, p. Xix.

⁹⁷Before 1865, a deserter from the tea gardens provided for one month's imprisonment. The government of Bengal, Papers Regarding the Tea Industry, p. xxii.

⁹⁸ Planters had immense legal powers over labors including the power to prosecute defaulting and malingering laborers and the power of private arrest of deserters. Behal and Mohapatra, "Tea and Money versus Human Life", pp. 161-163; Behal, "Some Aspects", ch. 4, Barker, Tea Planter's Life, p. 134.

⁹⁹Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur reported 1900. Assam Labour Report, 1900, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰Sir Bampfylde Fuller, Some Personal Experiences (London, 1930), p. 118.

¹⁰¹Assam Labour Report, 1902-03. During 1902-03, there were 15 severe cases of violence and intimidation in 4 cases managers were severely beaten. The manager had to use the revolver to save them. About 90 laborers were convicted and imprisoned.

¹⁰²Assam Labour Report, 1904-05. More than 30 laborers attacked manager in the Jorhat subdivision. In the Darrang district, laborers assaulted the manager of the Kalakuchi and Ghoria tea estates. Assam Labour Report, 1900.

¹⁰³Assam Labour Report, 1900. , p. 23.

¹⁰⁴Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in the Recruiting and Labour Districts, Calcutta, 1906.

government passed the Assam Labour and Immigration (Amendment) Act, 1908 and abolished the penal clauses of Act VI, 1901.¹⁰⁵ As result planters become more dependent on the Workman's Breach of Contract Act XIII, 1859. ¹⁰⁶ The act was supplemented by the section 490 and section 492 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 where it was mentioned that breach of contract by a workman was a criminal offense.¹⁰⁷ Under the Act XIII 1859, laborers had to face a worse form of punishment under the provision of breach of contract.¹⁰⁸ Planters continue to have oppressive measures even after the amendment of Act XIII in 1920.¹⁰⁹ Life of the plantation labor was never easy. The planters used to pay their contractors and agents from Rs. 120 to Rs. 150 for every recruit under a penal contract, at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹⁰ Record of the criminal courts revealed that agents often resorted to criminal means in the process of recruitment.¹¹¹ Labour lost their lives due to congestion, lack of adequate food, unhygienic conditions. Collies were even not free at the expiry of the contract period; they were repeatedly induced, under duress and re-engaged. ¹¹² If they fled, the planters had the right to arrest them without a warrant. ¹¹³ Coolie-catching in Assam was precisely like "slave running in Africa." ¹¹⁴Plantation labor force was ignorant, unorganized and isolated from their homes were weak and powerless against the planters. The upsurge of plantation labor unrest and also the emergence of the tradeunion were marked by the period 1937-1940. More than 37 strikes reported in

¹⁰⁵R.K. Das, *History of Indian Labour Legislation*, Calcutta, 1941, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶The act was effective to control over the labor forces.

¹⁰⁷ The local laborers first used the act, but soon it included all kind of laborers engaged by the planters. Managers considered the act as absolutely hate a more rigid form of contract should be retained for the new arrival. Das, *History of Indian Labour Legislation*, p. 26

¹⁰⁸Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906. Enquiry Committee 1921-1922 recorded some cases where laborers were punished in a very rigorous ways form three weeks to three months for refusing to work for entire periods of the contract.

¹⁰⁹Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1921-22. The Enquiry Committee found that practice of punishing workers even minors were still widespread.

¹¹⁰Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, p 35.

¹¹¹Cotton, *Indian and Home Memories*, p 262.

¹¹²Cotton, *Indian and Home Memories*, p 263; Sir Bamfylde Fuller, *Some Personal Experiences*, London:1930, p 117; Giha:2007, p 35.

¹¹³There was semi-feudal exploitation where coolies were denied even the basic needs. Rice was not provided at the statutory price, and the subsistence allowance prescribed by law was not paid to the sick coolies. Advances were often illegally debited against coolies on account of subsistence allowance or ill diet, as well as on account of rewards paid for the arrest of deserters, and laborers were thus bound hand and foot to the garden service, See Cotton, *Indian and Home Memories*, p.265.

¹¹⁴Their transit to tea gardens under conditions of high mortality, the selling of recruits at a market price, the haunt for runaway coolies –all these remind one of the slaves running in Africa and the global slave trade. See Guha:2007, p 36.

1939.¹¹⁵ The government of Assam expressed its concern over strikes occurred in tea estates and also in different companies including Assam Match Company at Dhrubri, Assam Oil Company at Digboi, Assam Railways and Trading Company.¹¹⁶ ITA requested Ministry for the need of urgent action to maintain law and order.¹¹⁷ The government of Assam appointed the Tea Garden Labour Committee to investigate the strikes.¹¹⁸ The Committee was appointed to evaluate the following study.

- (1) To study what is the cause of recent strikes and other manifestations of discontent on tea gardens in Assam, and particularly whether there are economic grievances either generally in the district concerned or the affected estates.
- (2) What measures are required to remove the cause or causes of the said strikes?
- (3) Whether and if so what forms of organization are desirable for enabling laborers on tea gardens to communicate their grievances to the management in such effective manner as will remove any doubt that their interests are secure, and procure the settlement of such objections, if any, by negotiation.¹¹⁹

ITA was not happy with the development and was suspicious of the Congress party. Two labor members¹²⁰ in the committee, ITA considered, would use its proximity to the colonial bureaucracy to delay and thwart the operations of the Committee.¹²¹ ITA demanded to work with the committee if only it were carried out by representatives

¹¹⁵D.V. Rege, Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India (Delhi, 1946), p. 72.

¹¹⁶NAI, Fortnightly Reports, Assam, Home Political Department, 1939.

¹¹⁷ITA Report, 1939, p. 26

¹¹⁸Members were K.C.Ghish as the Chairman, F.W.Hockenhull representing ITA, Baidyanath Mukherjee representing the Indian Plantation owners, A.K.Chanda, member of the Legislative Assembly from Surma Valley and Debeswar Sarma, MLA from Assam Valley was representative from the working class.

¹¹⁹ ASA, AICC Papers, file no. P1-12, TL No. 1020, 1939, p. 3, R.P, Behal: 2006.

¹²⁰In a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Assam Government dated 26 May 1939, and the ITA protested against the appointment of the two MLAs from the labor side alleging that were biased against the industries and were personally associated with fomenting labor disturbances in tea gardens. ASA, Government of Assam, General and Judicial Department, Immigration Branch, B, file no. Imm.118-GIM49/47, 1939, P.137.

¹²¹ITA Papers, Mss Eur F/174/bay/H, 1939, also R.P.Behal:2006.

acceptable to the tea industry else it expressed the withdrawal of its participation from the committee.¹²² ITA opposed the idea of trade unions in tea gardens, as it argues,

In most gardens labor is simple and primitive; and if unions are started, they would most probably run by the outsiders. In such cases, the prevailing opinion is that outsiders would most probably run them. In such cases, the prevailing opinion is that they should be discouraged.¹²³

With the changing political scenario by 1939, ITA modified its view on trade union, and it recommended a conditional recognition of the trade unions. The intention behind this new stand was,

Managers have done their best to prevent a Union being formed, would perforce change their attitude once such a Union had been established, and would in fact as far as possible become the guide of those running the Union in the hope that, by so doing, undesirable influences would be kept out of the Union.¹²⁴

ITA conditioned that only the permanent labor forces residing in the tea estate should be a member of the union and executive should be only among them. Every union will be allowed to represent only one tea estate. Any strike in the tea garden must be approved by the prior ballot with the voting by a minimum of two-thirds majority and approval with 50 percent of votes. Moreover, for any strike, fourteen days notice was compulsory. The Union account must be audited once a year by the government auditor.¹²⁵ Subsequently, in September 1939, the government of India imposed the Defence of India Rules that completely suppressed the trade union movement in Assam. However working class beyond the tea estate was growing at the provincial level. The Assam Provincial Trade Union Congress (APTUC)¹²⁶ was formed in

¹²²ASA, Government of Assam, General and Judicial Department, Immigration Branch B, file no. Imm. 118–GIM 49/47, 1939, p 28.

¹²³ITA Report, 1937, p. 37

¹²⁴ITA circular no. 917, 11 April 1939, ITA Papers, Mss Eur F 174/bay 2 (C)

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶APTUC, branch of the All India Trade Union Congress. APTUC had its first conference at Dibrugarh on 28 November in 1943. AITUC successfully established contacts with tea-garden laborers. From 1943 to 1945 the APTUC increased its member strength in Assam from 4,345 members belonging to 10 affiliated and associated units to about 16,000 members with 41 affiliated and associated units. ASA, Government of Assam, General, and Judicial Departments file no. GIM 7, 1943–1947.

1943.¹²⁷ Some other accounts show the inhuman treatment and growing racial prejudice towards the immigrant planting labor.¹²⁸ Early immigrants had to suffer in many ways. The fleeing of the planters as a body towards their workers was deplorable.

Section of Assamese elites defended the tea enterprise with the claim that the tea ameliorated the lives of the Indian peasants and regenerated Assam's economy. Of course, there counter-voices like Bolinarayan Borah, an England educated engineer, who supported British rule as the "harbinger of modernity" and thus supported the plantation system as a way to achieve modernity. In 1886, he published an article in popular Assamese periodical, *Mau*¹²⁹ that reflected the kind of modernity represented with tea enterprise. Padmanath Gohain Barua appreciated colonial authority in his book *Assam Buranji*, published in 1899, that the British rule in Assam had replaced pre-modern slavery with free labor. Hemchandra Barua addressed the issue of a coolie in *Assam News*, published from Guwahati. Lakshminath Bezbarua, who was very much concern about the exploitation faced by plantation laborers. He has written in *Mau*, a magazine¹³⁰ that the Assam tea estates were built upon the coolies "lifeblood." For a section of Assamese elites, colonial plantation fostered hopes that all-round development of the Assam's society would follow. For the attack on the imperial tea, the industry was a threat to the prospect of the development of the society. There were many big local planters such as Jagannath Barooah (800 acres), Bisturam Dutta Barua (246 acres). There were also small local planters such as Rudraram Bardoloi (45 Bigha), Sheikh Danish Mohammad (45 acres). Many a time small planters leased land from the government or the big landlords. Auniati Satra Gosain leased Satra's land to Debeswar Sarma to start his plantation. Since Assamese planters were not abundant in resources, they had no option but to operate subsidiaries of British gardens. Assamese tea planters had no access to the privileges provided by the colonial government, in fact, they were not allowed to join planters organization like Indian Tea Association. Roshewar Barua had half a dozen tea gardens in the 1860s, but could not survive in the tea crisis of 1866-69. The approach of the many Assamese gentries towards the plantation economy was never the same. By the early twentieth-century Planter's Raj was vehemently criticised by many Assamese elites who supported Imperial plantation

¹²⁷NMML, AITUC Papers, file no. 45, 1942-1944, p. 25.

¹²⁸ The government of Bengal, Papers Regarding the Tea Industry, p. xix

¹²⁹ Bolinarayan Borah, "Sah Bagisar Kuli," *Mau*, 1886.

¹³⁰Lakshminath Bezbarua, "Kuli," *Mau*, 1886.

economy as a hope of progress and modernity. With the influence of Gandhian reformism, Assamese gentry condemned the exploitative planters practice, particularly their repression and treatment of the migrant laborers. Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Assam in 1921 and forty-one Indian National Congress sessions at Guwahati in 1926 influenced many to promote reformist agenda, especially among the plantation colliers. Many like Kushal Konwar, Sankar Chandra Barua left plantation clerical jobs and devoted the national movement.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it can be said that the development during British Raj in Assam was designed in the interest of the plantation economy. Communication was the primary area where British investment was significantly high. There were 172.8 kilometers of railways linking interior areas with the Brahmaputra by 1886. Daily service of mail steamers was introduced in 1884. Tea, discovered in a wild state in 1826, began to flourish with the formation of the Assam Company that produced over 1, 6872 million kg per year with nearly 4000 acres under cultivation. It was the period of transition from pre-colonial to the colonial economy and the phase when the colonial government penetrated the economy and thus started an infrastructure in the interest of the capitalistic setup.¹³¹The new capitalist economy in Assam coexisted with tribalism and feudalism where continuous enhancement of the land revenue and other taxes on a peasantry economy that was unaccustomed to any taxation. With the advantage of early initiation of the English language, Bengali clerks, doctors and lawyers monopolized the government's jobs and position. Land to the planters with the Waste Land Settlement Rules, 1838 and 1854 allowed to grab more land than they required or could manage contributed a significant change in the region. Planters also encroached upon the jhum¹³² rights of the tribal people. Plantation economy contributed a major shift in the demography as well. East India Company thus successfully transformed the region into the "British Empire's tea garden" with the collaboration of traders, lawyers, bankers including clerks from other provinces. The discovery of the tea in the Himalayan foothills has transformed the frontier land to the land of the planters.

¹³¹Amalendu Guga:1977, p 20.

¹³²Slash and burn shifting cultivation practice by tribal of the region.

Chapter two:

Divide and Rule: Colonial State and Ethnicity, 1874-1931

In this chapter, I intend to study how the British prevented democracy and federal principles not to take root in Assam by manipulating the political processes and allow ethnic diversities and religious groups to play different roles from 1874 onwards. It will also discuss the politics of immigration and how colonial government encouraged peasant immigrants into Assam and how it affected the land and demographic structure of the province allowing people to draw into conflict over land and national aspirations. On 6 February 1874, Assam proper along with Cachar, Goalpara, Garo Hills and other hills districts, was formed into a Chief Commissioner's province. During 1872-81, there was a high population growth, but the rate of growth slowed down over the next twenty years.¹ The epidemic kala azar spread throughout Assam and thus during the decade 1881-91, the population decreased at a significant rate². With the rise of the peasant economy, a significant shift in the composition and distribution of population happened during the nineteenth century.

Colonial Territorial Arrangement and its Consequences:

In 1874, the separation of Assam from Bengal happened. The partition of Bengal in 1905 and thus Assam incorporated to the Eastern Bengal. The Lahore Resolution of the Muslim league, 1940 included Assam in the prospective state of Pakistan and Assam was considered with Bengal by the grouping of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Assamese developed a deep-rooted conflict with Bengalis when colonial territorial organization put them together. In the following years, the cultural conflicts between groups only became stronger compared to other aspects of conflicts. The British government's territorial rearrangement was ignorant towards prevailing diversity in the provinces. It had not taken account of different ethnic groups, diverse languages and also diverse culture and different national areas were combined as one administrative unit. Later, the colonial administration decided to organize areas in the small territorial group for the smooth running of the government. In that context, the Sylhet district of Bengal along with Cachar and Goalpara transferred to it. The main purpose of the idea of

¹During 1891-1901, the decadal population growth rate was 5.7 percent in Brahmaputra valley and about 6 percent in Surma valley.

²Kala azar ,i.e.the black fever epidemic appeared in Garo Hills and then spreaded throughout Assam . In 1883 , it appeared in Goalparaand then in proper Assam in 1888.

attachment was to balance the deficit of the Brahmaputra valley with the surplus revenue of the Surma Valley. Viceroy Council advised that Assam would continue to receive the financial support from the government.³ This reorganization led towards strong protest from both sides of the territory. The strong rally broke out in Sylhet opposing its amalgamation with Assam. There were no similarities, culturally or in linguistic terms between the two regions. On 10 August 1874, they submitted a memorandum to the Governor General against their transfer.⁴ In 1896, the outgoing Chief Commissioner of Assam suggested the transfer of Chittagong division and two districts of Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.⁵ However, the new Chief Commissioner, Henry Cotton (1896-1902) didn't support this move by his senior and convinced the government not to approve that decision.⁶ Sir Andrew Fraser renewed the earlier scheme, and he was supported by J.B. Fuller, the Chief Commissioner (1902-05) for the speedy completion of the Assam Bengal Railway line. His basic purpose was the expansion of maritime outlet for the development of the tea, coal and oil industries,

The amalgamation was a well-planned step to divide Bengali community by religion, as in the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the Bengali Hindus will be a minority and thus pro-British Muslim will cooperate the government.⁷ The new province resulted amalgamation would suffer from the mistrust already developed among Assamese and Bengali.⁸ In December 1917, the Sylhet People's Association submitted a memorandum to the Viceroy and the Secretary of the State. The support to the demand by the Bengalis of Assam led to a clear division on the ethnolinguistic line in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Brahmaputra Valley was predominantly Assamese speaking region whereas the Surma Valley, consisting of Sylhet and Cachar, was mainly Bengali speaking region. Deep ethnic cleavage generated as a result of the colonial territorial arrangement. When the people of the Sylhet organized protest movement against the government decision regarding the transfer of Sylhet, the campaign didn't gain substantial support in the districts of the Brahmaputra valley. And interestingly, the divisive conscious was reflected in the political behavior of the

³Home Department Notification, 379 and 380, 6 February 1974, Home Public A, nos.157-60, NAI.

⁴Home Public A, September 1874, nos.250-60, NAI.

⁵Home Political A, May, 1897, nos. 204-34, Chief Commissioner of Assam, 25 November 1896.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Bose. M.L.The. "Genesis of Ethnic Identity and Social Tension in North Eastern India" in *Shodak*, no 13,

⁸Ibid.

leaders.⁹In the Municipal Boards, there were two camps, for example, at Tezpur and Guwahati Municipal Boards, members like PadmanathGogainBarua, Manik Chandra Barua, Bhuban Ram Das, Mahendra Mohan Lahiri, and Manmohan Lahiri were in opposite camps. Gradually, the Bengali population gained their demographic strength in the Brahmaputra valley. With the collaboration of the Marwari businessmen, the immigrant Bengali people, after a century of their settlement in Assam formed the political front, the Assam Domiciled and Settlers Association (ADSA) in 1935,as an active reaction to the legislation of the Moneylenders Act, 1935,ADSA, 1935 proclaimed that its basic duty was to protect the interest of the Bengali Hindu settlers of the Brahmaputra Valley . If necessary, it would strive to ally with the Muslim immigrants of the valley.¹⁰The association was critical of the Assam Tenancy Bill, the Assam Municipal (Amendment) Act and the Moneylenders Act of 1935. The association demanded the equal status of the domiciles Bengalis. In its second session, the resolution was passed to extend loyalty to His Majesty, the King-Emperor.Besides citizenship rights, Bengalis of the Brahmaputra valley also challenged the move of Assamese people to declare the valley as unilingual.They demanded the Bengali medium government school.The association submitted a memorandum to Gopinath Bardoloi, the premiere of Assam in March 1939, requesting the government to review the policy of domicile or provincial citizenship. It was a huge setback for the unilingual move of the government. The then Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi requested the Bengali leaders to cooperate in solving the issue. The government aided Bengali Medium school was established in 1935 irrespective of strong opposition from the Assamese leaders. The Congress Working Committee recommended for the practice of issuing domicile certificates and also suggested that the birth in the province or ten years of continuous residence should count as the domicile. However, Bardoloi stressed more on the assimilation of the immigrant Bengalis rather than the conditions for the domicile qualification. Another challenge paused to the whole effort of Assamese resistance towards the colonial expansionism of the Bengali language was

⁹In the Municipal Board elections of the various districts ethnic cleavages were clearly visible .In these elections , the participations of the voters were purely on the basis of the ethnic affiliations. In fact there was an instance like where the Assamese leader PabmanathGohainBarua refused to work under the Bengali superior of the Municipality Board. History of the Agitation for Reunion of Sylhet with Bengal ,AICC Papers, File No.3,1945,NMML.

¹⁰Reports of the Assam Citizens Association, compiled by its head office, Guwahati, 1940.,Sajal Nag:2017,Amalendu Guha:1977.

by the Goalpara district of Assam¹¹. The changing political geography of the Goalpara district was the reason behind the move of the Goalpara district to declare it culturally to be part of Bengal. The Koch Kingdom was divided into Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo in 1581. The Koch Bihar extended a large area of the eastern Assam, presently known as North Bengal and some part of Bangladesh. Koch Bihar, the part of Koch Kingdom was annexed by the Mughal Empire in 1609. Later, Kamrup and Koch Hajo portion were also annexed in 1613. Part of the Bengal province became the part of the British East India Company under the Diwani System in 1765.

It was transferred to Assam in 1874, and at that time Goalpara district was with two other districts of Sylhet and Cachar. Identification of the Goalpara elite to the Bengal was driven by not only cultural cause, but the economic interest of the peasants was also another concern. However, the Goalpara Zamindars advocated the retention of the Permanent Settlement system whereas, in the rest of the Assam, the Ryotwari system prevailed. Thus in that way, the people of Goalpara identified themselves more with Bengal than that of Assam. They feared that if Cachar and Sylhet were transferred back to Bengal, the Ryotwari system would be extended over Goalpara. And in that context, the Zamindars of Goalpara would lose their power.

Bengali continued to be the language of the court and instruction in Goalpara even after Assamese was introduced since it was part of Bengal until 1874. Report of the Indian Statutory Commission states that it was difficult to determine where Bengali stopped and Assamese began as the language prevailed in the west was similar to Bengali but spoken to Assamese.¹² The census data, 1911 shows that total population of the Goalpara district was 600,643, out of which 347,772 were Bengali speaking and 85,329 were Assamese speaking. Only in 1914, Assamese was introduced as an alternative language in that district. In 1903, J.B. Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam decided to discontinue Bengali as the language for Assamese. However, Goalpara was exempted from the order.¹³ Several petitioners protested the Fuller's decision. A memorial signed by 3,366 people, submitted to the Deputy Commissioner

¹¹For details see Misra, Sanghamitra. *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*. Vol. 2. Routledge, 2013, also, Misra, Sanghamitra. "Changing frontiers and spaces: The colonial state in nineteenth-century Goalpara." *Studies in History* 21.2 (2005): 215-246, Misra, Sanghamitra. "Redrawing frontiers: Language, resistance and the imagining of a Goalpara people." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43.2 (2006): 199-225.

¹²Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, Simon Commission, vol. XIV, 1930.

¹³File No 52-57, August 1903, Home A, ASF, State Archives, Guwahati.

favoring the introduction of the Bengali in Goalpara.¹⁴ In the context of the language, Grierson's finding and analysis was the source for the government, where language was considered the key indicator for determining identity. An inquiry was made in 1914,

To ascertain what really was the vernacular of the district (Goalpara). It appeared that neither pure Assamese, as spoken in Central and Upper Assam, nor Bengali as spoken in Nadia, was the vernacular of the districtin the eastern part, most of the people spoke a form of Assamese similar to that spoken in the adjoining district of Kamrup, while in the western portions, the dialect was closely akin to the Rajbanshi dialect of northern Bengal.¹⁵

Responding to the inquiry, the Chief Commissioner's order stated that the deciding authority for the language of the medium in the district was to be the Deputy Commissioner. The census report, 1921 explains the wide variation of the Bengali and Assamese speaker.

Table 2:1 Assamese and Bengali Speakers in Census 1911 and 1921.

Languages	1911	1921
Assamese	115,436	138,810
Bengali	317,365	405,710

Source: Census of India, 1911, Assam, Shillong, 1912; Census of India 1921, Assam Shillong, 1923.

C.S.Mullan, the census commissioner of 1931, observed that bilingualism, the new category in the 1931 census applied to the people of Goalpara. The exception continued to till 1940 when Assamese was the medium of instruction in the rest of the valley.

Changing Economy and its Consequences:

The British led colonial characterized "semblance of modernity" made people aware of their identity, status, and rights. The economy of Assam shattered with the Burmese invasion, and British intervention only added distress to it. Under British, it becomes

¹⁴File No 50-54, December 1897, ASF, State Archive, Guwahati.

¹⁵Letter from J.E. Webster, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, to the Secretary to the Government of India, 12 March 1919, Shillong, Ninth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms, Q/IDC/46, OIOC, London, quoted in Sanghamitra Mishra, *Becoming Borderland*. Routledge. 2015. 152-153.

exposed to all sorts of "exogenous phenomenon hitherto not experienced by it."¹⁶The economy transformed, and that resulted in a drastic change in the social life. Agriculture was the primary sector targeted by the British as the primary source of revenue. Thus, "colonial penetration had a tremendous effect on the non-capitalist mode of production prevalent in Assam."¹⁷In the process, the non-capitalist mode of the economy was broken down, There were heavy taxes. Gadhan, a tax of two rupees in the lower and the central Assam. The poll tax of three rupees was in upper Assam. Above all, the rent-free grants were scraped and taxes had to be paid in cash only. David Scott's "better management system" was an instant transformation from Ahom to the British taxation policy. Under this better management system, Scott organized the new taxation policy where Ahom headman like Hazarika, Saikia, Bora was employed as headman. The tax imposed on Paik for which they entitled to have two Pura of land each. A division of people for the specific purpose of the state, i.e., Khel was liable to render duties to the state. Taxes levied without any consideration of the resources or capabilities of the peasant. Agrarian struggles broke out in various parts of the province along with the anguish reaction by the discontented nobility. David Scott's policy of reconciliation of the former aristocracy by appointing them in office proved a failed idea as were placed in the responsibility of administration, a field where they had hardly any experience before. As a change in policy, he recommended for the removal of the "man of rank" from office and to import "man inability" from Sylhet, Dhaka, and Mymensingh as they experienced in such work.¹⁸After Scott, Jenkins introduced new land taxes, and he succeeded in his recommendation to the government for the resumption of upper Assam. Thus, there was a considerable change in the mode of revenue demand and enhancement in the rate of land revenue. ¹⁹ During the years, 1856-57 to 1870-71, there were 24,912 sq.miles cultivated land. Also, the revenue collected from the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley, where land areas cultivated remained the same. Thus, the existing structure of the land tenure was utterly ruined by the British intervention that led disastrous repercussion on the overall peasant economy. To initiate the British manufactured goods, the indigenous silk and

¹⁶ Nag:2017, p 78.

¹⁷Ibid .

¹⁸Bengal Political Consultations, 10 June 1830,no.51,WBA.

¹⁹Cited in Debolina Sen, Hadananda,Sodana: Unish o

bishSatokerTintiAsomiyaPatrikaEbongSanskritikBibimoyerEktiChehara ,Obovash, October-December ,2004

handloom industries were destroyed.²⁰ Tea cultivation flourished as a separate industry. Attempts were made in the commercialization of the agriculture under Jenkins. To increase the purchasing and paying capacity of the peasants, commercialization was important it was, in fact, a planned move to separate peasants from their means of production as the colonial government was not successful in pushing Assamese peasants into the labor market. He encouraged peasants to cultivate readily marketable products and thus initiated a class to convert the wastes into a fruitful field.”²¹In a short span of time jute became one of the most important commercial crops.²² Thus the British had a successful attempt in the production of commercial crops to provide the state with a constant source, of revenue.

Jute cultivation increased from 500 acres in 1901 to 6000 in 1911.²³ To improve the communication steamer service was introduced in 1847; public works department Assam had 410 miles of motorable metalled roads under public works department, was formed to construct and maintain road connectivity and in 1880 railways started.²⁴ Apart from agriculture, other sectors like mineral resources were also explored. Under the colonial government, the coal output increased to 2, 77,000 tons by 1905-06 from 50 tons in 1872. Crude oil production was very high i.e., 27, 33,000 gallons in 1905-06 increased from 8, 88,000 gallons in 1900-01.²⁵ It shows that the colonial government invested a lot in the oil and the coal sectors. Coalfields were developed; annual production of the crude oil was increasing. The commercialization and the prosperity of the tea, jute and ancillary industries led a new situation in the province with the visible change in the demography. "Homogeneity of the exclusive society",²⁶ was affected by the continuous inflow of the immigration in the emergence of the new economy.²⁷ It was the time when the Marwari traders reached out to the interiors of Assam. The Marwari traders have exchanged the products like cotton, salt

²⁰ Sajal Nag: 2017.

²¹ Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 July 1838, No. 84.

²² Production of jute was new to Assam. It was linked to the immigration of the peasants from the East Bengal who were expert in this crop. In the absence of a skilled workforce, British were successful in importing an agricultural labor force.

²³ See Amalendu Guha, "Socio-Economic Changes in Agrarian Assam" in M.K. Choudhury (ed.), *Trends in Socio Economic Changes in India*, Shimla: 1967.

²⁴ By 1891, Railways mileage was 114 miles and 715 mileage by 1903.

²⁵ Sajal Nag: 2017, K.E.L. Pennell: 1939.

²⁶ Sajal Nag: 2017.

²⁷ Sajal Nag, "Economic Roots of the Regional Capitalists Class; A Study of the Primitive Accumulation of the Marwari Business Community in Colonial Assam", in the proceedings of the North East India History Association Barapani Session, Shillong: 1984.

etc and twisted for the rice, paddy, silk, and mustard. Also, Bengali businessmen entered Assam from the side of the Eastern Bengal side. The destruction of the medieval economy left the nobility of the Ahom era in a deplorable condition. The Ahom community affected the worst order under the British rule. They suffered politically, socially and the most important in the economic context. The colonial government abolished one after another Ahom institution that granted certain privileges to the Ahom nobility. The Khel system was abolished in 1840, thus curtailed the agricultural privileges of the nobility. In 1843, the slavery system was abolished and that affected the social privilege. In a way, the slavery abolition reduced the privileged nobility into the ordinary, normal peasants. They tried to restore their position by different means, first by the moderate way and then followed by a combined upsurge. Maniram Dewan requested Mills with a memorandum to restore the former administrative, customs and the native habits. When moderation didn't work, in 1857, there was a combined upsurge to restore Ahom monarchy, however, it failed.

Having failed to acquire their status in any way, the ex-nobility concentration shifted to the white collar job sector. By then this segment was already under the domination of the Bengali English speaking people who came from various districts of Bengal. Bengali influx, started with the British annexation of Assam, increased with the recruitment of the educated Bengalis by the British. The number added more when the Bengali was made the language of the court. Revenue and the judicial departments were occupied by the English educated Bengali people. The British Raj was dependent upon the Bengalis for their administrative works.²⁸ The first organized rules for the recruitment of the clerks was published on 20 December 1882. Notification No 82, March 1885 has revised with the provision that candidates must have a certificate of proficiency of particular language from a government or aided school. The new guideline provided that the applicants have to produce a certificate of proficiency only. They must be able to read, write and speak the Assamese, English and Bengali language.

Table no.1.1 reflects the advanced educational position of the Bengalis of the Surma Valley. By then Assamese had not made progress in the prescribed educational system

²⁸File 10460 of 1899, Notification no.21, 26 January 1889, ASR).

for government posts. Assam was attached to the Eastern Bengal in 1905 containing the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam

Table No:2.2

The State of Higher Education in Assam, 1893-99

Bachelor of Arts Examination	1893-94	1894-95	1896-97	1897-98	1898-99	1899
From Surma Valley	8	13	16	6	4	5
From Brahmaputra Valley	1	3	4	2	3	4

Source: Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam 1874-82; 1893-1900, Government of Assam, Shillong.

Immigration and Ethnic Diversity:

The colonial transformation resulted in the continuous flow of immigration and its sheer numerical strength posed a significant threat to the completion of the Assamese nationality. The immigrant groups became the marginal factor that could permanently seal the fact of either of the two groups. The colonial government preferred the immigrant labors for the very simple reason that the Assamese native people were not ready to work according to the criteria set by the colonial government. The increasing number of the labors was need of the growing economy. The Transport of Native Labourers Act of 1865 allowed the planters to recruit workers through Arkattis, the professional recruiters. They were the licensed contractors to transport the workers. There was an allegation that the Arkattis transported the laborers by making them false promises. Often they would mix drugs into drinks of the villagers and thus carried them off. Their responsibilities ended with the recruitment of the laborers only as after the recruitment, they were to have no contact with the recruited workers. The Act was amended in 1865 and again in 1870 with the introduction of the Sardari system of recruitment. Under this system, new recruitment was targeted with the help of the already recruited labors. The working labors were sent back to their village or to their native areas to persuade others to join as plantation workers. Basically, they targeted the areas like Bihar, Bengal, and Eastern United Provinces. The Act of 1870 abolished

the "minimum wage" and created "Garden Sardar" divided in to licensed and unlicensed. Contractor license was to recruit more than 20 workers and the unlicensed referred to the operation without restriction. At the behest of the planter's free labor according to the Act 1873, however, failed to please them.²⁹Laborers resorted to ruthless exploitation without fundamental right and care. ³⁰ The government then targeted the wasteland of Assam and also emphasized on the settling immigrants in the cultivable wastelands. ³¹ The expansion of jute cultivation in Assam also led massive peasant inflow outside the tea plantation. The Chambers of Commerce, Calcutta, recognized jute cultivation in Assam with the expert peasants from the East Bengal.³²On 2nd June 1897, the immigration policies were brought out by the Chief Commissioner recognizing the colonization of the wastelands of Assam. The East Bengal farmer settlers increased to 2, 26, 00 from 1, 95,800 according to the census report 1911-20 and 1921-30. During the same time period, traders from East Bengal increased from 25,000 to 84,600. The first official census was in 1871-72 and recorded population of Assam at 19, 17,000. In the 1901 census, the population increased to 26, 19,000 and in 1911, the figure increased to 31, 08,000.

Table 2.3: Immigration into Brahmaputra Valley 1881-1931.

Decade	Clerks and other professional men from Bengal	Farmers from Surma Valley
1881-90	1.20	Nil
1891-1900	1.00	Nil
1901-10	5.20	1.00
1911-20	13.70	15.00
1921-31	15.50	12.00

Source: Census of India, Reports on Assam for respective years.

²⁹ Sen, Samita. "Commercial Recruiting and Informal Intermediation: Debate over the Sardari System in Assam Tea Plantations, 1860–1900." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2010, pp. 3–28.

³⁰ Between 1860 and 1861, there were 2,272 workers recruited for the Assam Company of whom nearly 11 per cent died on way to the plantations. Of the 84,915 recruited for the plantations. Of the 84,915 recruited for the plantation during the three years beginning May 1863, there 30,000 died before June 1866. (Edgar, 1873 cited in Guha, 1977).

³¹ Kar. Makhan. Waste Land Settlement Policy in Assam 1826-1900, in *Social Action*, Vol., 30 July – September 1980, p.302.

³² See, Proceedings of the Meeting of Bengal Chamber of Commerce, 29 April 1897, RP, July 1897, no.46, ASR.

Table 2.4: Immigrant Farm Settlers from Bengal. 1881-1931

Year	Farm Settlers from Bengal	Total form Bengal
1881	1,751	2,623
1891	17,250	19,041
1901	37,250	39,435
1911	1,06,326	1,20,220
1921	2,65,242	3,01,157

Source: H.Goswami, "Migration of Landless Labourers from East Bengal to Assam valley 1881-1931", in Assam Economic Journey, vol.2, no 1, March 1976,pp.72-80

Table 2.5: Urban Population of Assam: 1881-1931

(In eighteen towns, each with more than 5,000 population in 1931)

Year	Towns having above 10,000 population in 1931	Towns having 10,000 population or less in 1931	Total
1881	62,612	24,057	86,669
1891	63,803	30,312	94,115
1901	71,711	35,284	1,06,995
1911	82,941	42,654	1,25,595
1921	1,01,028	49,350	1,50,378
1931	1,30,793	65,435	1,96,228

Source: Census of India, 1931, Vol.3, Assam Part II, p.8.

The decadal population growth rate was 5.7 in the Brahmaputra valley during 1891-1901.³³ The low decadal population growth during 1891-1901 was because of the high death rate. Also, an unequal male-female ratio is responsible for the same. During 1901, there was 923 female against 1000 male. In 1911, the female number was 919, in

³³Census of India, 1901,vol.4,Assam.

1921 it was 900 and in 1931 there was 879 female.³⁴ During 1881-1900, the birth rate was 32.26 and the death rate was 34.83.³⁵

The population of the Goalpara subdivision was decreased by 18 percent during 1891-1991 and of Kamrup by 1.6 percent.³⁶ During this period the growth of the indigenous population was almost stagnant. Even in the next decade, the condition was the same. In Kamrup district population decreased 7.1 percent.

Meanwhile, the non-indigenous population increased from less than a lakh in 1972, with the population of 15 lakhs to 5 - 6 lakhs in 1901 when the total population was 22 lakhs. Assam, as receiving economy, welcomed immigration even by the indigenous gentry. But then migration from the Eastern Bengal continued to the outlet of Assam and it resulted in the highest annual growth of population other than Travancore.³⁷ There was a massive inflow of population to the wastelands of Assam from the populated Eastern Bengal districts, see table 1.4. The low population density of Assam (Table 1.3) and the availability of the vast wasteland showed a significant change in the migratory inflow to the province.

Table: 2.6: Density of Population per sq .mile (Brahmaputra Valley) 1872-1961

District	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1941	1951	1961
Kamrup	146	167	164	153	173	198	328	387	542
Darrang	69	80	90	99	110	170	263	326	383
Nowgong	68	82	90	68	79	108	299	409	559
Sibsagar	64	79	96	120	138	162	301	351	437
Lakhimpur	27	40	56	82	104	143	219	265	317
Goalpara	98	113	115	117	152	193	254	278	385

Source: Census of India, Assam Census Report and District Census Handbook, cited in Amalendu Guha, 1977. Appendix 3, p.279.

³⁴Census of India ,1971, Series 3, Assam.

³⁵Census of India, 1901, vol 4. Assam.

³⁶Census of India Report, 1991.

³⁷S.K.Das, "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam". 1891-1981. *EPW*, 10 May 1980.

Table 2.7: Population Density per Sq. Miles 1881-1901

Year	Mymensingh	Pabna	Bogra	Rangpur
1881	3,055,239(483)	1,310,604 (714)	6,86,974 (505)	20,79,064 (600)
1891	3,472,186 (548)	1,362,223 (740)	7,64,461(562)	20,65,464 (591)
1901	3,915,068 (618)	1,420,461 (772)	8,54,553 (629)	21,54,181 (617)

Source: Government of Bengal, *Twenty Years' Statistics of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1905.

With the flow of immigrant Bengali population from the East Bengal, Assam not only faced significant demographic change, but it also led an extreme ethnic redistribution. The primary concern for Assamese society was not about the increasing population, instead of increasing domination of a particular ethnolinguistic community.

Table 2.8: Growth of Muslim Population, Net Migration from Bengal and Net Migration of Eastern Bengal from Settlers in the Valley by Inter censual Decades 1881-1931.

Census Year	Muslim Population	The natural increase in Mid-Census population	Net Migration of Muslims from Bengal	Net migration from Bengal (all religion)
1881	2,14,510	---	---	---
1891	2,40,352	9,097	16,745	19,700
1901	2,48,249	9,210	17,107	20,126
1911	3,56,022	35,652	72,121	84,848
1921	5,83,686	23,493	1,89,171	2,22,554
1931	9,43,352	86,054	2,18,260	2,56,776

Source: Census of India, Report on Assam for Respective Years (Religion Chapters). Also, Sajal Nag, op.cit. 2017, p 215

In the Brahmaputra valley, the continuous increase of the Bengali population was a significant concern for the Assamese people. They were terrified at the prospect of the losing their majority status. As the immigrants were mostly Muslim, Assamese people were also concern about religious identity. In the Surma Valley with districts of Sylhet and Cachar, there was already domination of the Bengali population.

Ethnic Distrust: Increasing Bengali Population

With the territorial rearrangement, a dynamic anti-partition movement started in Bengal. People protested against the amalgamation of Bengal with Assam, with whom they had profound differences socially or in linguistic terms. Of course, during the whole process, there was not much enthusiasm among Assamese people.³⁸ Leaders from Assamese community like Manik Chandra Barua and Jagganath Barooah supported the Curzon's plan. ³⁹The support base for the anti-partition movement in Assam confined to only the urban areas where Bengali population predominated. Gradually the protest expanded to other areas, press and politico-social organization participated actively in protesting against Curzon's plan. As a result of the partition Assamese population become a minority in the in the newly amalgamated province. Assam was affected most by the partition as it was attached to the East Bengal districts with already existing Bengali speaking districts. The capital of the province was transferred to Dacca. As a result, the Assamese population became a minority. It was a significant threat to the elite Assamese community as they could imagine that they might lose their political voice to the dominant section of the province. Fear of losing a job was already there. The Surma valley Bengali elite protest against the government decision and wanted to go back to the Chief Commissionerate. The Surma valley Bengali people were enjoying the political and economic edge over their Assamese counterpart. As a result, they didn't want to tag with the other districts of the Bengal. The Surma Valley Bengali people didn't want to be tagged with the districts of Bengal as they were enjoying certain political and economic privileges over Assamese counterpart. In 1911, eventually, the partition was annulled, and Assam reverted to the Chief Commissioner's Provinces. The protest broke out in Sylhet against the decision of tagging them once again to the Assamese, since they had no similarities with the Assamese people. Public meeting held on 15 April 1912, under the president of Anjuman-e-Islamia, Syed Abdul Majid demanded the Separation of Sylhet from Assam.⁴⁰ In 1917, memorandum presented to the Secretary of States and the Viceroy, Lord Harding. The section of the Muslim people in the Surma valley desired the

³⁸See, Barpujari, H.K., *Political History of Assam*, vol.1. Guwahati:1977, also, Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, New Delhi:1973.

³⁹Barpujari:1977.

⁴⁰Referred in B.N. Choudhury, Assam Gazettes, 13 August 1924, Motion for the Separation of Sylhet from Assam in the Council. Again in another meeting under the chairmanship of Nawab Samsul Huda, passed a resolution recommending the amalgamation of Sylhet with Bengal.

retention of Sylhet with Assam as the prospect of the Muslims outnumbering Hindus in the province could put them in a privileged position.⁴¹The colonial government feared that any move of modification of the new province would adversely affect the interest of the tea industry.⁴²And there was a declaration from the Chief Commissioner that the government had no intention of making any modification in the territorial boundaries of the province of Assam⁴³Such a declaration could not stop people from protesting against the government decision. February 1918, Rai Bahadur B.N.Sharma moved a resolution in the Imperial Council asking for the redistribution of the rural areas and the constitution of the provinces.On 6 February 1918, Kamini Kumar Chandra, a leader of the Surma valley raised the issue in the Imperial council.⁴⁴ He argued that Sylhet contains one-sixth of the total Bengali population and about ninety-two percent of them are Bengali speaking. Ethnologically they belong to the Bengali race, thus they are anxiously trying to be united with Bengal. On 6 February 1918, Surendra Nath Banerjee argued in the Imperial Council supporting Kamini Chandra's view. He explained,

After all Sylhet was asking for nothing more than the legitimate fulfillment of the policy enunciated in the memorial dispatch of Lord Hardinge of August 1917 which is to organize the Bengali speaking district into one consolidated unit and the time comes to give effect to it.⁴⁵

Girish Chandra Nag, representative of Sylhet in the first Assembly published a booklet titled "Back to Bengal" tracing the history of separation of Sylhet and projected the plight of its people.⁴⁶Sylhet Bengal Reunion League formed in 1920, and thus movement for reunion gained momentum. The league sent a delegation to the Viceroy on his visit to Assam. The provincial government urged the government not to take any decision on the issue without considering the opinion of the local tea association as it feared that if Sylhet were separated, it would result in its separation from its sister tea district of Cachar.⁴⁷July 1924, a resolution was moved by B.N.Choudhury on the

⁴¹ Home Political A, Calcutta Records, 1912, no. 1, Earle to Hardinge, 31 July 1912.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ AICC Files no. 3, 1945, NMML.

⁴⁵ Surendra Nath Banerjee speech in the Imperial Council, 6 February 1918.

⁴⁶ Sajal Nag: 2017 p 131.

⁴⁷ B.N.Choudhury, Assam Gazettes, 13 August 1924, Motion for the Separation of Sylhet from Assam in the Council. Also, see Sajal Nag, op.cit.

separation of Sylhet. Eventually, the resolution was moved by the members of the Cachar for the transfer of Cachar to Bengal along with Sylhet. The resolution accepted by 28 to 12 votes. The Surma Valley Political Conference, 1926 recommended for the inclusion of Sylhet and Cachar in Bengal although the resolution was defeated. From the second decade of the twentieth century, the demand to transfer Sylhet to Bengal was very strongly raised by the Assamese community compared to the Bengali community.

The forceful transformation of the economy under the colonial regime has broken down the self-sufficiency of the Assam economy. Ahom nobility and the emerging petty-bourgeois section reduced to the poor class by curbing their privileges out, as a result, they had to depend upon the white-collar jobs. Assamese thus lost to Bengalis and found themselves in a difficult situation. The transfer of three Bengali districts to Assam further worsens the situation. Fear was that Bengali might claim the status of the sons of the soil status in Assam. On the other hand, people of the Surma valley hold Assamese people responsible for their separation from their motherland and thus ethnic grouping was taking place. Ethnic cleavages were also reflected in the regional context, while Surma valley projected as the area of Bengalis, Brahmaputra valley was an area of Assamese. Bengali functionaries of the colonial government operated major decisions of the government like a collection of the revenue, the imposition of the new taxes or confiscation of property at the failure of paying tax. The permanent presence of the Bengali immigrants resulted in an undesired societal biculturalism and thus posed serious challenge towards Assamese nationality. Job seeking people to land seeking farmers –the massive migratory inflow continued despite protests. Immigration soon assumed a threatening position. There was significant growth of the Muslim population in the Brahmaputra valley. As argued by Udayan Mishra,

The Muslim population in the Brahmaputra Valley from a mere 9 percent in 1881 to 19 percent in 1931 and 23 percent in 1941. For instances, in the Barpeta subdivision (later district) Muslim who was only 0.1 percent of the population in 1911 grew to 49 percent in 1941.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Misra, Udayan. "Immigration and identity transformation in Assam." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1999): 1264-1271.

Even without immigration, Assam is the land of extreme diverse culture, linguistic and religious identity. ⁴⁹However, the census data can't be read an indicator of a "pre-political and static objective reality without ethnic diversity."It reflet's grouped changeable subjective ethnic identification.⁵⁰

Table No: 2.9

Decadal Population Variation in Assam 1901-41

Year	Population (Assam)	Percentage of Decadal Variation
1901	32,89,680	---
1911	38,48,617	16.99
1921	46,36,980	20.48
1931	55,60,371	19.91
1941	66,94,790	20.40

Source : Census Report,19 51, cited in Sajal, Nag,2017, p 358.

Table:2.10

Population Growth Rate in Assam and India (Percentage) 1901-41

Years	Assam	India
1901-11	16.8	5.7
1911-21	20.2	-0.3
1921-31	20.1	11.0
1931-41	20.5	14.2
1941-51	20.1	13.3
1951-61	35.0	21.6
1961-71	35.2	24.8

Source: Myron Weiner, "The Political Demography of Assam's Anti-Immigrant Movement," in *Population and Development Review*, 9:2 June 1983. 283.

⁴⁹1971 Census classified population of Assam into 76 languages and dialects and residual category of 48 other language and dialect. The number of speakers according to 1971 census were ,. Assamese 8,904,917 60.89, Bengali 2,882,039 19.71, Hindi 792,481 5.42,. Bodo 533,713 3.65,.Gorkhali/Nepali 349,116 2.39,.Mikir 191,354 1.3, Miri/Mishing 177,226 1.21,. Oriya 150,196 1.03,. Manipuri/Meitei 87,167 0.60, Santali 86,086 0.59, Munda 76,894 0.53, Garo 76,004 0.52, Others 317,959 2.17.

⁵⁰See, Sanjib Barua.Immigration, Ethnic Conflict, and Political Turmoil--Assam, 1979-1985 . Asian Survey.Vol.26,No.11 (Nov.1986),pp.1184-1206.

Origin of the Assamese language: Debate between Tagore and Bezbarua

Interestingly, in spite of emerging differences between Bengalis and Assamese overtimes, both the parties shared a cordial relation. In 1874, when Assam became the part of the Chief ministerial province, Bengali language was introduced as the medium of instruction in the new province. It was also the time when a large number of Bengalis migrated to Assam as colonial administration office bearer and also as school teachers. Numbers of educated youth had to stay at Calcutta for their higher education. Often Bengali and Assamese relations ended in matrimony. Lakshminath Bezbarua⁵¹, one of the leading figures in modern Assamese literature, married to Pragyasundari Devi, niece of Rabindranath Tagore. The very personal debate⁵² between Bezbarua and Tagore on Assamese and Bengali language has strong political ramifications. The close resemblance between two languages made the people of Bengal believe that Assamese to be a dialect of Eastern Bengal.⁵³ Bezbarua often faced a situation where different groups tried to prove their point that Assamese was a dialect only.⁵⁴ Tagore argued that there was a “thin veil” between Bengali and Assamese languages. Tagore didn’t agree with the point raised by Brown that Assamese phonetics is closely related to the Hindustani. He rather argued that the dissimilarities between the Assamese and Bengali language area negligible. It is like the difference between the languages of Chittagong from the Bengali language. Tagore further argued that it was the colonial divide and rule policy by which they wanted to develop permanent differences between "our languages" by encouraging the development of local languages, i.e., Assamese and Oriya language. Here he cited the example of Irish and the Welsh, where English becomes their natural language although their spoken language was not a dialect of the British language. He considered that such instances may happen in India too by unifying languages belong to one family and thus one single language should be the lingua franca. Bezbarua published an

⁵¹Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864-1938), known as Sahityarathi (Charioteer of Literature) was the celebrated pioneer of the modern Assamese literature. He was one of the literary stalwarts of the Assamese literature renaissance. His most of the writings were published in *Jonaki* (1889), the famous Assamese journal. He wrote poems, short stories, stories, novels, humor and also was a great translator. Above all he has written the anthem of Assam.

⁵²The debate between Bezbarua and Tagore has been widely discussed by Samir Roy Chaudhury, *Bhasha Bitarka: Rabindranath Bonam Lakshminath in Mahanagar*, August 1983.

⁵³Samir Roy Chaudhury, *Bhasha Birarka: Rabindranath Bonam Lakshminath in Mahanagar*, August 1983.

⁵⁴He has stated in his memoir “*Mur Jiban Xuwaran, 1944*” that he would rather not participate in “unpleasant controversies”. He has mentioned explicitly that the leader of his opponent group was “Rabi uncle” (Rabindranath Tagore)

article titled “AsomiyaBhasha” in *Punya*⁵⁵, October –November issue. He argued, “in favor of the right of the Assamese language for self-determination.”⁵⁶ He further argued that Bengali and Assamese were two separate entities.⁵⁷ There were many who considered Assamese merely a dialect originated from the Bengali language. Padmanath Bidyabinode, Dinesh Das, and many more scholars subscribed to that view⁵⁸. Eventually, the Assamese students in Calcutta founded the Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha (ABUSS) with the objective of regenerating Assamese language, literature, and society. Lakshminath Bezbarua along with Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Hemchandra Goswami were leading member of the organisation. ABUSS initiated the revival of the Assamese language. In the following years, Bengali language emerged as one of the first and pioneer modern Indian language. The Bengali language was considered as the chauvinist and expansive by nationalism Assamese. To counter the narrative of the Bengali people that Assamese was part of Bengali language, Assamese counterpart adopted diverged measures. Assamese countered such expansion of the Bengali language not only with literature and cultural development and sometimes with a counter expansionist campaign. In that context, one can refer Benudhar Rajkhowa, prominent poet, writer, dramatist, claimed that the Sylheti was a dialect of Assamese language.

Colonial Measures and Ethnic Autonomy:

1911 Census reported the growing immigration as the silent invasion of Assam. The water-logged, wasteland, riverside belt was occupied by the peasants from East Bengal. Immigration was a welcoming phenomenon for the Colonial government and thus was an essential factor in the Raj Economy. Line system was adopted in 1920 was an administrative device to control the clash of interest when the immigrants mostly occupied the area held by the autochthones. It was an administrative measure for the

⁵⁵ *Punya* journal was edited by Pragyasundari Devi. Another article titled “Ashamer Katha” was published in *Ashwin*, September-October, 1898. Bezbarua in his article published in *Punya* expressed his dissatisfaction over many points. *Ashwin*’s article argued why Bengali language could be introduced in Assam. Although Bezbaruareacted very strongly to Tagore, there family relation never affected by this debate. Infact, Tagore was perhaps a little emotional, because despite the correction made by Bezbarua, Tagore never rectified them. see, Atual Hazarika, 1968, Usharanjan Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Aru Asom*, 2001, Bezbarua, Mur Jivan Xuwaran, 1944.

⁵⁶ SajalNag, op.cit.

⁵⁷ Article titled “Bangla Bhasha o AshamiBhashaOvinnoNohoy?”

⁵⁸ Dinesh Chandra Das has written explicitly on how use of Assamese was not a good sign for the development of the Bengali literature. PadmanathBidyabinode, the president of the Bengal Literary Conference, 1909, Goalpara declared that Assamese was not a language rather it was a dialect.

protection of the land of the indigenous people. Under this system, a line was drawn in the districts to settle the immigrants in specified areas. The mobilization of the Congress helped growing political consciousness among the tribal community, and that gave impetus to the emergence of the tribal associations. Chutiya, Moran, Kachari etc came out as an organized manner. Kalichman Brahma and Sitanath Brahma Choudhury were very active for the cause of the tribal community. Line System demarcated two district areas and no occupation of land by the immigrants was allowed beyond that line. First introduced in Nowgong district, the Line System expanded in most districts in the upper Assam. The Assamese people demanded a firm policy to prevent the flow of immigration into the wasteland. A resolution was moved by Mahadev Sharma, on 23 July 1927 to protect the wetlands from the immigrant settlers. The resolution recommended for a committee to study the issuing district wise and to adopt preventive measures accordingly. However, the resolution got rejected. In 1928; all-party committee conferred its view on positive colonization policy primarily on revenue consideration. The committee consisted of five Indian members and four British members argued that the administrative control over the process of natural migration. The Colonization policy initiated by the colonial government derived its legitimacy from the all-party conference. In 1924, colonization officer appointed at Nawgaon district to look after the immigrant settlement issue. In 1928, the commission stated that the line system was the official policy for the restricting and regulating land settlement with immigrants. Meanwhile, Simon Commission, 1929 provided tribal people a scope to put forward their demands and grievances for the first time. Commission interviewed representatives from different sections of the society. The commission interviewed representatives from the “primitive and the backward tribes”, also accepted the memorandum submitted by the Bodo Community of the Goalpara district, memorandum by Kachari Yubok Sammilan and many organizations.⁵⁹ Many organization submitted a memorandum to the commission demanding protection of their interest. Many communities also demanded separate representatives in the local council. The Bodo community reservation of a seat in the Central Legislature. They complained that the benefit of the reforms was enjoyed by the upper caste only and

⁵⁹The representatives were Sonadhar Das , Representative BaniaSamaj, Raj Saheb Pyari Mohan Das , representative Mahisyas, NilaKanta Hazarika , representative Kaivartas, Jogesh Chandra Nath , representative Yogia, Mahi Chandra Miri, and Mahi Chandra Miri representative of Miri, Jogesh Chandra Nath , representative Yogi, Jadav Charan Nath , representative of Bodo, Mahendra Lal Das , representative of Lalungs and Mikirs , Ramesh Chandra Das.

thus the backward communities had been deprived.⁶⁰ Tribal leadership urged people to focus on education for better progress and better opportunity. Benudhar Rajkhowa, the president of the Assam Kachari Yubak Sammilan in 1929 appealed for the opening up schools in the villages and interior areas with the effort of the local people. Awareness against the immigration was carried out by the regional leaders. Nilomoni Phukan, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury asserted the protest and agitation to save Assam from the immigrants. Ambikagiri was the founder of the organization, Association for Conservation of the Assamese in 1926. With the appeal of “Assamese race is in danger”, they organized people and aware them about the consequences of the huge flow of the immigrant settlers in Assam. Publication of the census report,1931 added fear complex to the indigenous people on the issue of the immigrant settlement. C.C.Mullan, a British Civil Servant, presented the census report, 1931 stating that the districts of Nawgaon, Kamrup,and Barpeta subdivision were completely conquered by the immigrants. There was no place for the indigenous people in those districts. It aggravated the fear complex not only those particular districts but also in the entire Assam. Early twentieth century marked the emergence of the Tribal League in 1933. The Tribal League represented a single monolithic notion of all the plain tribes such as the Kacharies, Lalung, Miris, Rabha, Mikir. The League considered the Line System as the colonial intervention to safeguard their land. In the fight against visible competitor Bengalis, Assamese leadership paid little attention towards the tribes and ethnic groups of the region who too were undergrowing colonial modernization and were readying themselves to claim their rightful position.

Conclusion:

The demand for the transfer of Sylhet and Cachar to Bengal was largely based on the notion that the Bengalis were already in a majority in Assam if the population of the Surma valley districts was taken into account. In the Brahmaputra valley also, Bengalis were half of the Assamese population. The continuing flow of immigrant Bengalis was a major concern for the Assamese people. The colonial effort of the forceful transformation of the existing arrangement invited deep ethnic differences between Bengalis and Assamese. The territorial reorganization exercised by the British didn't

⁶⁰ Basumatari . Binay Khunur (ed.),The Plains Tribes Before the Simon Commission, Cited in Sajal Nag:2017.

take into account different linguistic, cultural, ethnic elements. The colonial administration encouraged significant numbers of immigration into the wastelands for the purpose of raising more revenue and thus posed a great threat to the indigenous identity of the region. Although in 1920, the government introduced the Line System as a measure of protecting tribal, the system didn't work properly as it was never implemented in a strict manner. People of Assam living with multiple tribal and ethnic identities faced sudden threat, and competition to its "culture, number and hegemony" from Bengalis, a migrant community, who "due to their head start in modernization thrived under colonial conditions",⁶¹ and in the process of reclaiming their hegemony, Assamese leadership completely ignored other ethnic groups.

⁶¹SajalNag,op.cit.

Chapter Three

Constitution Assembly Debates and the Making of the Six Schedules

This chapter will discuss the Bardoloi Sub Committee Report along with the Constituent Assembly debate for the formulation of the Six Schedule to explore the role of Gopinath Bardoloi for construction of region and to discuss what his policies towards various ethnic groups were? As the chairman of the Tribal subcommittee, Bardoloi tried to accommodate the tribal aspirations by formulating the Sixth Schedule while at the same time satisfying the indigenous Assamese and tribal sentiments. However, the protection of the plain tribes was not in similar line. The Sixth Schedule comprises two sets of tribal areas of undivided Assam. The first set covers the United Khasi and the Jaintia Hills districts (excluding Shillong), Lusai Hills, Garo Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills, and Mikir Hills. The second set covers the North East Frontier Tracts and the Naga Tribal Area. while the first set of areas today comprise the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and parts of Assam and the second categories consist mostly of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and a portion of Nagaland. The administration of the latter group put under the responsibility of the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the Indian president, since these areas under the colonial administration were considered to be not quite ready. The Six Scheduled provision was a necessary arrangement for Assam considering its background. As a region, it was, more “other” compared to the other tribal areas; more excluded during the British Rule and culturally, linguistically, geographically it was more peripheral than the Hindi core. ¹ But then it can't be seen as the only criteria for development of that particular region. The Sixth Schedule, as argued by Udayon Mishra, can be considered as the liberal approach towards the aspirations of the tribal communities.

But in the process of the protection for the tribal people, Bardoloi, and other Assamese leaders were motivated by the hope that in the long run, these tribal communities would ultimately merge with the greater Assamese

¹Young, M . Crawford *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* .Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976),. 287.

nationality whose major constituent would obviously be the Assamese nationality whose major constituent would obviously be the Assamese – speaking segment.²

North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub Committee:

The five members committee under the leadership of Gopinath Bardoloi undertook an extensive tour of North East India and studied very comprehensively with extensive interviews in different stages of the society. Because of the difficult communication and bad weather, the committee could not visit the Garo Hills and Jawai Sub-division, Khasi Hill. Committee collected information from the representatives of the Garo Hills District at Guwahati. Also interacted with some of the villagers near the Goalpara Road. The members of the committee were Rup Nath Brahma, Mayang Nokcha, Rev. J. M. Nicholas Roy, A. V. Thakkar. Mayang Nokcha replaced Aliba Imti, the previous member from Naga Hills. The Committee collected data basically visiting the district headquarters or the tract. Two members from each tribe interviewed excluding the Frontier Tracts and Frontier Areas, as Kezhol, an Angami Naga and the representatives of the Naga Council resigned during the final meeting at Shillong. However, the committee faced criticism for not consulting the Superintendent of the Lusai Hills. The district conference that was convened by the Superintendent of the Lusai Hills was representatives of the whole district. The Mizo Union has boycotted the election to the body that consisted twenty representatives along with the Superintendent himself. It was the only representative body of the Lusai hills at that time. In that context, this could not be regarded as the body that represented the whole district, rather, it was a representative of a section of people, the Committee justified. In Nagaland because of the Naga National Council led extremism, the committee was not successful in carrying out discussion to the full extent. The committee claimed their proposal corresponded to the spirit of the Warkha Resolution of the Naga National Council, June 1946.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, the Order-in-Council divided the Excluded and the Partially Excluded Areas of Assam. The Excluded Areas covered the following areas-

²Misra. Udayon. "Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 21, 1999, pp. 1264–1271.

The North East Frontier (Sadiys, Balipara, and Lakhimpur).

Tracts –The Naga Hills District.

The Lusai Hills District.

The North Cachar Hills Sub-Division of the Cachar District.

The Sadiya Frontier Tract is between the Tirap Frontier Tract on the northeast and the Subansiri river on the west. The Sadiya tract was falling into two three districts. Towards the west, it was up to the valley of the Dibang or Siang with Abor tribes. The Dibang valley in the center inhabited with the tribes like,Chulikata, Mishimi or Idu. Areas beyond the Inner Line inhabited by 40,000 Idu, 250,000 Abor and 25,000 Digaru and 2,000 Hampton. The Trip Frontier Tract covered the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and also the Naga people towards the Burmese territory. Here the political officer was also in charge of a portion of the Naga tribal areas towards Burma. The Naga Hill District, an area of 4,289 square miles, surrounded the by Manipur on the South, Naga areas on the East, Sibsagar district on the West. The Naga National Council passed a resolution on 16 May 1946, expressing their approval to form part of Assam and India. The Lusai Hill District area, with 8,142 square miles lies to the south of the Surma Valley, the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the south-east. The Lusai hill separates Burma from the state of Tripura and Chittagong hills of Bengal. The North Cachar Hills area covers 1,888 square miles with different tribes. There was no intermingling of population among the tribes. Within the Excluded Areas, the Provincial Ministry has no Jurisdiction, and the revenue expended in this area is not subject to, the vote of the provincial legislature. Areas fall under this category are diverse in many ways.Only the Lusai Hills has one common language while every tribe in the other districts have their own communicative ways

The Partially Excluded Areas included –

The Garo Hills Districts.

The Mikir Hills (In the Nawgong and Sibsagar Districts).

The British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantt.

The Garo Hill Districts covered 3,152 square miles areas and the population was 233,569 according to the 1941 census. It constituted for the watershed for the Surma Valley and the Brahmaputra Valley. People in the Garo Hills are Tibeto Burman origin. Garo, the major tribe of the hill district, is highly democratic where Ntookma, the head or chairman resolves the dispute. Garo wanted all the Garo inhabited villages united into a common home. The Mikir Hills District, with about 4,400 square miles area had a population of 150,000. It was in between two districts, Nawgaon and Sibsagar. The Jaintia Hills district was formerly part of the Jaintia kingdom. The Khasi and Jaintia hills covered a large territory between Garo Hills in the west and the North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills on the East. Only Khasi tribe speaks the Mon-Khmerlanguage.

The total tribal³ population of Assam was 2,484,996 according to the Census report 1941, and the excluded and the partially excluded areas had a population of 863,248. The States have comparatively less revenue and were dependent for a good deal of support from the political officer in their relations with their peoples. In the partially excluded areas, the Committee stated that Khasi was the most advanced and the Mikir the least.⁴ The people in the partially excluded areas, situated between the Surma valley and the Brahmaputra valley were much more in contact with the plain people. From the development perspective, the committee found that the Partially Excluded areas, specifically Mikir and the Garo Hills came the last. The Committee also found that the Hill people did not lack in political consciousness either. In Naga Hills, an interim government of the Naga People under the protection of the benevolent guardian power was demanded, who would provide funds for the development and defense for ten years. The Garo Hills, the draft constitution required all powers of the government except provincial governance in specific areas like higher education, medical aid other than defense, taxation, and communication. Not much demand on the part of the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills. The committee referred to these

³There are arguments for and against the persistence of the term 'tribe' and the category 'tribal'. Nongbri (2003, p. 88) argues that although tribal communities have widely diverse origins, languages and ethnicities, the use of the term has 'given their identity a kind of concreteness that it lacked in the past'. Xaxa (1999) supports this viewpoint and argues that the term that was imposed upon these communities has become internalized by tribal groups to mark their identity and pursue collective rights. McDuaie-Ra, D. (2007). Anti-development or identity crisis? Misreading civil society in Meghalaya, India. *Asian Ethnicity*, 8(1), 43-59.

⁴Bardoloi Committee Report, p. 6

areas as the least vocal and advanced areas. Khasi Hills demanded the federation of the state. Politically, the region was not experienced at that point of time as the only Municipality of Shillong had statutory local self-governing bodies. However, in general terms, the tribal village council were democratically elected body. Appointment of the tribal headmen was by common consent except the Lushai was it was the hereditary head. The region's diversity can analyze the following data. (Table 1 and Table 1.1)

Table No: 3.1

Communities of the Urban Population (10,000 of Urban Population):

Natural Division	Hindus	Muslim	Christians	Tribes	Jains	Others
Assam	7,157	1,749	86	529	77	42
Brahmaputra Valley	7,400	2,132	105	168	149	46
Surma Valley	6,534	3,251	69	112	28	6
Hill District and Frontier Tracts	5,420	787	198	8,451	18	175
Manipur	9,483	233	15	245	16	5

Source: Census Report, 1941. Vol, IX

Table No: 3.2

Communities of the Rural Population (10,000 of Urban Population):

Natural Division	Hindus	Muslim	Christian	Tribes	Jains	Others
Assam	4,021	3,234	61	2,665	12	15
Brahmaputra	4,801	2,294	56	2,824	4	18

Valley						
Surma Valley	3,593	5,710	18	674	7	5
Hill District and Frontier Tracts	585	134	9	9,230	...	42
Manipur	5,070	661	620	3,647	...	2

Source: Census Report, 1941. Vol, IX.

Observations of the Committee:

Some of the critical comments made by the Committee regarding specific fields like land, customs, resources, mines, and minerals, the regional council give immense scope to understand the specificity of the region and the tribal people of the particular areas. They are distinct in many ways, from the social custom to the practice of own tribal form of worship, animism. For example, the Khasi and the Garos have a matrilineal system; the Lusai have a hereditary chief, Ao Nagas have Tatar, the council of elders; Laws of succession in case of Lusai goes to the youngest son of the family while in case of Garo, it is the youngest daughter. The tribal population had the fear of exploitation in the hand of the plain people and anxiety about losing land undoubtedly mattered for special provision. Hence, the committee suggested that the Hill people should have the most substantial possible protection for their property and also for the protection of the immigrants into their areas for the agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. The committee also read that the hill people will not be confident for their protection if protective measures extended in the hands of the Provincial Government. The Committee recommended that the Legislative powers of the local council should not cover the reserved forests. However, the needs of the native people should be taken into account. The emphasized was upon the centralized management of the forest and also the engagement of the hill people in the areas like the appointment of the forest staff, granting contracts and leases. The Committee also observed that the control of the jhuming should leave to a local council, who would be guided by the expert opinion. It is the right of the tribes to decide whether they should have shifting cultivation or not. Of course, the Committee expressed strong concern about the

damages caused by the terraced farming. But then it has decided not to interfere as the jhumming was the part of tribals' way of life. The Interference in this might lead a trust deficit among tribal groups. The Committee argued for the least possible interference of the local customary laws practice by the tribal and also the Tribal Councils, and thus the council or the chief of the tribal will deliver justice according to their customs. The committee recommended that criminal offense should be dealt with in accordance with the local customs, except those punishable with death penalty or imprisonment. In such cases, the code of Criminal Procedure should not apply. In the case of nontribal cases, civil or criminal, regular law and the provincial government will apply. The Committee suggested that the Hill people, except the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills, should have the right on the primary school dispensaries and the areas which come under the scope of the local self-governing institution. However, there should be the provision of training for the hill people. The Council would establish with the powers of the local boards, and thus it was proposed that such Council would entrust with the powers of legislation and administration over land, forest, Agriculture. Regarding the secondary education, the Committee considered that the hill people were not prepared to look after the subject, and thus it was agreed that secondary education should have some integration with the general system of the province. They suggested that there should not be any provision for the secondary education management as thus it should be with the Provincial Council and the government of Assam. With the executive instructions, these authorities should take the necessary steps. On the issue of finance, hill districts, i.e., Naga Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, and Lushai Hills demanded that all powers of the taxation should be vested in the National Council. However, the Committee didn't accept such demands because such arrangement will make the center weak. It will leave the center with no power to levy taxes in these areas. The committee feared that a local council and a local executive would be much more susceptible and amenable to local pressure and influence to collect the tax. The most significant concern for the Hill people was the issue of outsiders, especially the non-tribal people and they were of the view that the Hill people greatly needed of protection. In that context, the Hill people attached a significant interest in the regulation like the Chin Hills Regulation. This regulation demanded pass for outsiders to enter the hill districts beyond the Inner Line areas. Also was the provision to expel the undesirable person. Hill people feared that the Provincial Government was not the proper custodian since the plain people would influence them. The Committee shared

the depth of the Hill people concern and considered that their fear of the unrestrained liberty to the outsiders to carry on money lending or other non-agricultural possessions is not without justification. Hence, the committee agreed to the fact that if the local Council decided by a majority of the three-fourths of the members, they would introduce a system of licensing for moneylenders and traders. Also, the Hill people wanted the ratification of their district boundaries so that people of the same tribes brought under joint administration. The committee, in this context, agreed for the formation of a separate commission by the Provincial government. The Committee also recommended that for the Non Tribal people living in the Hill District should not be eligible to contest in the election to the Provincial legislature. But they should be provided representation in the Local Council. The Committee referred Minority to those plain tribal people, which assimilated to the plain people. There were about 1.6 million tribal population including tea estate workers in the plains, according to the census data, 1941. These people's representation and protection, Committee suggested, should be considered by the Minorities Sub Committee. The Hill people demanded that their Council should be entitled to the revenue accruing from the exploitation of the mines and minerals. For the Committee, the best way towards the mines and minerals were to centralize the management of minerals resources in the hands of the provincial government. It should be subject to the sharing revenue, also to the condition that license and leases should be with the Provincial government. However, the consultation with the local Council is important. There was a demand from the Hill People that no provisional legislation should apply to the hills except with the approval of the Hill Council. However, the Committee observed that limited restriction should be only in case of provincial legislation which deals with subjects related to social custom and laws. The committee approved that the Legislation passed by the Provincial legislature prohibiting or restricting the consumption of any non-distilled alcoholic liquor, shall not apply to autonomous districts. Regional council or district council in the absence of the former may apply any such law to the area with or without modification. The Committee provided for the formation of the Regional Council if tribes desire so. However, local organizations argued for the separate Sub-Council for the different tribes. The Committee suggested that members of the same tribe should be brought together under one administrative setup. However, the committee acknowledged the diversity prevailed among the tribal people; diverse groups with different languages

and culture (Table 1.3). In that context, the Regional Council had the power to make laws.

The Regional Council shall have the power to make laws regarding (a) allotment ,occupation or use for agriculture ,residential or other non agricultural purposes ,or sitting apart for grazing ,cultivation ,residential or other purposes ancillary to the life of the village or town, of land other than land classed as reserved as reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation,1891 or other law on the subject applicable to the districts. (b)The management of any forest which is not reserve forest ,(c) The use of Canal or watercourses for the purposes of agriculture, (d) controlling, prohibiting or permitting the practice of jhum or other shifting cultivation ,(e) the establishment of village or town committee and council and other powers ,(f) all other matters relating to village or town management ,sanitation, watch and ward.⁵

Table No: 3.3

District, Areas, and Persons: Census 1941.

District or State	The area in sq. miles	Persons
Assam	67,359	10,930,888
British Territory	54,951	10,204,733
Surma Valley And Hill Division	24,124	4,218,875
Cachar	3,862	641,181
Sylhet	5,478	3,116,602
Khasi and Jaintia Hills (British)	2,353	118,685
Naga Hills	4,289	189,641

⁵Bardoloi Subcommittee.

Lushai Hills	8,142	152,786
Assam Valley Division	26,947	5,919,228
Goalpara	3,969	1,014,285
Kamrup	3,840	1,264,200
Darrang	2,804	736,791
Nowgong	3,898	710,800
Sibsagar	5,128	1,074,741
Lakhimpur	4,156	894,842
Garo Hills	3,152	223,569
Sadiya Frontier Tract	3,309	60,118
Balipara Frontier Tract	571	6,512

Source: Census Report, 1941(Volume IX, Assam Tables by K.W.P.Marar)

Recommendations of the Committee:

The Sub –Committee recommended for setting up District Councils in the Hill Districts. The membership of the council will be not more than forty of whom minimum one fourth shall be elected by the universal adult franchise. There shall be a separate regional council for the areas with different tribes, inhabiting within an autonomous district. The committee stated,

The District Council is an autonomous district with Regional Council shall have such powers as may be delegated by the Regional Council shall have such powers as may be delegated by the Regional Councils in addition to

the powers conferred by this constitution. (Section B of APPENDIX A, Bardoloi Committee). For the Mikir and the North Cachar Hills and District or Sub Divisional officer, as the case may be ,should be ex-officio President of the local council with Powers ,subject to the control of the Government of Assam to modify or annual resolutions or decisions of the local councils and to issue such instructions as may be necessary.⁶

The District Council should have the powers over management primary school, dispensaries and other institution which come under the purview of local self-government. In the case of the Secondary School, there should be cooperation with the Provincial Government.⁷The Council should have allotted certain financial powers, and in addition to the powers which the local bodies in regulation district enjoy, they should have the power to impose house tax, land revenue and also the tax for the management of the local forest.

The development of the Hill Districts should be as much the concern of the Federal Government as the Provincial Government. Financial assistance should be provided by the Federation to meet the deficit in the administration on the basis of the average deficit during the past three years and the cost of the development schemes should also be borne by the central Exchequer.⁸

The Provincial Government will manage the reserved forest, but then the need of the Hill people should be taken into account.⁹ The Jhuming should be discouraged; however, the initiatives should come from the tribal people. It was purely on the environment ground as it leads to the disastrous effect on climatic features. The social laws and the Custom should leave to be controlled by the tribes. ¹⁰ However, when the nontribal is involved, the case would be tried the regular law and Provincial Government should make a necessary arrangement by employing judges or circuit magistrates.

⁶Section B 5.Para 13. Bardoloi Subcommittee.

⁷Para 13 ,Section E ,Appendix A.

⁸ Para 43 ,Recommendation No 6. Bardoloi Subcommittee.

⁹Paragraph 10, Forest , P 11.

¹⁰, Para 12,Sec C ,2,Appendix A.

The Criminal offenses except those punishable with the death, transportation, and imprisonment for five years and upward should be left to be dealt with in accordance with local practice and the code of the criminal Procedure will not apply to such cases. For the serious Criminal offenses, punishable with the imprisonment for more, should be dealt with the Criminal Procedure Code. For such cases, the power should be conferred by the Provincial Government wherever suitable upon tribal councils or courts set up by the district council themselves.¹¹

The management of the mines and minerals should be centralized in the hands of the Provincial Government, but the right of the District Council to a fair share of revenue is recognized. The Governor will generally decide the issue of the revenue between the Provincial Government and the District Council.¹² There should be the creation of the Regional Council for the different tribes inhabiting an autonomous district. The tribal people of the Autonomous Council will decide the formation of the Regional Council. The Regional Council will represent the District Council as well. However, the jurisdiction of the Regional Council will extend to the Customary law, landmanagement, the court, and the village. Interestingly, the Committee recommended for the continuation of the Posa payment. The Posa system refers,

A collection of subscription for a common purpose. In this very sense, the term is well understood in Upper Assam. With regard to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh the posa was defined in the official glossary of terms as the allowance paid to certain hill tribes inhabiting the hills on the northern frontier of Assam bordering Darrang and Lakhimpur, on account of commuted blackmail, or in consideration of the abandonment by them of their claims with regards to certain duars. In general, the term posa came to be applied to all payments made to the hill tribes by the Governments.¹³

The Central Government was advised to continue to administer the Frontier Tracts and the Tribal Areas with the Government of Assam until the administration has

¹¹Para 12,Section D &F ,Appendix A.

¹² Para 16, Recommendation No 8, P 43.

¹³ JHA, B. (1996). Politics Of Posa : A Case Study Of Pre And Post Independence Scenario In Arunachal Pradesh And Assam. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*,57, 446-458

satisfactorily established.¹⁴The administration by the Non –Tribal officials should be allowed. However, the appointment should be the due proportion of hill people.¹⁵ The critical point is that Non –Tribal should not be eligible for election from the Hill constituencies which includes the Municipality and Cantonment of Shillong.¹⁶ The Non Tribal population should have representation in the local council only with their desired number of population. ¹⁷ The alteration of the boundaries to bring the people of the same tribe under the collective administration should be under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government.¹⁸The Committee also recommended that the Provincial Councils should be set up by the Governor of Assam after the consultation with local organizations. Provincial Councils will have one year term and have the power to frame their constitution and rules for the future.¹⁹

Autonomous District Council: An Institutional Arrangement

The Autonomous Council(ADC) of the Six Schedule is an exclusive arrangement for nearly 80 percent tribal population of the region. The ADC in this regard has the legislative, administrative, judicial as well as the financial power to a considerable extent for the enforcement of its development. ADC was empowered to make laws on subjects including land use and economic development policy, social customs, etc. Administering Justice is another responsible for the ADC, where the districts and regional courts are to establish in their respective territories. However, the Governor may also direct the High Court of the state for the performance of the delivering justice. ADC is vested with the responsibilities of the infrastructure improvement along with large administrative capacities. Most importantly, ADC has the right to assess and collect certain taxes.

Constitutional Assembly Debate on the Sixth Schedule:

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution didn't have a smooth passage; the draft debated for three long days (September 5,6 and 7, 1949). The Constituent Assembly debate on the Sixth Schedule can be studied from two angles, i.e., debate supporting Bardoloi and

¹⁴Section P Appendix A, Para 20 a

¹⁵Para 23, Recommendation no 15.

¹⁶Para 21 d , Section K 8 ,Appendix A, Recommendation No 13.

¹⁷Para 27, Section B2,Appendix A, Recommendation No 18.

¹⁸Para 26, Recommendation no 18,p 45.

¹⁹Appendix A. Para 29

debate opposing Bardoloi. Analysis refers that arguments advocating and opposing the formation of the six schedule areas didn't come from the diverged political or ideological positions instead of shared vocabulary based on ones socio-political notion towards the region. Secondly, a political safeguard for the tribal communities in the northeastern part of India is based on the understanding of different kinds of liberal norms. Thirdly, while the Constituent Assembly agreed upon a single notion of democracy, six scheduled debate shows that different understanding of political ideals was played an essential role in the context of protecting tribal culture and tradition.

Debate on Sixth Schedule: Opposition to Bardoloi

Kuladhar Chaliha, a Constituent Assembly member and one of the very strong opposition voice of the sixth schedule provision argued on essentially two points. Firstly, he considered Nagas are primitive tribe who have been still following their traditional way of doing justice. Chaliha, therefore alleged that it is not desirable to allow them to rule the other people of the region as the end of the day it will proceed towards anarchy. He again pointed out that, the creation of the Sixth Schedule will promote and justify a separatist tendency. He argued that the region has so very diverse identity and thus one cannot consign them to misrule, to a primitive rule. Considering the state of development of the Nagaland, Chaliha in no way ready to extend the responsibility of the law and order in the hands of the Naga people. He has questioned on the very justice system that has been practiced by the Naga people, i.e., head hunting. He argued,

We should not be frightened by these threats of some people who say that they will come down on us. This is intended to be imposed on us by the threats of some people, and we should be aware of these interested persons. There is no need to keep any Tribalstan away from us so that in times of trouble they will be helpful to our enemies.²⁰

Regarding Para.2 sub-para (5), of the committee report, regarding the administration of the autonomous district, Chaliha pointed out that how in the provision of the sixth schedule the Act of Parliament can't be implacable without the consent of the tribal people. This, according to him, is an arrangement to keep the tribal people away from

²⁰6th September 1949 Constituent Assembly of India Debates (Proceedings) - Volume IX.

the rest of the population. He has cited the conspiracy of the Communist in the whole phenomenon.

And the result will be that there will be a Communistan there. The Communists will come and they will have a free hand, as in Manipur one of the Ministers was already a Communist. Your Governor will not be able to act, your Parliament will not be able to act. If you go on like this we will have no government there. The whole Schedule is conceived in a way which is a negation of government.²¹

Chaliha was quite apprehensive regarding the allocation of the membership for the Naga Hill District. With the larger representation, he considered the tribal people including the Naga tribes were not mature enough for their rule. Therefore, he suggested to reduce the membership and also to nominate one- third members by the Governor. He stated,

The Naga Hills contain only a lakh and seventy thousand people and it contains about tribes. If you give them for every district twenty-four members it will be too much..... There are ten tribes having a population of about 1,70,000 and the villages or tribes will be about from 1,000 to 2,000 per ten tribes. They ought not to have so many members. It will be only giving cause for trouble. As such the number should be less. I should say that the number should even have been five. It should not be so much, as it will lead only to interminable quarrels and trouble to the Governor and trouble to us.²²

He also pointed out that the mechanism like the autonomous district will keep the tribal people aloof for the rest of non-tribals. Lakshminarayan Sahu strongly opposed autonomy to the Naga tribes on the ground of their backwardness. They argued that Naga tribes practice Headhunting and it is not a wise decision to leave them alone. Sahu argued,

I am working among Kanh people of Orissa, among whom there is a system of human sacrifice. That system has been abolished by law. These

²¹. CAD, Vol. IX.

²²KulaharChaliha, CAD, Vol. IX.

people also have considerably changed in this respect. But even these we have often to overlook case of such sacrifice because even now there are cases of human sacrifice. Human sacrifice is done in great secrecy. Even if we come to know of such a case, we do not arrest them. This is the right course to follow. But the people like Kanh tribe who still perform human sacrifice have been included by us in the Constitution. Then why should we free the Nagas at once ?

A section of the members opposed the formation of the District Council on the ground that it is divisive and might lead to the formation of many nations Brajeshwar Prasad stated that shouldering the responsibilities of parliamentary life into the hands of tribals is nothing but the surest method of inviting chaos. Brajesh Prasad expressed that he was not in favor of the self-determination although he believes in the principle of the most significant good of the highest number. He referred to how the principle of self-determination is responsible for spreading extreme violence. Two world wars were fought for that particular reason. This very principle, according to him, is responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. He argued,

I am opposed to the District Councils and Regional Councils because they will lead to the establishment of another Pakistan in this country. I stand second to none in my enthusiasm for social, educational and cultural advancement in the tribal areas of Assam. For it is on the achievement of these objectives that the security of the State can be guaranteed. But the step that we have taken is neither in accord with the general well-being of the tribals nor with the interests of the people of India as a whole.²³

Regarding the powers of the District Council, Kuladhar Chaliha alleged that they had allotted unimaginable powers, for example, management of any forest not being a reserved forest, use of any canal or watercourse for the agriculture. He was afraid of that condition if so desired; the tribal people can prevent anyone from using water. Brajeshwar Prasad was of the opinion that there were strong possibilities of the conflict of interest between the security power vested in the Governor and the power of voting laws of the District Council. Thus it might lead the ill –will between the Provincial Government and the District and Regional Council. To prevent this conflict, he argued

²³Brajeshwar Prasad, CAD ,Vol IX

that in order to protect the provincial order, power should be vested in the hands of the President. However, there might be separate departments in the center for the interest of the particular tribal areas. He, therefore, suggested that there would be a greater risk in such a situation if the Governor fails to deliver duty. Such a situation will affect the whole country.

Debate on Sixth Schedule: Support to Bardoloi

Many members in the Constituent Assembly including Shibban Lal Saksena extended their support to Bardoloi and agreed that like many, he was not very much conversant with the conditions in the autonomous districts. Jaipal Singh appalled to see some of the member's tribal venom. He quoted Sardar Patel in the acceptance of the tribal committee,

It was after considerable difficulty and negotiations that the tribal people of Assam were persuaded to agree to the recommendations. There was a definite understanding on the part of the rest of India that those agreements, those understandings would be, honored.²⁴

He has criticised some of the members attempt to suspect the intention of the tribal people of Assam. He further stated that there was the definite understanding between the leaders and the Tribal Sub-Committee. There was nothing to doubt the people in the hills .A.V.Thakur, a member of the Sub Committee argued regarding the head hunting practice of the Naga that they do have this practice not only against plain people but also against other tribes of Nagas. He agreed that the system of autonomous districts is the best arrangement to deal with such issues. He argued,

There is no reason why we should fear this autonomous district's business and should not make the most of it, as if it was giving away or making States within States for or permanent period. It is not for a permanent period. All constitutions are changeable, all laws are changeable and we can change the law, change the constitution when you think the time is ripe

²⁴CAD, Vol IX .

for it. In the meantime let us all study the question of the tribals as best as we can.²⁵

Rev.J.J.M.Nichols Roy criticised the members with opposite view did not know the prevailing conditions of the hill people in Assam. He has argued how tribal people have their unique culture and belief system.And this diversity, he argued, needs to be protected. The tribal people can't be clubbed together either with the Hindus or with the Muslims.

The Hindus do not eat beef but the tribesmen do. The Muslims do not eat pork but the Tribal people do. Therefore these people cannot be either Hindus or Muslims. The Government report is that the people of the hills have their own culture which is sharply differentiated from that of the plains. The social organization is that of the village, the clan and the tribe and the outlook and structure are generally strongly democratic. There is no system of caste or purdah and child marriage is not practiced .²⁶

In that case, Roy explained that India should raise the real democracy which the tribal people have else there would be insecurity among these people. He was somewhat surprised with the arguments forwarded by some members that tribesmen will be inimical or they would raid Assam if the Sixth Schedule is introduced. According to him, this idea based on wrong understanding of facts and a wrong psychological approach to the problem of bringing the hill folks and the plains people together. In contrast, this schedule has offered specific measures of self-government to the hill districts, but the laws and regulations were to make by the District Councils were subject to the control and consent of the Governor of Assam. B.R.Ambedkar argued in support of Bardoloi referring their distinct characters; they are different in the laws of inheritance, laws of marriage, custom and so on. He mentioned that the position of the tribal is somewhat analogous to the position of the Red Indians in the United States. Hestated,

So far as I am aware, what they did was to create what is called Reservations of Boundaries within which the Red Indians lived. They are a republic by themselves. No doubt, by the law of the United States they are

²⁵A.V.Thakur, CAD,Vol IX.

²⁶Nichols Roy. CAD.Vol IX.

citizens of the United States. But that is only a nominal allegiance to the Constitution of the United States. Actually, they are a separate, independent people. It was felt by the United States that their laws and modes of living, their habits, and manners of life were so distinct that it would be dangerous to bring them at one shot, so to say, within the range of the laws made by the white people for white persons and for the purpose of the white civilization.²⁷

He further argued that the executive authority of the Government of Assam shall extend not only to the non-tribal areas but also to the tribal areas. The executive authorities of Assam Government would be exercised even in those areas which covered in autonomous districts. It infected the improvement of the Government of India Act 1935 where the executive was divided into two categories, Government of the province and the other was called the Governor in his discretion, specifically for the tribal areas. This provision was not only for the tribal areas of Assam but also to the wholly excluded areas. Ambedkar didn't agree that in creating the Regional Council and the District Councils, the population of Assam have been divided into two water-tight compartments, tribals and non-tribals. He talked about two binding influences -the Regional Council or the District Council was not immune from the authority of the Parliament in the matter of lawmaking, nor they are immune from the jurisdiction of the High Court or the Supreme Court. Another limiting principle was that the laws made by the Parliament and the rules established by the Legislature of Assam would automatically apply to the Regional Councils and the District Council unless the Governor they ought not to ask.

Gopinath Bardoloi: Why Sixth Schedule

Bardoloi clarified that the reason behind many members not appreciating the Advisory Sub Committee was the fact that many members were not cognizant of the prevailing tribal situation in Assam. There are three categories of tribal in Assam; he explained. The plains tribal, classified as the Scheduled Classes. They were the original inhabitants with their own culture and civilization. They gradually absorbed into the culture of their plains people to put more appropriately the Aryan culture. Then there are the hill tribes, divided into two groups, i.e., the hill tribe administered by the

²⁷ B.R.Ambedkar , CAD,Vol IX.9.133.105

Governor as the agent of the Governor-General of India and the other tribe coming under the Sixth Schedule. He explained that the first category in the Sixth Schedule was not a matter of concern except to the extent of the provision contained in paragraph 17. He stated that areas administered by the Governor as the agent of the Governor-General can be autonomous districts in certain situations only.²⁸In response to the areas under autonomous district, he explained that those districts inhabiting the southern bank of the river bordering Burma and Pakistan were under the category of the autonomous districts. Other tribes have no self-governing institution of their own.

The Draft Constitution provides that these areas should be administered directly by the Governor without any restriction whatsoever. But the time may come when they may become fit to govern themselves. The proposal is that at that time they may be brought under the category of autonomous districts. These areas lie on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra on the foothills of the Himalayas²⁹

Bardoloi argued that the rule of the British Government and the activities of the foreign Mission happened side by side. These areas were under the category of excluded until 15th August 1947. Since some of those areas were a war zone, there was a sense of isolation and separation developed among tribal people. Very conveniently, they were assured by the colonial government that at the end of the war, the respective tribal group will be independent state managing their own affairs. The fact that presented before the committee was whether the process of integration would be by using force or through co-operation. Bardoloi referred that some of the institutions among the hill tribal were very important and unique and it would be wrong to destroy them. Especially their dispute settlement mechanism and the village assembly are unique. Referring to the headhunting practice of some tribal groups, he argued that it happens only when there is enmity of one clan against another. It is the choice between the spirits of hatred and enmity with the use of force or the government through co-operation and goodwill. Bardoloi being a Gandhian stressed on the adoption of the latter course. Supporting Bardoloi's argument, Lakshminarayan Sahu stated that the dispute between the tribal and the non-tribal should be adjudicated according to the Criminal Procedure Code and the Civil Procedure Code until it has expressly provided.

²⁸CAD, Vol IX .

²⁹ Bardoloi, CAD, Vol. IX .

People in the hill areas had suffered a lot. Therefore sign of maturity was the most important tool in the hands of the government in the process of the integration.

Conclusion:

In 1874, the Indian legislature passed the Scheduled Districts Act, while the Government of India Act of 1919 empowered the Governor General in the council to declare any territory to be backward tract. In 1930, the Statutory Commission had examined the political condition of British India and proposed constitutional reforms. After all these development, the Government of India Act 1935 provided for the excluded, and the partially excluded areas and subsequently with the recommendation of the Bardoloi Sub Committee led the formation of the Sixth Scheduled and provided for autonomous districts and autonomous regions within those districts. The colonial tribal policy has been criticised on the ground that there was hardly any concern about the impact of the non-aborigines living in the areas of the aborigines. The contradiction lies on the issue of the nontribes in the protected areas. As argued by Ghurve,

The British parliament barely considered the condition of the non-tribals in whose midst the protected aborigines live and on whom they depend to some extent for their livelihood. That these non-tribals, too, have rights, that their goodwill and cooperation, next only to the conscious and deliberate internal organization of the tribals themselves, are the most essential factors for the present welfare and future development of the so-called aborigines, failed to receive adequate consideration.³⁰

³⁰ Ghurye .G,S.*The burning caldron of North-East India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.1980.

Chapter Four

Gopinath Bardoloi and the Ethnic Politics: Confrontation and Accommodation;

1947-1952

It was on the eve of Indian independence that Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi found the rein of the state in his hand which he effectively used to neutralize the dissenting and secessionist forces. As a chairman of the Tribal subcommittee of the Indian Constitution, he tried to accommodate the tribal aspirations by formulating the Sixth Schedule while at the same time placating the indigenous Assamese and tribal sentiments. This chapter will discuss what role Bardoloi played in the construction of the idea of a region, and what were his policies towards various ethnic groups? In what way, those were effective for carving out a unified region in deep plurality?

Indian National Congress and Bardoloi :

In the Indian National Congress session 1886, at Calcutta, four Assamese delegations were present. Kalikanta Barkakati, representative of Shillong Association, Devicharan Barua and Gopinath Bardoloi represented Upper Assam Associations, and Satyanath Borah represented Nowgaon Ryot Association. On 16 October 1905, Assam's status as the separate province came to an end, and the Chief Commissioner Fuller was promoted as the first Lieutenant –Governor of the new composite province of the Eastern Bengal and Assam. The anti-partition agitation started in Bengal and the Surma Valley. The call to boycott British goods inspired the cult of swadeshi. As a result, the national schools sprang up. It was only in 1906 that Assam has representation in a provincial council formed under the Act of 1892. However, until February 1909, the Assamese community went on unrepresented in the Council. The Council consists of fifteen members, out of which two quasi-elected seats were allotted to Assam. These members were recommended in rotation by public bodies. The Lieutenant –Governor has to accept the recommendation. He could make a nomination which was subject to the sanctions of the Governor General. Such a small council was not enough to accommodate the representatives of all communities especially when two third members were always British. Under the Indian Council Act 1909, the Provincial Council was enlarged and given a non-official majority. In reality, it was dominated by

the British members and all nominated Indian members forming its trail. On 15 November 1909, the Regulation framed for East Bengal and Assam under the Indian Council Act, 1909 came into force. It provided for forty-two Council members and non-official majority. The representation of Assam in this body has increased from two to five. Under the Government of India Act 1919, Assam emerged as a full-fledged Governor's province. The principle of linguistic provinces for the future Congress organization was adopted at the Nagpur session of INC, 1920 and the Assam Provincial Congress Committee (APCC) for the Assamese speaking area (Brahmaputra Valley) with the headquarters at Guwahati. The Surma Valley was under the jurisdiction of the Bengal Provincial Congress. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) passed a resolution allocating five seats to the Assam Provincial Congress. Bardoloi attended INC Ahmadabad session, 1921 for the second time along with Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Paramnanda Agarwala, Chandranath Sarma and fifteen others. Indian National Congress sessions created an enthusiasm throughout Assam. Gopinath Bardoloi was one of the three congressmen who opposed the idea of boycotting the Councils during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Two other members were Tarun Ram Phookan and R.K.Chaudhuri. The Pradesh Congress was in a critical situation because of dissensions over the policy of Council boycott. Tarun Ram Phookan, Kuladhar Chaliha, and N.C.Bardoloi the triumvirate who led the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam were not prepared to lead the agitation to the stage of the Civil Disobedience. On 27 January 1930, the old leaders of APCC resigned, Bishnuram Medhi and Tayyebulla were elected as the President and Secretary respectively.¹The APCC and allied associations were declared unlawful by British with the notification on 23 December, and Assam Rifle marched through the interior parts of Assam to strike terror. After Bishnuram Medhi arrest, the President post remained vacant until Jadevprasad Chaliha came forward as Gopinath Bardoloi was reluctant to step in. Meanwhile, Gandhiji temporarily suspended the boycott movement after his historic meeting on 5 March, with the Governor General.

¹Confidential A, March 1931, No. 127, File no 58 -C of 1931, Assam Secretariat.

Protection of Land: Line System and Bardoloi

In 1915, a set of rules for wasteland settlement was published. ²The Line System introduced in 1920 to protect the indigenous people, where a line was drawn in the districts under pressure to settle immigrants in segregated areas. Bardoloi demanded the protection of the tribal blocks and belts and wanted control of the influx of immigrants. Bardoloi formed Congress Coalition Ministry in 1938 with the full support of the Tribal League and passed a resolution on the report of the Line System Committee on 4th November 1939, to evict the immigrants. The proposed measure was not implemented as the Congress High Command decided to give up government responsibility in 1939. The incoming Saadulla ministry introduced a development scheme for the settlement of the wasteland. The Saadulla ministry in a completely opposite move proposed development scheme where different communities including immigrants were allowed to settle in the wasteland on the payment of Rs. Five per bigha. The scheme of the settlement of the wasteland led to the fall of Saadulla ministry and thus installation of the direct rule by the Governor. The Governor scrapped Saadulla's development scheme as the Governor considered that immigrant settlement in the riverine areas would be a better idea.³ Saadulla returned in 1942 and started the "grow more food" campaign as wartime need. In reality, Saadulla wanted to revert his old Development Scheme for the benefit of the immigrants. Grow More food was in reality "Grow More Muslim".⁴ However, Bardoloi defeated Saadulla's political tactics. The Line System reintroduced by the Congress Ministry headed by Gopinath Bardoloi in 1946. Hokenhull Committee appointed in 1937 to review the Line System. The Committee stated that the restrictions were continuing and the Line System which has been in existence in the province for over ten years primarily intended against the massive flow of immigration from Bengal. It recommended that within the restricted area, there should not be allowed land either by settlement or by transfer of annual pattas and thus any immigrant so taking up land or by squatting shall be evicted.⁵ The

²File No.Rev.A, September 1926, No 1-22, AS.

³.Das, J.N.'Genesis of Tribal Belts and Blocks of Assam' in B.N.Bardoloi. Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness, Guwahati:1986,p 32.

⁴Misra, U. (1999). Immigration and identity transformation in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1264-1271. Mohammad Tayebullah who led the Congress in Assam during the tumultuous pre-partition days and who consistently opposed tooth and nail the politics of the Muslim League.

⁵Home –Poll (Confidential), C213/19. NIA

Assam Provincial Muslim League opposed the decision of the government to evict the settlers beyond 1st April 1937, and it led to the formation of a Committee of Action headed by Bhasani. Other members of the Committee were Maulana Bhasani, Saadullah, Abdul Kasem, Md. Saleh, Abdul Bari Chowdhury, Dewan Abdul Basit Choudhury, Moinul Haque Choudhury and Badrul Hussain.⁶ Gopinath Bardoloi has written to the Congress President about the decline of Assam's socio-economic fabric due to immigration, and thus he advocated robust protective measure to protect indigenous people. He stated about the Line System that the economic problem of the province is bound up with this system.

We can't think that shortly we shall have no spot on earth for our children and ultimately for ourselves and we shall be driven to the solution of acute difficulties which were some other provinces. The linguistic problem also increases the difficulties of an economic government, and what is worse, a source of constant friction resulting in violence, incendiarism, and crimes of all kinds, naturally disturb the peace.⁷

Of course, Saadulla ministry had an altogether different approach towards the Line System. In the all-party coalition, Saadulla Ministry announced four-point resolution on the land settlement on 13 July 1945, by the agreement with Bardoloi.⁸ It agreed for the protection of the tribal areas against the aggressive elements those would affect the economic and social basis of village life. It also decided to collect statistics of the areas where tribal people exceeded 50 percent of the population and the village occupied by tribal people to constitute tribal blocks and belts. The three other resolutions of the Tripartite Agreement were: 1. Planned settlement of wasteland, 2. Recognition of landless immigrants from other provinces who came to Assam before January 1st, 1938 as being equally entitled with the landless indigenous person to wasteland settlement, 3. Maintenance of grazing and other reserve and other reserves by evicting encroachers.⁹ In the general election of 1946, the Congress Party gained a majority with Gopinath Bardoloi as the Chief Minister. The Bardoloi ministry immediately took measures to implement the unfinished task of tribal belts and the blocks. The tribal

⁶Home-Poll (Confidential),C 240/46. NIA

⁷ File No .11/1946-47, NIA Gopinath Bardoloi to Rajendra Prasad, 6 April 1947

⁸ Guha: 1977.

⁹J.N.Das, 35-36.

majority belt remained for the tribals and non-tribals who were treated on the same footing concerning the future settlement of wasteland elsewhere and transfer of Bardoloi, land.¹⁰ 1947, all the new provisions concerning the tribal land incorporated in the Assam Land and Revenue Regulations of 1886 as chapter X., Sec 160 (1).¹¹ The Government of Assam constituted 31 belts in total, and the same number of blocks during 1947-51 and the total areas covered by these belts and blocks in the whole of the state come to about 15,000 sq. Km, comprising 2795 villages. ¹² The tribal leaders convinced of Bardoloi's proposal, and thus the Tribal League merged with Congress. In August 1946, Bhimbar Deuri accepted Bardoloi's invitation to join his cabinet.

Bardoloi was not comfortable with the methods by which Nehru and Patel chose to settle Bengali Hindu refugees in Assam. The Union Minister of rehabilitation, Mohanlal Saxena visited Assam in 1949 to inquire about the settlement of the refugees in Assam. Bardoloi government expressed inability to spare land. Bardoloi already informed Nehru not to speak of spare land for refugee settlement as it was not enough for the Province's landless people.¹³ Nehru was not happy with Bardoloi's position and argued that if the land was not available in Assam, it was still less available in the rest of India.¹⁴ Nehru warned Bardoloi that Assam's claim for financial help would suffer from the attitude of incapability to help in solving the refugee problem.¹⁵ Bardoloi informed Nehru with full data on available land and explained how it was inappropriate

¹⁰Ibid, p 37.

¹¹ The latest chapter empowered the State Government to "adopt such measures as it deems fit for the protection of those classes who on account their primitive condition and lack of education or material advantages are incapable of looking after their welfare in so far as such welfare depends upon their having sufficient land for their maintenance ." In subsection 160 (2), the Government also held the right to specify through notification in the official Gazette that the classes of people whom it might consider entitled to protection by such measures The added clause 160 (1) and (2) of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulations of 1886.

¹²J.N.Das: 1968, p 37.

¹³Bardoloi to Nehru, Shillong 7 May 1949.

¹⁴Nehru to Bardoloi, New Delhi, 18 May 1949. Nehru wrote, "Where are those refugees to go to if each province adopts the attitude that Assam has done? Are we to push them out of India or to allow them to starve and die out?"

¹⁵Nehru to Bardoloi, New Delhi, 18 May 1949.

to impose refugee on Assam.¹⁶ There was malicious propaganda against Bardoloi that his government preferred Muslim immigrants over Hindus.¹⁷ However, Bardoloi explained that nowhere in India have people lived in friendship and cooperation than in Assam.¹⁸ He stressed that it was not about preferring one community over other instead it was a genuine economic phenomenon. Finding it challenging to persuade the Assam Government to give up half of its newly reclaimed wasteland to the refugee, the union minister of Rehabilitation managed to bypass the Government of Assam. He thus managed to acquire access to Surma Valley tea estates and settled 3,500 families. Besides, Assam government has already undertaken the responsibility of the rehabilitating 100,000 refugees in addition to 125,000 refugees.¹⁹ Bardoloi, however, declared that if the center insisted on giving the claim of the refugee priority, his government left no other option but not to contest the ensuing election.²⁰

Bardoloi's participation in the Assembly Politics:

In 1937 polls, forty-one candidates fought the election from Congress ticket, thirty-three including twenty-six from Brahmaputra valley and seven from Surma valley came out as successful.²¹ The Congress influence in both the valley was limited to the non-Muslim general constituencies. Only R.K.Chaudhuri from the United People's Party led by Tarun Ram Phookan was elected. Gopinath Bardoloi, an AICC member, was amongst successful candidates of the Congress Party, who was elected as the

¹⁶Bardoloi has written that not more than two lakh acres of waste land were available, leaving aside the grazing reserves. Most of the land was in scattered blocks, not half a dozen blocks being more than 1,000 acres. As a whole, not more than 25,000 acres land would be fit for massive reclamation. In that wasteland, Assam had to settle 1,86,121 landless peasants families from the seven plain districts. And if the government were to provide financial holdings to each family at the rate of 10 acres, at least 18,61,210 acres of land would be needed. Bardoloi argued that since Assam was a purely agricultural economy, it was not possible for the government to ignore those facts. Bardoloi to Nehru, 29 May 1949.

¹⁷Nehru has written to Bardoloi on 18 May 1949, " I am told that your Government or some of your Ministers have openly stated that they prefer Muslims of East Bengal to Hindus from East Bengal...I am afraid Assam is getting a bad name for its narrow –minded policy ."

¹⁸Bardoloi to Nehru, 29 May 1949.

¹⁹Bardoloi to Patel, 22 June 1950.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Indian Annual Register ,January –June,1937,Vol.1,p.168.

leader of the Congress party in Assam on 22 February 1937.²² Congress had the fair prospects of forming ministry being the largest party in the Assam Legislative Assembly.²³ Gopinath Bardoloi preferred the formation of substantial opposition. He has written to Rajendra Prasad on the refusal to accept ministry and establishment of a solid block of opposition.²⁴ However, the Congress Working Committee permitted for the formation of the government in those provinces wherever there was a clear majority for the party. Congress party formed ministries in seven provinces by July 1937.²⁵ In Assam, Sir Mohammad Saadulla met the Governor Sir Robert Reid on 15 March and formed the first non-Congress coalition ministry.²⁶ Mohammad Saadulla, a distinguished lawyer at the Calcutta High Court, had the longest-serving member of the province's Legislative Council. His ministry included R.K. Chaudhuri, Nichols Roy and two Muslim members from Surma Valley. Interestingly Saadulla's official candidate for the position of the speaker was defeated on 7th April. With the Muslim League opposed to Saadulla government, he had to be dependent entirely on the European bloc; in fact, his government was referred to as white bureaucrats speak through their brown successor.²⁷ Saadulla's first budget faced a massive attack from the opposition.²⁸ The government defeated on the issue of the retaining Divisional

²²He was made AICC member in 1926. Along with him, there were four AICC members from Assam namely, N.C. Bardoloi, T.R. Phookan, Faiznur Ali and Kuladhar Chaliha

²³ In the 108 Legislative Assembly, 47 members were from Non –Muhammedan General, including 7 reserved for Schedule Caste, 34 seats were owned by Muhammedan, 1 Woman member, 1 European member, 1 Christian member. In Special Constituencies, 4 members from Backward plain tribes, 5 Backward Hill Tribe, 7 European Planters, 2 Indian planters, 1 from the Commerce and Industry (European), 1 Commerce and Industry (Indian) and 4 members were from tea garden labours.

²⁴APCC Papers, packet no 35, Bardoloi to Rajendra Prasad, 24 February 1937.

²⁵B.N. Chaudhury, "Democracy in Action", Assam Tribune, 11 April 1941.

²⁶ On the inaugural day of the Constitution, Saadulla formed the government on 1 April 1937.

²⁷Speech on 10 August, ALAP (1937), P.512, Also Guha 1977, p.179.

²⁸The Budget Session was from 3 August -1 September 1937. Of course, it was a budget with a small surplus despite economic depression. He suggested that Assam is assigned the whole or a portion of the central excise tax proceeds on petrol and kerosene produced within the province, as was done in case of Bengal in respect of the jute export duty. (IAR, July-December 1937). The second important point raised by Saadulla was that the substantial expenditure on Assam Rifles, para-military force, should be borne by the Center.

Commissioners-the administration's two white elephants –one in each valley.²⁹ By the end of 1937, the Muslim League under the leadership of Abdul Matin Chaudhury increased its strength up to ten. Thus it becomes increasingly clear that Saadulla would have to include more members from the Surma Valley, as they had the majority of the Assembly's Muslim members, for the survival of his government. There was tremendous pressure on Saadulla to woo the Muslim League. For his cabinet reshuffle, Saadulla tried to persuade two of his Muslim colleagues to resign although both of them refused. As a result, Saadulla himself had to quit on 4 February 1938 and formed a new ministry with Abdul Matin Chaudhury, and Munawwar Ali from Muslim League, R.K.Chaudhuri, Nichols Roy and Akshay Kumar Das. In July 1937, the Congress party didn't permit formation of a Congress coalition government in Assam whereas in several other provinces Congress ministries were installed. On 13 August 1937, the APCC president B.R.Medhi requested Rajendra Prasad over telegram to send Abdul Kalam Azad to the formation of the Congress government in Assam.³⁰ In September 1938, Congress and the Tribal League agreed to form a new coalition government. This time, the party high command approved congress coalition ministry. The most of the Indian planters supported Bardoloi.³¹ On 13 September 1938, Saadulla informed the house that he submitted his resignation to the Governor amidst Budget session. However, the Governor asked him to remain in office until it formed a new government.³² It was an exciting episode where Congress was not sure of its majority, and there were Horse-trading in votes.³³ Subhas Chandra Bose came down to Assam at the request of the Bardoloi and B.R.Medhi and helped information of the government. On 19 September 1938 formation of the government was announced by Bardoloi. However, on the same day, Saadulla tabled a no-confidence motion with the support of 56 members. The non-confidence motion was not accepted by the speaker as it does not apply against the ministers who had not yet been sworn in.

²⁹The Assembly voted 63 to eleven on 17 August 1937 to reject the entire supply for the pay and establishment of Divisional Commissioners. See Guha: 1977.

³⁰Rajendra Prasad has written to Bardoloi asking his explanation on the issue of the party policy of the formation of the coalition government. Telegram dated 13 and 14 August from the APCC President to Rajendra Prasad, File No.11/37,col.No.4,Item Nos.128 and 129, RPC.APCC Papers.

³¹ Out of 1,103 tea gardens in Assam in 1936,335 were Indian –owned. APCC Papers, Packet No.11.

³²IAR, July-December, vol.2,pp.181-82.

³³See Guha:1977,p 187.

Bardoloi and the Muslim League:

The fourth Saadulla ministry was formed with the help of the Muslim League. Very predictably, Saadulla took the liberty to revise the regulation on grazing and the forest reserve of Assam that will help immigrants from Eastern Bengal. Of course, Saadulla himself agreed to the fact of forcible encroachment in the third provincial Muslim League conference.³⁴ When he was attacked for not having done enough after the August 1943 resolution, he made mat bars responsible for this.³⁵ It's much contested, while Saadulla acknowledged the suffering of the indigenous tribal at the hands of the "aggressive Bengali encroachers", He, however, stood by his declared policy of gradual abolition of the Line system. Again it was the time when in February 1940, Jinnah propounded "two -nation theory" and also Pakistan Resolution passed in Muslim League Lahore session with the resolution that no constitutional plan for India unless two Muslim majority zones with autonomous and sovereign status, in Northwestern and North Eastern India.³⁶ Bardoloi opposed Muslim League move and sent two envoys Akshay Kumar Das and Mahendra Mohan Choudhury to meet Gandhi at Panchgani.³⁷ Inspired by Gandhi's word Bardoloi and members of the INC continued their fight against the repressive land policy of Saadulla government. On 10 July 1944, C. Rajagopalachari came forward with a formula.³⁸ It was for the Congress and the Muslim League settlement. The formula stated ,

Clause (2) of CR Formula states that after the termination of the war, a commission is appointed for the demarcating contiguous districts in the Northwest and east of India, wherein the Muslim population is an absolute

³⁴ Barpeta on 7-8 April 1944.

³⁵ "Saadulla chided these strongmen, *matbars*, who produced *pattas* for seventy -hundred acres of land each, with the intention of settling subtenants on them ...Saadulla, in an astoundingly frank manner, compared the situation to the problems faced by the Arabs through the unrestricted Jewish immigration to the Arab homeland." Nirode Barooah: 2010,p 166, also in Guha: 1977.

³⁶Ibid, p 168.

³⁷ Nirode Kumar Barooah (ed.) Bardoloi Dinlekh, Vol. I, Guwahati: 2002.

³⁸ C.R.Formula was proposed to solve the political deadlock between the All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress on the independence of India from the British. The League's position was that the Muslims and Hindus of British India were of two separate nations and hence the Muslims had the right to their nation when India obtained independence. The Congress, which included both Hindu and Muslim members, as opposed to the idea of partitioning India. With the advent of Second World War, British administration required both parties to agree so that Indian help could be sought for the war efforts

majority. In the areas thus demarcated, a plebiscite of all the inhabitants was conceived on the adult suffrage or other practicable franchise to decide the issue of separation from Hindustan ultimately. If the majority decided in favour of forming a sovereign state, separated from Hindustan, such decision would be given effect to, without prejudice, without prejudice to the right of districts on the border to choose to join either state.³⁹

Since INC demanded the formation of the National Government with ministers in every department except defence, but then Churchill was not interested in the responsible government in the centre. There was constant pressure on Churchill from the Muslim League on the question of two zones of Pakistan. CR suggested that,

A commission was to appoint for demarcating contiguous districts in the north-west and east of India. Wherein the Muslim population was an absolute majority. In the areas thus delineated a plebiscite of all the inhabitants conceived by adult suffrage.⁴⁰

Bardoloi came forward with a strong objection to CR Formula. He argued that any attempt to include Assam in Eastern Pakistan would be a great deal of injustice on Assam's part.⁴¹ He demanded that in no circumstances, Assam would submit to a sub-unit or sub-state to a Muslim or any other autonomous province.⁴² Bardoloi was worried that the Congress might consider CR Formula and before it was too late, he wrote to Rajaji, on 14 August explaining a short account of the history of Assam. He also sent a map of Assam along with the letter.⁴³ He has written,

“We strongly object to any other formula or even modification which aims at disintegrating Assam and the whole province will join to a man opposing it and the congressmen would be entirely helpless.”⁴⁴

³⁹CWVG, vol 78, p 549.

⁴⁰CWVG, vol 78, p 549

⁴¹Assam Police Special Branch File No,c 6,(4) 44, Bardoloi to Sapru, 16 August 1944.

⁴²Assam Police Special Branch File No C-6(4) 44.

⁴³Bardoloi to Rajagopalachari , 14 August ,1944, APSB,File No.C-6 (4),44

⁴⁴Ibid.

Bardoloi put the counter question on the point of clubbing Assam into the Eastern Zone of Pakistan. He argued,

"If self –determination is to be the governing factor of this compromise, why should a composite unit (of India), going on as such from time immemorial, be sacrificed to a new state simply because of latter demands it."⁴⁵

He also made it clear that only Sylhet district should be separated from Assam as it was decided not only in the Assam Congress Legislative Party but also in the programme of Congress coalition government.⁴⁶ Although there was no statement from the side of Tayyebulla, then President of Assam Congress and members like Ananga Mohom Das supported Bardoloi mentioning CR Formula as “anti-national.”⁴⁷ Ambikagiri Raychoudhury⁴⁸ representing Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, and Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri of Nationalist Party was among those who vehemently opposed the inclusion of Assam into Pakistan. Gandhi –Jinnah negotiation could not reach in any fruitful negotiation. “You are not accepting that Pakistan is composed of two zones, north-west and northeast comprising six provinces,”⁴⁹ Jinnah has written to Gandhi. In his letter, Jinnah blamed Gandhi for not agreed upon on the Lahore Resolution. Gandhi has written to Jinnah on 24 September 1944 explaining that,

India is not two or more nations. It is like a family of many members of whom the Muslim living in North West zones, i.e., Baluchistan, Sind, North West Frontier Province and that part of Punjab where they were an absolute majority, parts of Bengal and Assam desire to live in separations from the rest of India.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Bardoloi to Rajagopalachari, 14 August 1944.

⁴⁷Nirode Barooh: 2010.

⁴⁸He has written to Gandhi how he considered an "unholy motive" behind the move, see Times of Assam, 9 Sept 1944, Footnote no 29 in Barooh: 2010, p 201.

⁴⁹ Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47, Vol. II,(1957) ,p 550.

There was a protest by the civil society as well. On the 8th October 1944, Guwahati United Student's Board celebrated the Hindu-Muslim Unity day. Bardoloi ⁵⁰ and Saadulla⁵¹ sent their message to the Student community. Bardoloi attempted to reach an agreement with the government. On 14 November 1944, Bardoloi as the leader of the opposition, made a statement in the Assam Legislative Assembly on the Congress resolution to work with all communities for the achievement of independence. Baliram Das raised the issue of forceful encroachment in the grazing reserves by the immigrants from Bengal. Saadulla however assured that he would issue instructions to the concern officers "to stop further settlement of the demarcated lands."⁵² On 16 December 1944, the All Party Conference started under the chairperson of Saadulla. It was agreed upon that the Government should start a well-planned scheme for settlement for which application should be considered not only from the landless people from the outsiders but also from the indigenous landless peasants along with those who come before 1 January 1938. Participants in the all-party conference were Premier Saadulla, Minister of Revenue, Minister of Industry, Gopinath Bardoloi, Rabi Chandra Kachari, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan, Maulvi S. Abdur Rouf Chaudury, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury. Here it was decided that 30 percent of the area unsettled in 1940 should keep for the expansion of indigenous people. The landless peasant defined as someone having less than five bighas of agricultural land and maximum allotment should be not more than 30 bighas per family. With this decision, Saadulla coalition ministry passed a new resolution on the land settlement on 15 January 1945.⁵³ However, the resolution didn't work as two members of the Muslim League didn't

⁵⁰Bardoloi sent a message on the occasion of the Unity day. "I am glad that the students of Cotton College are endeavouring of unity between the Hindus and the Muslims, and for the matter that among all other communities in India by the Rajaji's formula. If the absence of unity amongst ? has ever stood in the way of Indian independence, it, indeed, becomes the duty of every freedom-loving man to work for its removal. The representatives of the people have not at present been in a position to keep contact with the people; and in such circumstances, the efforts of the students to contact the people have become a service in itself."Hindustan Standard, 12 October 1944.

⁵¹Saadulla messaged, "In Assam, we have been like brothers, both Hindus and Muslims, and if in any area of the mind, this feeling has become estranged, it should be the endeavour of every educated person to try and re-establish the brotherly feeling existing before." Hindustan Standard, op.cit.

⁵²ALAD, Nov,1944, vol. II p 912.

⁵³ Details of the resolution in Nirode Barooah:2010, p 177.

cooperate.⁵⁴ Having no other way left, Bardoloi started Satyagraha against Saadulla government policy. He wrote to his fellow congress members to be prepared and traveled to see Gandhi for his plan. Bardoloi proposed the formation of a Congress-supported Ministry with a resolution of the civil liberty, including the release of political prisoners and removal of the ban on the meeting. Secondly, he demanded the revision of the land settlement policy to accommodate the local landless people's claim. Thirdly, he promulgated the revision of the procurement and distribution policy on food, cloth and other essential articles and the abolition of corruption.⁵⁵ In the meantime, Bardoloi was successful to convince Surendranath Burhagohain to withdraw his demand for separate minority status for the Ahom and assured him to provide all those advantages that might receive as a minority.⁵⁶ Bardoloi passionately started his opposition in the Budget Session, began on 15 March 1945. In the cut motion on the land settlement issue, Bardoloi faced defeat as 36:41, but then it was considered his success as he gained vote by Ali Hyder Khan, Abdul Majid and Dewan Ali Raja along with Surendranath Burhagohain, Jobang Marak and Khorsing Terang who voted opposition.⁵⁷ On March 17, vote for opposition and government on the Censure motion was 39:39 and Ministry still survived as the speaker from Congress Party didn't cast his vote against the government. Ali Hyder Khan offered his mediation to bring together Bardoloi, Saadulla and the nationalist party leader Rohini Kumar Chaudhury⁵⁸ to solve the issue with the cooperation with Government and advised Bardoloi rather than trying to topple the government with no-confidence motion he should resolve the issue through agreement. Bardoloi agreed and resulted in Saadulla-Bardloi-Chaudhury talk. The Land Settlement resolution of 15 January 1945 revised although the result of the tripartite negotiation was not satisfactory from Bardoloi's point of view. On 22 March, Saadulla's cabinet member Nabakanta Dutta resigned, and thus it led to the reformulation of the ministry. Here is an exciting development, although it stipulated that Saadulla would reconstitute his cabinet on 23 March, it was Bardoloi and his

⁵⁴Revenue Minister Munawar Ali and Finance Minister Abdul Matin Chaudhury acted against of the decision.

⁵⁵Nirode Barooah :2010,p 180

⁵⁶Bardoloi Dinleka I, p 100-01, also in Nirode Barooah:2010, p 181.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid ., footnote in Nirode Barooah, no 59.p 203, Appendix F, "The Tripartite Agreement, the Terms and Conditions "Debate, , Land Settlement in N.K.Barooah ed. Bardoloi Dinleka I.

colleagues who formed the Congress Coalition and independent Muslim Party with 48 members and five in the Cabinet. Saadulla resigned from his Fourth Ministry and formed All Party Coalition Ministry. As argued by Barooah,

All –Party cabinet in Assam, the result of the Tripartite Agreement was a bold novel experiment in Indian Parliamentary practices. It is also significant that the differences between the Muslim League and the Congress were widening. In that circumstance, the Assamese leaders took a decisive step in forming a coalition ministry in which both the Congress and the League participated to solve some of the intractable problems of the province.⁵⁹

Cabinet Mission Plan and Bardoloi :

Cabinet Mission plan divided the provinces into three sections A, B, and C of which the last two were to be Muslim –dominated. It designed in a way that the Muslim dominated provinces could in future progress with the desire of the Muslim Community. The Muslim League had claimed the whole Assam in their Pakistan and thus Assam was put in the category C along with Bengal.⁶⁰ The representation in the category C was drawing as follows:

Table: 4.1 (Representation of the Provinces during Cabinet Mission Plan.)

Province	General	Muslim	Total
Bengal	27	33	60
Assam	7	3	10
Total	34	36	70

Source: Transfer of Power, VII, Foreign & Commonwealth Office,1970. p. 589.

It was a declaration that brought whole Assam, especially the Brahmaputra valley into a panic.⁶¹ With the declaration, APCC informed CWC about the universal feeling of apprehension and misgivings of the people of Assam. Bardoloi submitted a memorandum on 19th May to CWC calling the grouping system proposal as sinister,

⁵⁹.Barooah.N.K., Bardoloi, the Assam Problem and Nehru's Centre, Guwahati: Bhabani, 2010.

⁶⁰Transfer of Power, VII, P 372-374.

⁶¹The Cabinet Mission Plan divided the provinces or the units of India into three Sections of A, B, C of which the last two comprising six provinces were to be Muslim dominated.

and it would be a great betrayal on the part of people of Assam who has a significant role in the freedom fight. ⁶² Cabinet Mission invited Bardoloi in April 1946, and Bardoloi made use of the opportunity to put forward his view. Bardoloi argued against the inclusion of Sylhet in the future territory of Assam.⁶³ Bardoloi also argued for a U.S. type Constitution for India with robust federalism, where Centre would retain communication, defense and foreign relations and the residuary powers would vest to the provinces.⁶⁴ On 1st April 1946, Bardoloi replied many questions in the meeting between Cabinet delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, and Mr. Gopinath Bardoloi⁶⁵ on the condition in Assam⁶⁶, Sylhet,⁶⁷ hill tribes⁶⁸, uncultivated land in

⁶²Bardoloi said, "I can't think of a worst case in which democratic principles are given a go-bye than in a case like this." Nirode Barooah:1990, p 25

⁶³Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy Lord Wavell with Gopinath Bardoloi, 1 April 1946 in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.) The Transfer of Power.Vol VII, Doc.,35,p.78, Nirode Barooah,1990.Gopinath Bardoloi Indian Constitution and Centre Assam Relations 1940-1950.

⁶⁴ Bardoloi has explained to the Cabinet Mission with an example: About 260 million lbs.of tea were produced in Assam every year, 90% of which exported, but the export duty was realised by the Government of India in Calcutta, with a consequent loss of revenue to the province. In return, the province of Assam, though one of the poorest, received only Rs.30 lakhs as subvention form the central government. Thus to enable Assam to utilise its resources in its interest, he argued that the fullest possible autonomy should extend to it. Transfer of Power, Vol.VII, Doc.35, p 77, Nirode Barooah, p 24

⁶⁵ "On the Constitution making body, Bardoloi replied that he thought it was unnecessary to delay for the adult franchise and that representatives should be sent to sit with people from other Provinces. The selection need not, however, be limited to people with seats in the Legislature. The best people would be wanted, and there should be power to send names from any part of India and for the Constitution-making Body to co-opt in case of need. All communities should as far as possible be represented ." Minute of Bardoloi meeting with the Cabinet Mission,1 April 1946.

⁶⁶Bardoloi replied that the province (with Sylhet included) had been a unit for about 3,000 years. The Assam kingdom had maintained until the British arrived.At that time the district of Sylhet was part of Bengal, and though there had been several attempts by the Muslims to conquer the province, in 1901, there were only 7% Muslims in the population excluding Sylhet. The juncture of Assam with Bengal in 1905 led to a substantial infiltration of Muslims with the result that the Muslim community had grown from 3 lakhs in the Assam valley proper. Only Muslim immigrants had entered, and in Assam with Sylhet district combined there were now 33.7% of Muslims. It was preposterous for Mr Jinnah to say that the whole of Assam should include in Pakistan." Minute of Bardoloi meeting with the Cabinet Mission,1 April 1946.

⁶⁷In reply to Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr Bardoloi said the Congress would not object to the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal .

Assam⁶⁹ and Constitution-making body Bardoloi considered the two-nation theory to be fallacious; if Mr. Jinnah pressed it unnecessary to proceed without accommodating him. The process of giving the Muslims a share in the administration must, he felt, be a democratic one.⁷⁰ With the declaration of the Cabinet Mission Plan grouping, APCC president Mohammed Tayyebulla convened an emergency meeting⁷¹ and sent a telegram to the CWC.⁷² Bardoloi submitted a memorandum to the CWC considering the grouping provision as the sinister proposal.⁷³ Soon the leaders of Assam started working to gain support from other national leaders for their cause. Group of leaders⁷⁴, i.e., Hareswar Goswami, Dev Kanta Barooah, Kamakhya Prashad Tripathi, Harendra Nath Barua and Pusalata Das reached Calcutta. Another group including APCC president Tayyebulla, along with Omeo Kumar Das, Fakharuddin Ali Ahmed, Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, Nilmani Phukan and Ambikagiri Ray Chaudhury met Nehru and Patel.⁷⁵ The delegation met Gandhiji, and he assured full support to the delegation of

⁶⁸ "As regards to the position of the hill tribes, he replied that the hill people were anxious for some degree of autonomy, and although the tribes in the north of Assam are generally still somewhat savage, the relations between the hill people in the south and those in the Assam valley were friendly. The Khasis have an advanced form of democratic self-government. The Jaintias were also in an advanced state of civilisation with the Assam Government, though they would desire a high degree of autonomy. He would like Manipur State to be in a similar position, and he hoped the Ruler would agree." Minute of Bardoloi meeting with the Cabinet Mission, 1 April 1946.

⁶⁹ "In reply to a question from Viceroy, Mr Bardoloi said he could not agree that there was a large area of uncultivated land in Assam; this was Muslim League propaganda. The Muslim League had been sending in Muslim to occupy grazing areas, and these Muslims from Bengal were maiming and killing cattle and oppressing the inhabitants. ...much of the land was under water for a large part of the year. It was true that in the hills there were undeveloped areas, but one had to avoid denudation, and most of the land would be required to make up financial holdings." Minute of Bardoloi meeting with the Cabinet Mission. 1 April 1946..

⁷⁰ Minutes of Meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and Mr Gopinath Bardoloi.

⁷¹ M. Tayyebulla, *Between the Symbol and the Idol*, at Last, New Delhi: 1964, p. 176.

⁷² Telegram from the Secretary of APCC to the CWC, lodging an Emphatic Protest. Siddhinath Sarma's telegram in APCC files.

⁷³ Bardoloi's memorandum to the CWC, 19 May 1946, APCC Papers.

⁷⁴ Das. Pusalata. *Gopinath Bardoloi*. Guwahati: Prakashan Parishad, 1979., p 191-196.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Assam.⁷⁶ Gandhiji sent his message that Assam must not lose its soul. It must uphold it against the whole world. Else, he stated, "I will say that Assam had only manikins and no men. It is an impertinent suggestion that Bengal should dominate Assam in any way."⁷⁷ He appreciated Assam for taking its cause and warned, if Assam keeps quiet, it is finished. He advised,

The Federal Court is the creation of the British. It is a packed court. To be consistent, the Congress must abide by its decision whatever it may be.....No one can force Assam to do what it does not want to do. It is autonomous to a large extent today...As soon as the time comes for the Constituent Assembly to go into sections, you will say, Gentlemen, Assam retires. For the independence of India, it is the only condition. Each unit must be able to decide and act for itself.I am hoping that Assam will lead the way.⁷⁸

The leaders of Assam were not satisfied with the stand of CWC on the grouping issue.⁷⁹In fact, CWC was more interested in keeping the European representatives out of section C and not Assam. Maulana A.K.Azad has written in his memories,

In the Working Committee, we felt that we should not reopen the question of grouping. In order partly to meet the objection of our colleagues from Assam but mainly on the grounds of principle, we did, however, raise the question of European participation in the Constituent Assembly. Jawaharlal agreed with me that the fears of Assam leaders were unjustified and tried to impress them with his views.⁸⁰

Two leaders from the Congress side, i.e., Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru negotiated with the Cabinet Mission. Bardoloi, as the Premier, successfully

⁷⁶Gandhiji told the delegation from Assam, "lodge protest and retire from the Constituent Assembly. It would be kind of Satyagraha against the Congress for the good of the Congress." He also referred that if there was no clear guidance from the Congress Working Committee Assam should not go into the section. The Collected Work of Mahatma Gandhi, V ol.86, Doc.295,p.228.

⁷⁷Collective Works of Mahatma Gandhi, p 230.

⁷⁸Collective Work of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.86, Doc,295,p 228.

⁷⁹See Tayyebulla , p. 176-177, 179.

⁸⁰See Maulana A.K Azad, India Wins Freedom, Calcutta: 1959.p.172.

moved a mandatory motion on 16 July 1946 guiding ten members of Assam to the Constituent Assembly, not to sit with the Bengal representatives to make Assam's Constitution.⁸¹ APCC delegations were not happy with Nehru's stand.⁸² On 6-7 July 1946, Nehru, as the Congress President declared that the Congress would enter into the Constituent Assembly only when it would get the liberty to determine what it wanted to do. The Muslim League considered the statement as a complete repudiation of the Cabinet Mission Plan and thus on 29 July 1946, they withdrew their acceptance of the plan and called for direct action. On 16 July 1946, it was direct action day, and there was a wide range of violence, especially in Calcutta. On 7 September 1946, Nehru as the head of the interim government at the center stated that Congress was ready to sit in sections which would consider the question of the formation of the groups. Muslim League decided to boycott the Constitution Assembly on 14 November.⁸³ The Surma Valley Congresspersons and also Hill Tribal Representatives supported the resolution. The resolution presented directives to the would be elected representatives of Assam.⁸⁴ Bardoloi directed representatives not to attend any group meeting. Nehru wrote to Bardoloi,

"It seems rather premature to direct your representatives not to go even to a section meeting. Possibly that might be desirable, but certainly, it cannot be said so definitely now, however much you might be opposed to grouping."⁸⁵

⁸¹Bardoloi's mandatory resolution included three Muslim League members along.

⁸² "Nehru never ignored that Assam was not a Muslim predominated state and hence could never be joined to Pakistan." Nirode Barooah, p 26. On January 1, 1946, in his speech at the All India States People's Conference at Udaipur, Nehru said, "I would not oppose Muslims in Punjab or Bengal if they voted for separation but none would allow them to drag other communities with them." Foot note to B.N.Rau's "Outline of a new Constitution, January 1946", in B.Shiva Rao (ed.) *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents*, p.158.

⁸³ July 1946 election to the 296 member Constitutional Assembly, Congress had 199 members, Muslim League had 73 and 24 seats begged by the independent candidate. Naturally voting. Muslim League found the Constitution Assembly being outnumbered by the Congress.

⁸⁴ The decision bound ten Assam representatives to the Constituent Assembly including the three belonging to the League to abstain from any meeting of section or group and also to resist any attempt to set up a group constitution for inter-provincial matters.

⁸⁵Transfer of Power, VIII,106, P 173.

Nehru's position was not entirely clear in this regard.⁸⁶ On the 10th July 1946 in a press conference, Nehru stated, "I can say with every assurance and conviction there is going to be, finally, no grouping there, because Assam will not tolerate it under any circumstance."⁸⁷ He declared, "We have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly."⁸⁸ Bardoloi didn't agree to Nehru's prediction and demanded that the concerned province must frame the provincial constitution.⁸⁹ Azad supported Bardoloi in this matter. He stated that,

I must place on record that Jawaharlal's statement was wrong. It was not correct to say that Congress was free to modify the plan as it pleased ." He further argued, "we had agreed that there would be three sections viz. A, B, C in which provinces would be grouped. These matters could not be changed unilaterally by Congress without the consent of other parties in the agreement."⁹⁰

APCC has written to Nehru demanding an unequivocal assurance that the rights of the province to frame their constitution should not be interfered with.⁹¹ Bardoloi criticised Nehru for his acceptance of the 16 May Statement without discussing sections.⁹² Nehru responded Bardoloi with the assurance that the principle of the provincial autonomy would not be compromised.⁹³ Bardoloi was not satisfied with Nehru's assurance since the Congress agreed to abide by the Federal Court decision on the section. However, after round of protest and discussion, Wavell told Nehru and Jinnah⁹⁴ that consent of the

⁸⁶In a press conference on 10 July, Nehru said, "It is highly likely that Assam will decide against Grouping with Bengal, although I would not like to say what the initial decision may be since it is evenly balanced ." *Transfer of Power* , VIII,16, P 26.

⁸⁷*Transfer of Power*, VIII,16, P 26.

⁸⁸The Bombay Chronicle, 8 July 1946.

⁸⁹Bardoloi's Memorandum to the President of INC, 9 December 1946.

⁹⁰ Azad.Maulana. *India Wins Freedom*, Calcutta:1959. 155.

⁹¹APCC to Nehru, 16 September 1946.

⁹²On 8 August, the CWC accepted the Cabinet Mission Scheme. On 16May, the day on which the Cabinet Mission Plan was announced.

⁹³Nehru's letter to Bardoloi ,27 September 1946. He has written, "If Assam is strong enough nothing can happen to Assam that it does not like ."

⁹⁴Wavell told Jinnah on 19 November 1946, "Muslim League can't force a Constitution on Assam or any other province in Section B or C ." *Transfer of Power*, IX, 57,p 108.

people of Assam is necessary for their constitution, and imposition won't work.⁹⁵ In the meantime, the issue of Assam didn't get considerable importance in the 6 December statement issued by the British government after the talk with Indian leaders.⁹⁶ Bardoloi led APCC protested against the whole development. They submitted a memorandum to the Congress President stating that if the HMG's proposal were to be accepted, both the constitution and the grouping of Assam would be determined by the majority of the Constituent Assembly members sitting in Group C and thus Assam would be thrown entirely at the mercy of the Muslim League.⁹⁷ It was also mentioned that the CWC should reject paragraph 19(5) of the Cabinet Mission statement. It should take back the earlier promise to abide by the arbitration of a Federal Court. It demanded that the Constituent Assembly should be declared as a sovereign body.⁹⁸ Since there were differences between Gandhi and other leaders on Assam issues, CWC leaders Nehru, Kripalini and Sankar Rao met Gandhi on 25 December 1946, at Srirampur to take the issue forward. On 5-6 January 1947 AICC met at Delhi, and the British Government's Statement was accepted.⁹⁹ Nehru's resolution at the AICC approved on 5 January. Out of eight AICC members from Assam, six members voted against the resolution. Tayyebulla voted against and Fakhruddin Ali abstained from the voting. Tayyebulla issued a press note stating that Assam would follow the Congress decision regarding the British Government's Dec.6 1946 statement.¹⁰⁰ The Hills leaders extended their support to Bardoloi to fight against the resolution.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁵Wavell told Nehru ON 19 November 1946, "Congress could not make a constitution for India without the Muslims, any more than Section C could make a Constitution for Assam without the agreement of the people of Assam." Transfer of Power, IX,58, P.111.

⁹⁶The report referred, "It has always been the view of the Cabinet Mission that the decisions of the section should, in the absence of agreement to the contrary, be taken by a simple majority vote in the section." Transfer of Power, IX,147,P. 290.

⁹⁷ On 9 December 1946. A Note on Assam's Stand, p.10-11,

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Patel considered, "Whole of India can't be plunged into a civil war for the sake of Assam." , while Nehru considered that Assam could not hold the progress of the rest of India. He argued that supporting Assam would mean refusal to accept the British Prime Minister's Statement of December 6 and thus letting loose the forces of chaos. See, Transfer of Power, IX, P 508-510.

¹⁰⁰M.Tayyebulla, Between the Symbol and the Idol, at last, New Delhi:1964, p 203-204.

¹⁰¹Nicholas Roy said that it was a policy specially formulated for the interest of the Muslim League as they wanted to send thousands of immigrants to Assam and thus wanted to take possession of the land of

intense protests and agitation finally led the British Government about understand that they had no other option but to accept the demand of Assam for the working of the Constituent Assembly. Finally, in April 1947, Viceroy Lord Mountbatten wrote to Jinnah that he could not expect Assam in his East Pakistan.¹⁰²

Gopinath Bardoloi and the Opium Policy

A legal instrument to control the sale and possession of opium was materialised when Gopinath Bardoloi led Congress government passed the Assam Opium Prohibition Bill in 1947, and the legislation came into effect from April 1st, 1948.¹⁰³ With this Assam become the first Indian State to prohibit opium and also to prove compulsory penal sentence to smugglers and habitual offenders.¹⁰⁴ There were two opium inquiries; the Royal Commission on Opium, 1893-94 was set up by the British Parliament.¹⁰⁵ Another commission was the Botham Enquiry Committee, 1912-13¹⁰⁶, by Assam government with a Provincial charge.¹⁰⁷ The whole process of the ban on opium has been contested as there was a distinction between opium eating and opium smoking. For example, despite there was widespread use of opium, the Indian government denied raising the issue in the Geneva Opium Conference, 1924-25. The official representative of the British government stated that, firstly, outside Burma, there was no opium smoking in India. Secondly, the opium eaten in India under the government monopoly was used for semi-medicinal purposes and not in excess.¹⁰⁸ After the Bengal

Assam. The people of hills were afraid of the immigration, and they were ready to fight it out. The Statesman, 7 January 1947.

¹⁰²Transfer of Power ,X,165,P 300.

¹⁰³ Government of Assam, *Assam Opium Prohibition Act, 1947 (Act XXIII of 1947)* (Shillong, 1947), ASA.

¹⁰⁴E.H. Pakyntien, "Opium Prohibition Campaign in Assam 1", *Bulletin on Narcotics*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1958), pp. 13–14.

¹⁰⁵Records of the Royal Commission on Opium: Proceedings, 1893–94, HO 73/102, NAI

¹⁰⁶The BEC visited all the major districts and examined close to 500 witnesses who provided firsthand accounts of opium consuming and its related issues. Confidential File No. 87/C, 1913, ASA.

¹⁰⁷File No. E–1 M of 1912, Assam State Archives.

¹⁰⁸IOR/L/E/7/1404, File No. 4496/25, "India Copes with Assam's Opium Habit", *Christian Science Monitor* (5 Jan 1926), n.p., IOR., quoted in Ved Prakash Barua, PhD Thesis titled "Addicts, Peddlers, Reformers:

A Social History of Opium in Assam, 1826–1947".

Partition annulment 1912, Assam regained the status of an independent province, and with the appointment of the Chief Commissioner A. Earle, the opium issue received currency again. Two Assamese representatives actively participated in the Legislative Council Debate and thus challenged the government policy on opium.¹⁰⁹ The anti-opium movement in Assam was started compellingly during 1919 with the province entered into the domain of nationalistic politics.¹¹⁰ October 1919, the Assam Chattra Sanmilan held in Tezpur where the proposal was adopted for opium prohibition.¹¹¹ Assam Association also adopted a resolution for abolition of the opium trade in its Barpetas Session in 1919.¹¹² Mahila Sabha (women's association) played an essential role in the mass mobilisation. Mahila Sevak Samiti¹¹³, Sivsagar Mahila Samiti, Nawgaon Mahila Samiti etc., actively participated in the anti-opium mobilisation.¹¹⁴ During 1921, Gandhiji in his maiden tour to Assam focussed the significant issues like opium prohibition and also appreciated women leadership in their active role. He also lauded women of Assam for their spinning and weaving skills.¹¹⁵ International anti-opium activist like C.F. Andrew played an essential role in the mobilisation for the cause of the anti-opium campaign. Andrew was invited to Assam by the Assam Student's Conference.¹¹⁶ The Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Committee was formed

¹⁰⁹Ghanashyam Barua (1867–1923) and Padmanath Gohain Baruah (1871–1946). Assam Legislative Council Proceedings, 10 April 1913, No. 5, ASA.

¹¹⁰At the local level, an anti-opium policy already begun. In 1861 Phulaguri uprising or the 1894 Patharughat revolt.

¹¹¹Das.Omeo Kumar. 1895-1975, who pursued an agenda for opium prohibition.

¹¹²Assam Association in the Barpeta session 1919 declared that opium trade was prejudicial to the interests of the Assamese people. File No. 1A–7A of 1920”, Financial Department.

¹¹³, the first organised women association in Assam, was formed in 1915, Dibrugarh.

¹¹⁴Assam Mahila Samiti was founded by Chandraprabha Saikini (1901-1972) in 1926 which had branches across the provinces and was very active in social issues. Also, Mahila Samiti was an active participant in Congress activities, emerged as the most prominent leaders in Assam.

¹¹⁵Gandhi.M.K. “Lovely Assam”, *Young India* (1 September 1921), in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XXI (August 1921–December 1921)* (Ahmedabad, 1966), pp. 29–30, for an account of his tour to Assam in 1921.

¹¹⁶Andrew was asked to chair its annual conference in Nowgong, 1923. Andrew encounter focused widespread opium addiction in the Assam and highlighted the need to tackle the problem and appealed the student organisations should collect data on the opium consumption to study the issue in a detailed way. Sheila Bora, *Student Revolution*, p. 50.

in 1924 and published its report in 1925. This report was instrumental in appealing the international community in the Geneva opium conference to take up the issue of the opium consumption seriously especially in the case of India. In 1937 election, the Congress emerged as the single most significant party and in 1939, Assam government declared total prohibition of opium use in two subdivisions in upper Assam, Sivsagar, and Lakhimpur. Subsequently, Bardoloi government led absolute prohibition of the opium in 1947.

Bardoloi and his Policy on Sylhet

On 6th February 1874, the Chief Commissioners province was formed with Assam proper along Cachar, Goalpara, Garo Hills and other hills districts. The meager revenue potential of the new province led the annexation of the populous Bengali speaking district, Sylhet in September 1874.¹¹⁷ Sylhet, the economically viable district was annexed to make Assam self-sustaining. Hindus in Sylhet demanded a return to Bengal and mostly Muslim population were in favor of remaining with Assam.¹¹⁸ There was a massive protest against the amalgamation of a different cultural identity and also the disadvantages of Sylhet being attached to a backward region. On 10 August 1874, a memorial of protest was submitted to the Viceroy. The government didn't accede to the demands of the protesters, however, assured no change in the system of law and judicial procedures Sylhet people had hitherto lived under.¹¹⁹ Similarly, no change in the Bengal principles of settlement and collection of land revenue was assured. In the walk of Montague –Chelmsford visit to India in 1917, the Sylhet transfer issue raised actively. The Sylhet People's Association submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State for the transfer of Sylhet.¹²⁰ Of course, on its other side, a section of people demanded the amalgamation of Sylhet. In the Rajshahi session, the resolution on the

¹¹⁷The chief Commission province had 2,443,000 populations. Sylhet added additional 1,720,000 population .

¹¹⁸ Muslim of Sylhet wanted to stay with Assam as they found a more powerful political voice then they would have had if they returned to a Muslim majority East Bengal. Dasgupta, A. (2008). Remembering Sylhet: A Forgotten Story of India's 1947 Partition. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18-22.

¹¹⁹ Assam Legislative Council Proceedings, 1924, Vol 6, pp.51-52.

¹²⁰NMML, "History of the Agitation for Reunion of Sylhet with Bengal ".ALCC Papers, File no.3,1945,

transfer of Sylhet couldn't get passed.¹²¹ The Greater Bengal Movement of 1940 wanted Sylhet and Cachar in Assam.¹²² The referendum on Sylhet was on 6th -7th July 1947.¹²³ The outcome favored the amalgamation of Sylhet with East Bengal. The result of the referendum was not unexpected, in the APCC election manifesto in 1945-46 had pledged to the electorate that the Congress party would work for separating Sylhet from Assam. Gopinath Bardoloi along with the Congress members wanted separation of Bengali district Sylhet from Assam.¹²⁴ He informed the Cabinet Mission about the decision of the people and stated that that was the only alternative.¹²⁵ He argued that for the interest of both the region Assam and Bengal, transfer of Sylhet to Bengal was necessary. ¹²⁶ Bardoloi and his jail mates considered Sylhet should go to Bengal excluding Jaintia Pergannah. They argued that Sylhet was different in many ways, historically, culturally, linguistically.¹²⁷

¹²¹The Greater Bengal Movement in 1940 aimed at the inclusion of Assam in the state of Greater Bengal. The politicians who opposed to the Rajshahi session were considered to be part of the Greater Bengal Movement.

¹²² NMML, "Asamiya Samrakshini Sabha , to Nehru, Memorandum submitted to the latter, on his visit to Assam ." AICC Papers, File no. 4(1),2 February 1937.

¹²³ Home –Pool (Confidential),C 69/47-II. NIA.

¹²⁴Bardoloi wrote to Patel in February 1946 that the termination of the Bengali district of Sylhet and Cachar is necessary.

¹²⁵Bardoloi has written to Patel that Assamese people were looking forward to last 70 years to separate Sylhet. Bardoloi to Patel , 18 February 1946.

¹²⁶In reply to Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr Bardoloi said, " the Congress would not object to the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal, as its people and culture were predominantly Bengali. Before 1874, the district was administered by a Commissioner. In 1874, it was decided to include the district as part of Assam. In 1924 and again 1926 the Assam Legislative Council passed a resolution that the district should transfer to Bengal, and the Bengal Legislative Council passed a similar resolution in 1926. However, the Muslims of Sylhet opposed the separation of the district from Assam, as they gained advantages in the way of representation in Government services and other privileges. Sylhet being a permanently settled deficit district, which had to be maintained by the people of Assam valley, the relations between the two regions were liable to be strained. This was the main argument for cutting off Sylhet from the province . " Minutes of Meetings between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and Mr Gopinath Bardoloi on Monday, 1 April 1946 at 4.50 P.M., Source: Nicholas Mansergh (ed.) The Transfer of Power. Vol.VII Doc.35,pp.76-80.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Sylhet should go to Bengal excluding Jaintia Pergannah.

Table No: 4.2 Votes in Sylhet Referendum

Name of the Sub -division	Total Muslim Electorate	Total General Electorate	Votes for East Bengal	Votes for Remaining in Assam
Sadar	92,268	48,863	68,381	38,871
Karimganj	54,002	46,221	41,262	40,536
Habiganj	75,274	60,252	54,543	36,952
South Sylhet	38,397	41,427	31,718	33,471
Sunamganj	51,846	39,045	43,715	34,211

Source: A.Hydari to Nehru, 14 July 1947, The Transfer of Power, Vol. XII.

A section of people, however, questioned the outcome of the referendum as there was an allegation that the League used threat and violence to stop voters from casting

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- (i) Historical background: Sylhet was part of Bengal Suba all along, while Jaintia Hills was sometimes subject but always an ally of the Ahom Kings of Assam (including even Jaintia Pergannah).
 - (ii) Linguistic: Bengali for Sylhet.
 - (iii) Tradition and Culture are different.
 - (iv) Sylhet was only added in 1874 for administrative convenience. The administrative convenience should point another way. As against the Muslim attitude of not separating, the language of the Muslim (of this area) is also Bengali, and hence it would add to administrative convenience of Bengal.
 - (v) The previous position of Sylhet was in favour of Bengal.
 - (vi) Zamindari System: Small zamindaries. The Assam Valley zamindars are historical descendants of the Koch of Assam.
 - (vii) Riverain system and arrangement of arable land.
 - (viii) Geographical distribution with the Khasi and Jaintia Hills forming natural boundaries and river Barak.

votes.¹²⁸ Nehru, who was critical of the Referendum, accepted the verdict.¹²⁹ League, inspired by the referendum result demanded the inclusion of Goalpara district into Pakistan being the Muslim majority district.¹³⁰

Bardoloi and the Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948:

Bardoloi, a Gandhian was very concerned about the development of the villages and was firm believer in the system of decentralized self-administration. On 2 October 1947, Bardoloi Government inaugurated first five- year plan for the rural development.¹³¹ Introducing the bill, Bardoloi said that the villagers should be made to feel their potency as the citizen of the state.¹³² For this purpose, the 1947-48 budget allotted Rs.695, 000. On 11 March 1948, Bardoloi government introduced "Assam Rural Panchayat Bill" in the Assam Legislative Assembly.¹³³ The purposes of the bill had been pointed out by B.R.Medhi, in his budget speech as to the establishment of rural development centers, model villages, schemes of sale and purchase deports of the cottage industries. He also stated the establishment of the workshop for manufacture, research in cotton industries, tools and implements; subsidizing of village self –help enterprises; fairs and exhibition of local handicrafts and products of different kinds and publicity and propaganda; establishment of institutes to train local development areas.¹³⁴ The Rural Panchayat Act, 1948 divided the rural areas of Assam into about

¹²⁸AICC File No, 1/g 33/1947-48, R.N.Chowdhury, of the Sylhet District Congress Committee to Nehru, 17 July 1947, NMML, Also, File No 1/G 33/1947-48 Telegram, Monorama Dasi to Nehru, 6 July 1947, NMML.

¹²⁹Many demanded that it was not a free and fair referendum.AICC Dialled No.1/G 33/1947-48, R.N.Chowdhury of the Sylhet District Congress Committee to Nehru, 17 July 1947.

¹³⁰Home-Poll (Confidential B) File No .C 232/47, Assam Secretariat., IOR, R/3/1/157, Radcliffe to the Viceroy,2 August 1947.

¹³¹Barooah,Nirode. Bardoloi, the Assam Problem and Nehru's Centre ,1940,Bhabani:P.M,Guwahati, 2010, p.370.

¹³²Bardoloi further noted that the villagers were the roots of the country. "We can make Assam prosperous if we can regulate the daily life of the rural population,the not by external pressure but by the functioning of a socio-moral-economic order such as Mahatma Gandhi preached and worked for."Assam Legislative Assembly Debate,1948.Vol I&II.

¹³³Ibid.Thus before 45 years of Government India's effort with 73rd amendment in 1993, Assam become the first state to start with Panchayati Raj system. Prantik,16-31,October 2007,p.16

¹³⁴ Budget Speech, B.R.Medhi on 11 March 1948. Assam Legislative Assembly Debate ,1948, Vol II,p 69.

742 regions . Each area consisted of some villages. Every village was to have a Primary Panchayat. The Primary Panchayat consisted of all adult village members with the right to vote. The act also provided for a Panchayat Adalat¹³⁵and a Rural Development Institute.¹³⁶

Conclusion:

Bardoloi, a leader in his ability, dedication, restlessly worked for the protection of Assam, more specifically for the tribal population in all possible way. Because of him, the tribal leaders accepted the principle of the joint electorates, and also they merged with the Congress. Bardoloi focussed on the strengthening of the democratic institutions. He is credited for his effort to control the influx of the immigrants who tended to occupy the tribal land. His constant fight against the Grouping Plan of the Cabinet Mission in 1946 saved Assam from becoming the part of Pakistan. His strenuous effort led to the formation of the Sixth Schedule. He was widely accepted as a leader with non-communal, all- India yet regional outlook. However, in the case of the Hindu Bengali issue, Bardoloi didn't achieve any substantial success. Overall, Bardoloi played an essential role in the making of Assam amidst profound diversity.

¹³⁵Panchayat Adalat with judicial powers to try common offences in each rural panchayat.

¹³⁶The Rural Development Institute offers training to the different categories of the rural development workers.

Chapter Five

The Idea of Assam: Balancing Between State and Region

Assam, the region of deep plurality, encouraged massive migration during the Colonial era in the form of tea plantation labourer. The Bengali Muslims in large number settled in the wasteland of Assam. The province was surrounded by a large number of tribal groups. Soon after the partition, the massive scale of Hindu Bengali population migrated to Assam. During the post-colonial period, the immigration has become a constant issue of concern for the indigenous population as they fear that the immigration will take over their political power. In this context, it is important to know how the idea of Assam has been crafted amidst profound diversity, and what are its limitations and possibilities as a region and state. It will analyse the trajectory of Assam from a frontier region to a cauldron of ethnicity to a federation of enormous diversity.

The Official Language Act, Assam, 1960:

Following the publication of the census data 1951, where most of the immigrants declared Assamese as their mother tongue, Assamese elite felt that the idea of unilingual state needs to be consolidated.¹ As a result, they demanded the declaration of Assam as a unilingual state by declaring Assamese as the official language. The census data justifies the adoption of the Assamese language by the population groups including immigrants and tea garden labourers.² The Official Language Act, 1960 declared that “Assamese shall be used for all or any of the official purpose, of the State of Assam.”³ The Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha explained two reasons for the enactment of the state language. According to him, a state language was necessary to make the official communication easily understandable to the common men and also to

¹The total population of Assam was 90, 44,000 in 1951, out of which as many as 13, 44,000 (14 per cent) were born outside Assam. The Assamese speaking people in 1951 census was 56.7 per cent. In 1931, it was 31.4 per cent there was a noticeable decrease of the Bengali speaking people in 1951 census, 16.5 per cent. Census of India, Assam, 1951.

²There was the introduction of schools in the tea garden areas in Assam valley with Assamese as the medium of the instruction.

³**The Assam Official Language Act, 1960**, Published in the Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, dated the 19th December 1960.

break the barrier of the language which separated the diverse population of Assam. The Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha expressed,

Government feels that this question should be judged more from majority or minority. If this issue is decided only by majority or minority, the government is afraid that its object would be defeated.⁴

The Bengali medium primary schools were instructed to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction. The Bengali Medium schools were asked to take the permission from the local boards to present the Assamese language as the medium. Else, it was declared that their recognition would be withdrawn. Because of this direction, the Bengali medium schools in Goalpara district reduced to only 3 in 1950-51 from 250 in 1947-48. The Assamese medium schools increased to 773 in 1949-50 to 833 in 1950-51 from 348 in 1947.⁵ However, the Assamese speaking population was still only about 55 per cent of the total population of the state as mentioned in the State Reorganisation Commission Report, 1955.⁶ The move of Assamese as the official language backfired as the Bengali and other language groups like the Khasis, Mizos, tea labourers and Manipuri protested leading to the widespread rioting. The All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) and All Tribal Organisation resisted the government's decision to the introduction of Assamese as the state language. It was an arbitrary imposition on the hill tribes. Considering the population share, as there was less than 50 per cent Assamese speaking population, resistance from the side of the hill tribes was justified. The diverse languages, cultures, and races of the region deserved to have Hindi as the official language, while English could continue until they were ready to accept Hindi as the official language.⁷ Hill tribes were apprehensive about the fact that acceptance of the Assamese language would position Assamese people in a more dominant position and thus it would lead crisis to their distinct identity. Another issue raised by the Hill Tribes Organisation was that the adoption of Assamese as their language would adversely affect hill people prospect in the government services. The Bengali population of the region opposed the declaration of the Assamese as the state language in an organised form. Nikhil Assam Bangla Bhasa Bhashi Samiti convention

⁴Assam Assembly Debate, 3 March 1960.

⁵Starred Q.No.21 (a) (1) (2) by Santosh Kumar Baruah at the August September Session of Assam Assembly, 1953.

⁶Section 733, State Reorganization Commission Report, 1955, p .211.

⁷ Goswami.Sandhya. *Language Politics in Assam*, Delhi,1997,.,50.

held in Hojai. The Convention expressed deep resentment as the language of a vast majority of the population in the state was denied the legal recognition. They demanded the amendment of the bill to incorporate the legitimate demands of all sections of the state.⁸ As a result not only the attempt to declare Assamese as the official language failed but sparked off a separatist move from the tribals. The result was the creation of seven states out of Assam making Assam one of the smallest states. The immediate consequence of the Language Act, 1960 was Separation of Nagaland in 1963. Assam didn't learn a lesson from these consequences. There was a great deal of ignorance towards tribes like Bodo, Dimasas, Karbis and other nationalist aspirations. The result was even these tribes wanted to separate from Assam reducing the Assam state to an Assamese nationality state. Table No 1.1 and 1.2 show the diverse language groups in Assam and their number of speakers.

Table No: 5.1

(Distribution of Population of Assam According to Language 1911-51) (Number of Speakers in Lakh)

Language	1911	1931	1951
Hindi	2.35	4.24	3.07
Bengali	17.58	14.90	13.25
Assamese	8.35	17.47	45.52
Abor	0.33	0.12	0.02
Miri		0.71	0.53
Bodo(Group)	1.43	4.64	4.18
Mikir	0.56	1.11	1.20
Naga (Group)	1.20	1.65	1.92
Kuki Chin (Group)	0.11	1.78	1.92
Khasi	1.10	2.03	2.68
Manipuri	1.61	0.78	0.82

⁸ The Convention stated, " if the Bill is assented to, it would lead to inevitable dismemberment and ultimately will retard the progress and development of this frontier region." Proceedings of the Working Committee of Nikhil Assam Bangla Bhasa Bhashi Samiti, held at Hojai on 6 and 7 November 1960.

Others	3.87	6.18	5.18
Total	38.49	55.61	80.29

Source: Census of India, Assam, 1961, Vol-III, Assam Part –II /C, Cultural and Migration tables/Table –C/V, Appendix III, pp 69-73

Table 5.2
Population of Assam by Major Language Groups, Census data:1991.

Language	Number of Speakers	Percentage of Total Population
Assamese	12,088,532	57.78
Bengali	4,958,856	21.67
Bodo	1,184,569	5.28
Hindi	1,035,474	4.87
Nepali	432,519	2.00
Miri/Mishing	381,562	1.70
Karbi	355,082	1.58
Oriya	140,782	0.66
Santhali	135,905	0.60
Manipuri	126,987	0.56
Garos	114,779	0.52
Rabha	112,424	0.50
Munda	75,420	0.33
Others	579,669	2.60
Total Population	22,414,322	100.60

Source: Census of India 1991, Vol.III, Assam, Part 1.

State Reorganisation Commission and Assam:

The State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was appointed on 29 December 1953 to “investigate the conditions of the problem, the historical background, the existing situation and bearing of all important and relevant factors thereon.”⁹ Assam submitted the proposal to the commission stating that Assam stood in favour of status quo.¹⁰ However, it would be ready to welcome Manipur, Tripura and Cooch Bihar and also maintain an excellent administrative connection with North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Hill Districts demanded independent homeland.¹¹ Interestingly, there was no such demand during Bardoloi Committee. The SRC didn't recommend the formation of the new state in the region and also advocated for the merger of the hostile areas for the establishment of a composite Assam. SRC was more concerned about the security of the frontier region and thus didn't want the formation of the smaller states. The stand on SRC led to a debate between the people in the hills and people in the plains of Assam. The hill people were dissatisfied with the proposal of territorial unity of hills and the plain people whereas the plain people considered it in a positive dimension. However, there was no such criterion by the commission on how to maintain unity in a vast, diverse territory like Assam. Similarly, the SRC didn't consider the principle of the linguistic question in the provinces of the North East region. It stated that "linguistically it would be a composite state with even Assamese not having any substantial majority."¹² The outcome of the SRC recommendation led to “pan-tribal sub-nationalism.”¹³ Hill District like Garo Hills demanded the amendment of the six-schedule and thus formation of the separate state.¹⁴ The declaration of Assamese as the state language further strengthens the movement of the hill districts. All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) formed to oppose the government move of Assamese as the state language and demanded the creation of the separate hill

⁹Report of the State Reorganisation Commission, Government of India, Delhi, 1955, p.i.

¹⁰The Government of Assam, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, The Communist Party of Assam, the Tripura State Congress Committee were in support of the status quo.

¹¹Lusai Hill, United Mikir Hills and North Cachar in the Lushai hills and Krbia Darbar are in favour of status quo, but Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills demanded their homeland.

¹²Report of the State Reorganisation Commission, Government of India, Delhi, 1955, p. 145.

¹³ Nag.Sajal Beleaguered Nation, Manohar:2017, p 440.

¹⁴District Council Meeting in Shillong, 16 and 17 June 1954. The Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills District Council Captain Williamson A.Sangama convened the convention.

districts.¹⁵ Pataskar Commission's recommendation for no fundamental change in the Sixth Schedule disappointed the hill leaders.¹⁶In fact, Pataskar Commission, 1966 referred to the hill districts a series of economic islands joined by the plains. It stated that the hills were dependent on the plains for their development and thus hills and plains are primarily interdependent for their prospect. In the very next year, 1967, the Asom Sahitya Sabha stated with the proposal that Assamese should be introduced as the medium of language in the universities, i.e., Gauhati University and the Dibrugarh University. The Sabha also proposed that the measures should take for the publication of literature in the Assamese language. The APHLC opposed the whole move of a unified language. On 13 January 1967, the government proposed Federal Plan for the formation and administration of the North Eastern States. This proposal of the federal plan faced massive protest from the side of the political leadership and the civil society, including Asom Sahitya Sabha. They argued that such a procedure would lead to further tendencies of dissent.¹⁷ However, the Government proposal for the formation of five states and two union territories out of Assam acted in favour of the APHLC.

Formation of the Autonomous State:

The Government of Assam dismissed the idea of separate Hill states with the Pataskar Commission. Instead, it suggested that there should be a department in charge of the Cabinet Minister for the Hill areas. With no positive result from the Commission, the APHLC called the boycott General Election, 1967. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came up with the proposal for reorganisation of Assam during her Shillong visit. Accordingly, the Government of India forwarded the proposal to reorganise Assam, considering the aspiration of the Hill tribe. However, it was rejected by the people of a hill as well as the plain. The government of India came up with Mehta Committee.¹⁸ APHLC boycotted this committee also. The Prime Minister then came up with the proposal of an autonomous state for the hill tribes within the state of Assam. Thus the concept of autonomous state came as a mechanism to resolve the deepening

¹⁵ APHLC formed on 6-7 July 1960 in the convention called by Captain Williamson A. Sangma. S.K.Chaube, *Hill Politics in North East India*, Hyderabad: 1999. P 122.

¹⁶ Summary of Pataskar Commission's report on the hill areas of Assam., Indian Commission on the Hills Areas of Assam: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Shillong: 1966.

¹⁷Raatan, T. 2004. *Enclyopaedia of North-East India*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.

¹⁸ Mehta Committee under the chairmanship of Ashoka Mehta recommended that there would not be agreement on the creation of another hill state and suggested more autonomy to the hill tribes.

political crisis of the hill districts.¹⁹ Under Article 244, Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hill districts became India's first autonomous state. Meghalaya thus was the unique case since it not only was an autonomous state, it also had other units of autonomous power in the form of the district council. The leadership, however, was not happy with the decision and continued their struggle for the full-fledged state. On 24 December 1969, Parliament passed the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Bill and thus it created a new tier in the form of Meghalaya in India's state structure similar to the autonomous republics of the former USSR.²⁰ The changing political geography of Assam has played important role in shaping the idea of Assam. In this context, it is necessary to study the spatial changes with reference to the making and unmaking of the region.

The formation of the Nagaland was a complex phenomenon. The State Reorganisation Commission stated that the Naga National Council wanted independence from Assam and India.²¹ Claim for Naga Homeland dates back to the pre-independence period. A peace agreement was signed between the then Governor of Assam Sir Akbar Hydari and the Naga National Council on 26-28 June 1947.²² The Naga National Council was extended to settle the disputes under the Customary Laws. Phizo, the leader of the extremist group within NNC didn't agree to the agreement, popularly known as the Nine Point Agreement.²³ Extremist NNC leaders including Phizo declared independence on August 14, 1947. In 1950, the Naga Conference decided to hold a

¹⁹Hussain, Monirul. "Tribal movement for the autonomous state in Assam." *Economic and Political Weekly* 1987: 1329-1332.

²⁰ Nag.Sajal Beleaguered Nation, Manohar:2017,p 444.

²¹SRC Report, p. 184.

²²29 June 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari and the Naga National Council signed a peace agreement, known as the nine-point agenda. Nagas right to develop themselves according to their expressed wishes is recognised. The Naga National Council was the organisational descendant of Naga Club, 1918.

²³Clause 9 of the agreement states," Period of Agreement -The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement, at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of Naga people arrived at." Naga - Akbar Hydari Accord (Nine Point Agreement). https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN_470628_Naga-Akbar%20Hydari%20Accord.pdf

referendum.²⁴ The referendum conducted on 16 May 1951 and 99 per cent of the Naga people had voted for independence.²⁵ Subsequently, the NNC boycotted the India General Election in 1952.²⁶ With the denial of the opportunity to read out the statement demanding for the self-determination, on 30 March 1953, the NNC staged a total walkout from the public meeting in Kohima where Jawaharlal Nehru along with his Burmese counterpart U Nu was present.²⁷ Nagas reportedly embarrassed Nehru by showing their bare bottoms!²⁸ The district administration arrested NNC leaders for this fiasco. On 18 September 1954, People's Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland was formed.²⁹ The situation was out of control, and thus the Assam Disturbed Areas Act was declared on 27 August 1955 and later the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 was invoked.³⁰ In 1956, Phizo led NNC formed the Federal Government of Nagaland that drafted the Naga Constitution. It also developed the Naga Army. In 1957, for the political settlement of the situation, Naga People's Convention was convened in Kohima. The NPC demanded Naga Hills and Tuensang within the Indian Union. It led to the formation of the Naga Hills –Tuensang Area (NHTA) as an autonomous district under the Government of Assam, the jurisdiction of External Affairs. In Ao village, Ungma the second convention was held in May 1958. The second convention failed as Phizo led NNC refused to accept the NPC. The third NPC held in Mokokchung, 1959. A 16 point agreement was signed with the Government of India, and thus the Parliament passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1962.³¹ After the third

²⁴Ramunny Markot, *The World of Nagas*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1988, p.57.

²⁵A.S. Shimray, no. 3, p. 66. For details on the plebiscite, see *The Naga Chronicle*, no. 1, pp. 116–133.

²⁶Ibid, p. 20.

²⁷Nag, Sajal. "Nehru and the Nagas: Minority Nationalism and the Post-Colonial State." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 49, 2009, pp. 48–55. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25663861.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹ Phizo formed *Khunak Kautang Ngeukhuma* (People's Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland) in Tuensang district. A.S. Shimray, *Let Freedom Ring Story of Naga Nationalism*, Promilla, New Delhi, 2005, p.69.

³⁰Nuh, Vetsotü K. *The Naga Chronicle*. Regency Publications, 2003, p.155-157.

³¹The 16 Point Agreement between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention, 26th July 1960.

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN_600726_The%20sixteen%20point%20Agreement_0.pdf

Naga People's Convention, the Government of India agreed to constitute Nagaland state within the Union of India in 1963. However, NNC was not satisfied with the government move. In 1975, the Shillong Accord was signed by which NNC agreed to accept the Indian Constitution. In 1980, new militant organisation Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) formed and in 1988 this organisation suffered a vertical split. Another area of concern is constant boundary conflict with Assam. Immediately after the formation of the Nagaland, it began to claim some part of Assam as its territory.³² In 1963, the first meeting on the issue of the boundary held between the Chief Secretary of Assam and Nagaland. It was decided in the meeting that the office of the Survey of India will conduct a survey and relay inter-state boundary by 1925 notification. However, Nagaland didn't cooperate. In 1964-1965, the government of Assam arranged an eviction. Nagaland Armed forces even established armed camps in the territory of Assam.³³ Merapani encroachment irrupted violence in many times. The boundary dispute between the two is still unsettled.

Mizoram has been affected by a series of famine, for example, Mautam 1862, Thingtam 1881, Mautam 1911, Thingtam 1929, Mautam 1956, Thingtam 1977, Mautam 2007.³⁴ Mau and Thing are varieties of bamboos in Mizoram. Both of these varieties had periodic reproductive blooming³⁵. With the bamboo flower, "tom," i.e., devastation starts in the region as bamboo seeds appeared to be delicious food for the rats.³⁶ Mizo tribe had experienced many famines and thus were able to predict if there were a situation of famine nearby. The Mizo District Council predicted famine with

³²It declared that the Reserved Forest in Sibsagar and North Cachar district was part of its territory.

³³Bhubaneswar Bhattacharya, *The Troubled Border: Some Facts About Boundary Disputes Between Assam – Nagaland, Assam –Arunachal Pradesh, Assam-Meghalaya, Assam-Mizoram, Guwahati.*1995.p.23

³⁴Nag, Sajal. "Bamboo, rats and famines: famine relief and perceptions of British paternalism in the Mizo Hills (India)." *Environment and History* 5.2 (1999): 245-252.

³⁵Ibid

³⁶The massive increase in the jungle rat population happens with the blooming of bamboo. Millions of rats thus attack the crops in the field resulting in scarcity of food. Alexander Mackenzie (1884) stated, "the famine arose according to the concurrent testimony of all persons concerned, from the depredation of rates. In the previous seasons, bamboos had seeded; the supply of food thus provided caused an immense increase in the multiplication of rats."Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of Government with the Hill Tribes of North Eastern Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1884). Reprinted as *The North East Frontier of India* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 325-6. Also, The periodical flowering, seeding and dying down of certain species of bamboo all over these hills was followed last autumn by an enormous increase in the number of jungle rats." The Baptist Mission reported.

the calculation of the chronological record in the Mizo Calendar, 1958. They anticipated following the bamboo flower and passed a resolution to take up precaution for the upcoming disaster. 29 October 1958, Mizoram District Council issued a statement requesting the government to issue an amount of fifteen lakhs as a precautionary measure for Mizo district and Pawi- Lasher. The resolution stated,

“With the flowering of the Bamboos in the Mizo District, the rat population has phenomenally increased, and it is feared that in the next year the whole district would be affected”³⁷

Considering the whole prediction as mere superstition, the Assam Government headed by Bamala Prashad Chaliha rejected the claim of the Mizo District Council.³⁸ True to the prediction, in 1959, Mizoram faced the first famine in the post-colonial era. The whole phenomena justify blatant dereliction of the Government of Assam towards its tribal people. The condition was such that the government could not even send needed relief since there was hardly any connecting road. The only highway connecting Silchar to Mizoram was narrow and thus not possible to send loaded trucks. Condition worsens, people died in large numbers. Laldenga with Mizo National Famine Front tried to reach out to people.³⁹ Youth volunteered in the remote villages. MNFF blamed the Mizo District Council for not taking precautionary measures while they know the bamboo flowering session. On the other spectrum, the Mizo District Council accused the Government of Assam for their negligence. After the visit of the Chief Minister, MNFF agreed to help the government relief distributor in distributing food supplied to the remote areas. Chaliha Government denied the numbers of the famine death provided by the Mizo Hills District Council considering grossly exaggerated. Besides MNFF, District Council, more importantly, Mizo current leadership lost their trust in the Government. The notable point is that only after 1958, the insurgency started in the Mizoram. The Mozo National Famine Front re-emerged as the Mizo National Front, that led the secessionist movement in the region. After the Mizo Accord was signed by

³⁷V.Venkata Rao,et.al. *"Century of Government and Politics in North East India: Mizoram"*, Vol-3, New Delhi, 1991, Pp.235.

³⁸ The government didn't accept the connection between the bamboo flower, rats and famine.

³⁹The people credited the Mizo National Famine Fund under the leadership of Sainghaka, Vanlalhruaia and Laldenga for the supply of relief in the remote areas. In the problematic hilly terrain, it was possible to carry insufficient foodstuff amount. Lousy weather, lousy packing, difficult terrain added to this hardship. Air forces had to unload food packing at specific points only due to the weather condition. This food was enough for some areas and not single grain for some remote areas.

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, Mizoram was granted statehood in 1987. Comparatively, there is less tension between the two states regarding the boundary dispute. Still, it has not always been peaceful. Mizo encroachment in the Inner Line Reserve forest of Cachar district is a serious issue. During the 1970s there was considerable scale encroachment. As a result, the forest department took up eviction in 1972, May. To prevent the encroachment round of meetings were held between both the states. Border outpost by Assam police in the Mizoram-Cachar border is another measure to avoid encroachment.

The Government of Assam, with a notification issued in 1951, transferred the Balipara Frontier Tract, The Abor Hills Districts, The Mishmi Hills and the Tirap Frontier Tract to the Assam Government. The transferred plain portion of the Frontier Tract, the remaining area, was collectively known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).⁴⁰ In 1972, the NEFA become a Union Territory under the North Eastern Area Act, 1971 and in 1987, NEFA becomes the full-fledged state, and it was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh. Assam –Arunachal boundary runs through the tri-junction of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan at Bhairabkundo. The border was drawn by the Survey of India where the fixation of the pillars on the demarcated portion was entrusted to the PWD of Assam.⁴¹ There has been encroachment in the boundary, incidents of the harassing people in the border.⁴² Many meetings and dialogues happened between both the parties. Still the border issues between the two states not settled.

Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and Garo Hills District of Assam comprised the State of Meghalaya by the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. The boundary between the state of Assam and Meghalaya runs approximately 452 miles. After the

⁴⁰North East Frontier Area (Administrative) Regulation, 1954. The Regulation changed the name of the Balipara Frontier Tract as the Kameng Frontier Division and the Subansiri Frontier Division; the Tirap Frontier as the Tirap Frontier Division; Mishimi Hills District renamed as Lohit Frontier Division; Naga Tribal areas as Tuensang Frontier Division.

⁴¹Till 1979, the total length of 396 km of the boundary had been demarcated leaving 308 km of the boundary un-demarcated. Out of the entire demarcated border, Assam didn't accept pillar positions in about 25 km in Banderdewa area, and Arunachal Pradesh didn't take demarcation in about 11 km in the South Bank. Sajal Nag, *Beleaguered Nations*, Manohar:2017.455.

⁴²Arunachal administration has built a circle office, PWD and forest office in Kimin inside Assam, and also a health centre and staff quarters at Telem in Jonai area and the Anchal Samiti House at Likabali without permission from either Assam Government or the Local revenue officer. *Ibid*, p 456.

formation of the Meghalaya, the issues started between both the states. There have been many attempts to settle the boundary issue from both the sides. Meetings held in 1983 and formed a joint official committee. The Committee published a report in 1984 identifying the areas of the differences.⁴³ Tripartite meetings were held in 1991 amongst the representatives of Government of Assam and Meghalaya and the Survey of India to settle the boundary between Assam-Meghalaya. There has been claiming and counterclaim over territory.

Plain Tribe and their demand for Ethnic Homeland

The plain tribes of Assam were also not happy with the phenomenon of the Assamese linguistic imposition. Multiple tribal and ethnic communities suddenly found that their identity, as well as culture, was in threatened. There was at the same time tribal revolt challenging the chauvinistic hegemony of the caste Hindu Assamese. After the separation of the hill districts, plain tribes like Bodos, Karbis, Dimasa etc. demanded ethnichomeland. The Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) formed in 1967 to represent the aspiration of the plains tribes, Besides Bodos, PTCA represented Deoris, Missings, Kacharis, Barmans of Cachar and Hojai. The PTCA demanded full autonomy in the predominantly plains tribal areas of the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur, and Sibsagar district including tribal belts and blocks of those areas. The PTCA submitted a memorandum to the President of India on 20 May 1967. It demanded adequate protection of their land, protection from economic exploitation by the non-tribals, conservation of their language, culture, customs, counter political domination by non-tribals over tribals and protection of their tradition and liberty to grow according to their tradition and genius. Right from its formation; PTCA has categorically demanded Udayachal, a union territory for the Bodos and other plains tribes.

The Assam Tribal League:

Assam Tribal League formed with the representation of plain tribal groups including Chutiya and Mottocks. Simone Commission declared for the four reserved seats for the plain tribes in Assam. On 10 September 1939, an agreement was signed between the Tribal League and the Assam Government. Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnuram Medhi

⁴³Report of the Joint official Committee on the Inter-State Boundary of Assam and Meghalaya, 16 November 1983

signed the agreement. ⁴⁴The plain tribal League demanded the separate electorate that was provided by the Government of India Act, 1935. Interestingly, the plain tribal leaders wanted to maintain a safer distance from the Indian National Congress even when participating in the Congress-led ministry. It was the failure of the Provincial Congress Committee to incorporate any segment of the tribal within its fold.⁴⁵ The Tribal League participated in the ministry of the Saadulla in 1939 after the resignation of the Bardoloi Ministry. Rupnath Brahma, as the Tribal League nominee, became the minister in the Saadulla cabinet. On 21 March 1940, a new agreement was signed between Tribal League and Saadulla.⁴⁶ Saadulla Government faced criticism for sabotaging the Line System.⁴⁷ The ministry resigned on 12 December 1941, followed by the opposition on land policy. Again, on 25 August 1942 Saadulla formed a government with the ensured majority when most of the Congress MLAs were in jail during August Movement. This time Saadulla opened up the new areas for immigrant

⁴⁴It was the first document through which the Bodos along with other plains tribal communities came to share the power to the extent provided by the Government of India Act 1935. The agreement based on the fact

1. that the Assam Tribal Party will remain an independent party and its members will not be bound to put their signatures about the creed of Congress.
2. The present system of the separate electorate will continue till the Congress Party agreement to accept the system of keeping separate seats in the joint electorate for the tribal communities in proportions to their population.
3. The Tribal communities will be allowed to send their members to the local Boards according to the electoral system to be determined by the Tribal League in the next session.
4. The people of the tribal communities who have embraced Hinduism or Christianity will include in the schedule of the tribal people provided they identify themselves as tribals.
5. The plain tribals will be treated as a separate class for government services, and in the matter of appointment, preference will be given to them till the quota provided for them in proportion to their number is filled up.
6. For the spread of education among these communities, provisions must make, and the maximum amount of financial grants be allowed every year out of the budget for their education.
7. A sufficient number of scholarships and stipends must be given to their students for general and professional education.
8. The sufficient number of scholarships and exemption of tuition fees must be granted in the High School and ME school, too.
9. One of the members must be inducted as a minister in the ministry.
10. The Government must make provisions for giving settlement of lands to the landless tribals, particularly to the Miri people.

See, Sujit Choudhury, *The Bodos Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority*, IIAS. Shimla: 2007.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶The agreement stated that the Assam Plain Tribal Party would remain an independent party and stay as a co-partner with the United Party as long as the Assam United Party will remain in the ministry. It has been expressly said that in the absence of the ministry of the United Party, it will not be obligatory on the part of the Plains Tribal Party to remain a party to the United Party. Appendix B, Memorandum submitted to the president of India by the Plains Tribal's Council of Assam on May 29, 1967.

⁴⁷Bimbadhar Deuri, an MLA of the Tribal League, launched a frontal attack in his budget speech, 26 February 1940.

settlement.⁴⁸ Thus, encroachment of the tribal land has been a significant challenge right from the colonial period. Ironically, the role of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and more importantly the Tribal League was not satisfying to protect the tribal land.⁴⁹

Post-Colonial status of the Plain Tribe and Movement for separate Identity

The Bodo was the most dominant of the Tribal League. Their position further consolidated since Moran and Chutiyas opted derecognition of their tribal status in the constitution. Thus Bodo becomes the sole authority to represent the tribal cause because other tribes were far less in number.⁵⁰ Gopinath Bardoloi successfully managed to pursue the Bodo leaders to abandon any idea of staking any claim for benefits of the sixth schedule. Bodo leaders joined 1952 election under the banner of the Congress banner, and Sitanath Brahma and Rupnath Brahma, two prominent leaders of Bodo, found a critical position in the postcolonial power structure.⁵¹ Tribal League or any other plain tribal organisation didn't seek protection under the sixth schedule. There were administrative difficulties in incorporating the plain tribes within the provision of the sixth schedule.⁵² Bardoloi Committee suggested that all matters

⁴⁸Bengal famine broke out and thus there was a fresh exodus of famine-stricken people from Bengal. Muslim League Bengal Assembly pressured Government of India for the arrangement of the Bengali people in Assam. Saadulla came out with Grow More Food policy, which was, Wavell, interpreted as the "Grow More Muslim" in reality. Thus the grazing reserves districts were thrown open. Also, the surplus land of the indigenous people occupied by the immigrants. See, S.L.Barua, A Comprehensive History of Assam, New Delhi: 1985, P.665.

⁴⁹As argued by Sujit Choudhury, the Tribal League leaders indifference and inertia towards the problem of encroachment had to account for. One reason, maybe the Tribal League was dominated by the Bodos, and the Brahmans monopolised the Bodo leadership. The Brahma movement had its positive aspects. But one can't deny that its protagonists in their bid to catch up with the advanced sections of Bengalees and Assamese who were their neighbours. Thus the movement created an early middle class, but in the process, it lost the organic link with the common layer of the society to a considerable extent. He further argued that the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, throughout the land debate, acted as the spokesman of the Assamese Hindus. Of course, its arguments for the reversal of the land policy regularly expressed concern for the safety of the tribal land. But at no point in time, the Congress tried to involve the plains tribals in the politics that it spearheaded over the land question. See, Sujit Choudhury, *The Bodos Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority*, IAS. Shimla: 2007., p 82-83.

⁵⁰Tribes like Mishing, Lalung were less in number as well as much behind in material advancement.

⁵¹Bardoloi died in 1952. Because of the active role played by Bardoloi to accommodate Bodo leaders, they fought the election under the banner of Congress.

⁵²In its memorandum submitted by the Tribal League on 20 March 1947, to the Constituent Assembly, it demanded protection under the fifth schedule of the Article 189 (a), and this reiterated in the subsequent memorandum. The hill districts of Assam inhabited by distinct tribes occupying specific territories where they formed an overwhelming majority. Their areas could be easily demarcated and identified as units where the sixth schedule could be enforced. The plain tribes of Assam had diversity. It was difficult in the case of the plains tribes to carve out any viable region where the habitats of the plain tribals would have justified the creation of a district demographically.

related to the protection and representation of the plain tribes should be left with the Advisory Committee. Another notable point was that even Bardoloi visualised a unilingual Assam or at least a unilingual Brahmaputra valley.⁵³ Congress member Nilomoni Phukan expressed in the Assembly that all other languages in Assam will be absorbed in the Assamese culture.⁵⁴ However, the plains tribes were not protected in the fifth schedule either on the ground that there was in existence the Amendment Act of 1947 that defended the tribal land. Imposition of the Assamese language on the plain tribes further complicated the situation. In the case of Bodo, a large number of educated Bodo became bilingual, which is why in the census report of 1951 and 1961, a large section of them returned Assamese as their mother tongue. Even in 1971 census figure shows that out of 6, 10,459 Bodo populations, Bodo speakers were only 5, 33,713. Interestingly, it happened when identity consciousness of Bodos became assertive. The first post decade in the post-colonial era, Bodo developed a better understanding of the Assamese society. They even established a common front with the Assamese people in the question of the incorporation of Goalpara district with the West Bengal.⁵⁵ Bodo in the areas of the Goalpara even accepted the decision of the Assam Government to discontinue Bengali medium for identifying themselves with the Assamese aspiration.⁵⁶ Branches of Assam Sahitya Sabha also established in the Bodo dominated areas. However, this kind of cooperation and understanding was overlooked by the process of forcible nationality formation. ⁵⁷ In 1952, Bodo Sahitya Sabha was established by a section of young Bodo leaders for the development of their speech. Infact, it was a symbolic protest against the language policy of the Assam government. In 1953, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha forwarded its demand for introducing the Bodo language at the primary level in the Bodo inhabited areas before then Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi. There was no active role on the part of the Government of

⁵³He spoke in the Assembly that, "For the homogeneity of the province, they (non-Assamese) should adopt the Assamese language. It is not the intention of the Government to make Assam a bi-lingual state." Assam Assembly Proceedings, 1948, p 511.

⁵⁴Nilomoni Phukan stated, "Regarding our language, Assamese must be the State Language of the Province. There can be no gainsaying of it the Government of it even if the Government stand or fall by it. All the languages of the different communities and their culture will be abolished in the Assamese culture. I speak with rather an authority in this matter regarding the mind of our people that this state can't nourish any other language in this province ." *ibid*, p 582.

⁵⁵ Bodo leaders opposed the integration of Goalpara to the West Bengal although most of the Bodo inhabitant areas of that district had been a part of Bengal since the time of Mughal.

⁵⁶The Director of the Public Instruction of Assam vides his memo no.41766/77 dated 20.11.47 wrote to Additional Director, Public Instruction: The grant sanctioned on condition that the medium of instructions should be nothing but Assamese.

⁵⁷ R.B.Vagaiwallah, the Census Superintendent of Assam stated the aggressive language policy as the form of aggressive nationalism. Census of India, 1951, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, vol. XII, Part 1 –A, p.414.

Assam.⁵⁸The annual session of Asom Sahitya Sabha in 1959 demanded Assamese as the sole language of the state. It has given one year time to the Government for taking the necessary step to make Assamese state language. Of course, the decision was executed in 1960. Bodo Sahitya Sabha came out with a resolution against the "hegemony of the Assamese in the Brahmaputra valley."⁵⁹ Bodo Sahitya Sabha even advocated Hindi as the official language.⁶⁰ The resolution pointed out that the people of Hill districts and Cachar are almost one and all ignorant of Assamese language. Even in the Brahmaputra valley, the northern part of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang and some parts of Nowgong and North Lakhimpur districts, the uneducated tribal people, mostly Bodo people are not familiar with the Assamese language. In that context, adoption of the Assamese as an official language, as stated in the resolution, "will fail." They also feared that if Assamese became the official language, Bodo children have to bear an extra burden of learning in the Assamese language which would put them in a disadvantageous position. On 16 November 1962, more than 15,000 people took part in a procession under the banner of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha demanding recognition of the Bodo language at the primary level. The Government of Assam finally appointed Rupnath Brahma Committee to examine the demand. On the recommendation of the Brahma committee, the Chief Minister of Assam introduced Bodo language as the medium of instruction up to class three at the Government High School of Kokrajhar. Besides language, another area that has been the primary issue of concern for plain tribes island. In 1960, the Tribal Sangha submitted a memorandum before U.N. Dhebar, the Chairman of the Scheduled Areas for the inclusion of the plains tribes of

⁵⁸The Government of Assam took three years to act on that demand. In 1956, when the government came out with textbook supposed to be a Bodo primer which to their bewilderment, the Bodo scholars found to be an Assamese reader interspersed with some Bodo words here and there. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha refused to accept it in a Bodo primer, and since then the issue has been shelved in cold storage. See, Sujit Choudhury, *The Bodos Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority*, IAS. Shimla :2007.,p.103-104.

⁵⁹The resolution stated, "It can't be denied that Assam is a multilingual state. Every linguistic group desires to keep alive their literature and get the education in their mother tongue. The biggest linguistic group in the state is that of Assamese which can claim only 54 per cent. According to the opinion of the S.R.C., a language should be spoken by seventy per cent or more to be recognised as an official language of a state. Looking at from this point of view the declaration of Assamese as the official language of Assam will mean imposition on the people of other linguistic groups.

⁶⁰ The resolution of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha: The unity of India has to be maintained to preserve the newly won independence. The issue of the official language in Assam has threatened the integration having given the fissiparous tendency which is harmful to Assam and for India as a whole. To put an end to this tendency, the best course open is, in the opinion of the Bodo people, to accept "Hindi" as the official language of the state of Assam. Thereby every linguistic group in the state will be on the same footing; that will also encourage the people of Assam one step forward towards learning Hindi.

Assam to the schedule of the constitution. However, the commission didn't consider the demand of the Tribal Sangha.⁶¹

In 1967, the All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) formed with the demand for a separate Bodoland. ABSU demanded the eviction of the all nontribals from the tribal belts. Bodo with the 49 per cent population in 1947 dropped to 29 per cent during the 1971 census. Migration from the neighbouring state of Bangladesh was mostly responsible. Large-scale infiltration towards the tribal belts and the blocks were further only added to the various settlement policies undertaken by the successive government.⁶² All Assam Student Union (AASU) and ABSU demanded tribal for tribal belts during the Assam Movement.⁶³ However, Assam Gana Parishad (AGP),⁶⁴ After formation of government promulgated law for the eviction of the unauthorised occupants or the reserved forest. In the whole process, ironically, tribal were the most affected.⁶⁵ In 1987, ABSU and the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) led an agitation against the growing infiltration and the protection of their land and identity. Thousands of protesters were detained. After a prolonged movement, the Chief Minister of Assam, P.K.Mahanta proposed the formation of the district council providing the limited autonomy under the Panchayati Raj Act. The Bodo leadership opposed this decision. In September 1990, the nine tripartite talks held in New Delhi between movement leaders, Assam Government and the Government of India. Finally, on 20 February 1993, the leadership of six years Bodo agitation signed the Bodo Accord that provided Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC).⁶⁶ The BAC was formed with 40 member council, out

⁶¹The Commission observed that Assam was already facing perplexities in the Hill Districts and Cachar. P.S.Dutta(Ed.), *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, Delhi, 1998.p.167.

⁶²For example, the Bodo leadership stated that the government appropriated 600,000 acres for government projects. J. N. Das, "Udayachal Movement in Assam," *Indian Journal of Political Science* (Madras) 50:3 (July-September 1989), pp. 335-36.

⁶³Assam Movement started in 1979 ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. Clause 10 of the Assam Accord states, "it will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws." <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/assam-accord-and-its-clauses#Clause%2010%20:%20Prevention%20of%20Encroachment%20of%20Government%20lands>.

⁶⁴ After two months of the signing of the Assam Accord, Asom Gana Parishad, a regional political party was formed on 15 August 1985. Hazarika, Niru. "ASOM GANA PARISHAD." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1988, pp. 95–104. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41855355.

⁶⁵George, Sudhir Jacob. "The Bodo movement in Assam: Unrest to accord." *Asian Survey* 34.10 (1994): 878-892.

⁶⁶The Bodo Accord signed in the presence of the Home Minister Pilot by K.Rao, Additional Chief Secretary, S.K.Bwiswmutiary, the President of ABSU, Rabiram Brahma, the Secretary of ABSU,

of which 35 members elected and five members nominated by the Governor of Assam. The Bodo Accord stated that the General Council of the BAC will not have the power to make laws but only have the power to make by-laws on 38 subjects assigned to it. The Government of Assam retains the power to make laws. However, the general council views need to be counted before making statutes on specific areas.⁶⁷ BAC was to cover seven districts unlike autonomous districts in the two hill districts, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong.⁶⁸ The Bodo Accord, 1993 was not successful in fulfilling the demands of the Bodo Movement. The leadership demanded 515 "Contentious Villages" to incorporate into the BAC. The chief executive of the interim BEC, K. Biswmutiary, resigned from his position.⁶⁹ The government cleared that incorporation of villages to the BAC can't happen considering the interest of the large number of the nontribal population in the 515 villages. As a reaction to this, Bodo militant resorted to the ethnic cleansing in and around 515 villages in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts. Divide Assam 50:50 is the popular slogan in the context of the current Bodo movement.

Another tribal group Rabha Hasong demanded the Rabha Autonomous Council. The demand for a Rabha homeland was raised initially by the Nilachal Autonomous District Demand Committee (NADDC), a non-political body since 1988. The Nilachal Autonomous District is comprising South Kamrup Tribal Belt of Guwahati and Chhayagaon, Bardamal Tribal Block and Bandipur Tribal Block and adjacent areas of South Kamrup and South Goalpara. NADDC has launched the movement along with the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). When the ABSU leaders signed an agreement with the government of India for the formation of the Bodo Autonomous Council in 1993, a section of protesters raised the demand for the creation of the Rabha Hasong Council. Finally, in 1995, the Chief Minister of Assam Hiteshwar Saikia signed a memorandum of understanding in July 1995 for the formation of the Rabha Hasong

representatives of BPAC. memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) (Guwahati: Government of Assam Press, 1993), pp. 1-10

⁶⁷Firstly, religious or social practices of the Bodos; Secondly, Bodo customary law and procedures; and thirdly ownership and transfer of land within the BAC area. Bodoland Autonomous Council Act, ch. 2, paras. 23-28, pp. 394-97, and ch. 6, para. 56(1-3), p. 410.

⁶⁸Seven districts are Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Darrang, Barpeta, Kamrup, Nalbari, Bongaigaon.

⁶⁹He alleged the Government of Assam was not fulfilling the promise of giving 515 villages, although not stipulated in the accord, but promised verbally. He also accused the state government of practising linguistic chauvinism. Times of India, 17 December 1993

Autonomous Council. Demand for the creation of Nilachal Autonomous Council continues.

Conclusion :

Immigration, specifically of the Bengali settler indeed has been a perennial area of concern in the context of Assam. The total focus of the Assamese leadership towards the political and cultural identity led less concern on the land resource. Above all, the Indo Mongoloid or the Tibeto –Burma speaking tribal were ignored on the process of the imposition of the Assamese language. As a result, hill tribes started demanding autonomy. Assamese composite nationality thus was challenged by a strong tribal middle class with the imposition of their identity. Nagaland, Mizoram, Khasi, Jaintia, and Arunachal separated from Assam. The plain tribes revolted against the growing Assamese hegemony. Bodo Autonomous Council, Dimasas, and Karbi Autonomous Council were the result of conflict with Assamese domination on the one hand and growing tribal aspiration on the other side. There has been a continuous demand for the full statehood. Assam thus becomes and continues to be a nation of “besieged and beleaguered”.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Sajal Nag has discussed how Assam indeed a nation besieged and beleaguered from different directions for the last one hundred years and continued to face the threat of further disintegration. See, Sajal Nag, *Beleaguered Nation, The Making and the Unmaking of the Assamese Nationality*, Manohar: 2017.

Conclusion

Assam is the region with great diversity with hundreds of tribes and non-tribes. Ahom, a branch of Shans, ruled Assam for more than six hundred years, was the last to enter Assam. They adopted language, religion, and culture of the region, and were successful to gain the confidence of the people. The nationality formation in Assam shaped during the seventeenth century when under the Ahom regime a common language in a diverse linguistic environment was adopted. Tribal groups became bilingual and identified themselves as Assamese. The unified economic structure was another factor that brought people together. Wet rice cultivation started against shifting cultivation. Then the Vaishnavite movement preached by Shankardeva further unified the then divided society.¹ It was a socio-cultural-religious movement. A greater Assamese community was on the verge of emergence towards the end of the seventeenth century. However, it never consolidated due to the inner contradictions of the society. The difference between the tribal-non tribal and the caste Hindu was still a significant concern. The inconsistency of the mode of production led peasant uprising. Moamaria rebellion, 1770 started challenging the process of development. With the advent of the British, there was a sudden shift from the feudalism in the Ahom era to the capitalism in the colonial period. To fulfill the interest of the capitalism under the aegis of colonialism, the spatial transformation of Assam was an essential condition. The most critical issue was the attack on the self-sufficient economy of the pre-colonial era. As argued by Sajal Nag,

The reproductive powers of the peasants were undermined; they were asked to change the variables determining the equilibrium of their production. Production of use of value was pressurised to be replaced by production of exchange value. A new revenue system along with a new superstructure was introduced. Extensive administrative machinery along with a new judicial system made its appearance.²

¹Shrimanta Shankardeva (1449-1568) was a social reformer, cultural and literary icon and also a religious figure.

²Nag, Sajal. *Beleaguered Nation; The Making and Unmaking of the Assamese Nationality*. Delhi: Manohar .2017.470.

Challenges faced by Assamese identity:

A modern social class emerged where many Bengali officials entered to take up the white collared jobs. Their earlier access to the modern education and long association with the British helped them to occupy the job market. British opted for the already trained Bengalis for jobs in office and also in schools. Subsequently, three Bengal districts were transferred to Assam. It added more problems to the already existing threat towards identity. The geographical imposition in the form of annexation of areas to Bengal and then again transferring Bengal districts to Assam was another significant development in the context of the changing region. In the meantime,

Not only was there a tacit move on the part of the raj to gradually amalgamate the Assamese with the Bengalis, the Assamese were naturally getting acculturated as a result of their attachment with Bengal. This was indicated by the appearance of a section of Assamese youth of being so.³

The spatial history of the region formation and reformation was primarily determined by its connectivity with the core province, Bengal. Trade was another determining factor. Infrastructural development, especially the connectivity was solely for trading purpose. Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionerate province purely based on the interest of the tea –planters. The colonial government transformed Assam into a region of the planter’s raj. Transportation, communication, education and even in the administration the whole purpose was about protecting the interest of the planters. The inflow of the immigration started under the colonial government in the form of importing workers in the tea estate.

The control over the Assamese language with the declaration of the Bengali as the official language was another threat. It was considered that the Assamese was mere dialect originated from the Bengali language. In linguistic and economic terms, Assamese were overtaken by Bengalis. With the decision of the imposition of the Bengali language, a considerable amount of damage was already done in the relationship of both the communities. Moreover, the immigrant of the large numbers of the Bengali population led to change in the ethnocultural character of the society. It

³Ibid .471.

resulted in the vast social distinctions between both the communities. Bengalis position under the colonial government was much higher compared to that of the Assamese people, and thus the Assamese community remained a subdued cultural entity. It intensified the ethnic conflict in the region. With Cachar and Sylhet in it, Assam had already Bengali majority in the Brahmaputra valley. Moreover, the immigrants added a large section of the Muslim population to the province. A fear psychosis prevailed among the Assamese people that Muslim League leaders wanted to import and settle more Muslim population in Assam. However, this phenomenon was proven correct when the Muslim League proposed Assam to be part of Pakistan. The Cabinet Mission Plan proposed the Grouping plan and Assam was placed with Bengal. Whereas the region was not a Muslim majority and thus it was a severe threat to its existence as it would be absorbed in Bengal. The challenge faced by the Assamese nationality was the very survival of the community. That extended the intensifying conflict between Assamese, Bengali and Muslim population.

The rise of Assamese nationalism started against the threat to the culture and the hegemonic domination under the colonial government. The Assamese leadership continued to struggle to reclaim the land, language, and identity. The conspiracy of the Greater Bengal Movement or the proposal of the attachment of Assam into Pakistan during the Cabinet Mission Plan resulted in hectic political activity and also massive mobilisation in the Brahmaputra Valley. Separation of Sylhet and resisting Muslim immigrants was another area that led colossal emotion that the “Assamese were in danger”. Student community, Asom Sahitya Sabha, and politicians joined together on this issue. Ambikagiri Raychoudhuri even gave a call to raise an Army of two lakhs to volunteer to save Assam.⁴ The restless massive protest of the Assamese people led to the transfer of Sylhet by conducting a referendum.

However, and little interest was given towards the issues of the ethnic tribal groups. Fight against the visible opponent and the ethnic groups for their rightful claims to "nationhood, hegemony and political power" was a major concern. The flow of the immigrant Bengali peasants and their settlement in the wasteland was another cause that directly affected the indigenous tribes. Also, the massive influx of the immigrants was not settled in a particular area. As a result, the linguistically and religiously

⁴Guha.Amalendu. Planter Raj to Swaraj.Tulika Books .1977.317.

homogenous rural Assamese society was transformed into a heterogeneous society. The rural Assamese society considered the immigrants as a threat to their pure identity. Despite the strong protest from the local people, a massive inflow of the job seeking and land seeking Bengalis continued. Soon they became the dominant group to claim a share in the local politics. Assamese community strengthens their struggle to counter the Bengali forces in all spheres to establish the Assamese language as an independent entity. The emerging Assamese middle class successfully demolished the propaganda of Assamese as being part of the Bengali language; thus reclaimed the independent entity of the Assamese language. The challenge faced by the Assamese newly emerged middle class was that it had to take the predominant Bengali population in all fronts. They were successful in the reinstatement of the Assamese language during 1836-1873. During the process of the establishment of the independent entity of the Assamese language, they produced some of the best linguistic, literally creation.

Changing Ethnic Politics in the Post Colonial Era:

The postcolonial politics of ethnicity continued to cultivate much of the colonial spatial imagination. The movement for separate state, Kamatapur, justifies the narratives that do not limit to the territorial boundary.⁵ During the 1940s, the Zamindars of Goalpara along with Koch Rajbangshi, the Tibeto-Burman group of Indo Mongoloid racial group, desired transfer to Bengal because of their close connection with the Bengali culture. As argued by Sanjib Barua,

The ethno –territorial frame that colonial officials used to create boundaries between administrative units and to device rules of exclusion, continue to shape notions of entitlement and the aspirations of ethnic groups –as articulated by political organisation speaking on their behalf.⁶

This continuation leads a discourse between indignity on the one hand and territoriality on the other side. In that way, the ethnic groups argue with a line of the colonial category putting the binary of hill –plains in front. As a result,

⁵The demand for Kamatapur consisting of Goalpara, Cooch Behar, Garo Hills, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and neighbouring districts. A proposal was submitted for the formation of the Kamatapur in 1954.

⁶Baruah, Sanjib. *Beyond counter-insurgency: Breaking the impasse in northeast India*. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.9

“The politics of territoriality and indignity often becomes an exercise in defending the fences and walls that colonial rulers had erected. The continuing hold of colonial knowledge is reflected in both official policy discourse, and the political imagination of local activists.”⁷

With the growth of the tea-plantation industry in Assam, the colonial government encouraged massive migration and settlement of the Bengali Muslims in the wasteland of Assam. After independence, this became a significant issue that posed a challenge towards the existence of the Assamese identity. As a result, there was a significant concern for the protection of the Assam from the outsiders. In the 1960s, the Official Language Bill was passed to make Assam linguistically unified. It cultivated much discontent amongst the non-Assamese people. The State Reorganisation Commission didn't agree in favour of Assamese language as according to the condition there must be 70 per cent speaker of the language to be recognised as the official language. The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee in Shillong has resolved that Assamese would be the state language of Assam. There was a strong movement in Assam demanding Assamese as the official language, and at the same time, all members from undivided Cachar opposed the move. There was violence in various parts of the State resulting in police firing and death of protesters in Cachar districts. The turmoil resulting from issue temporarily ended with a compromise initiated by the Congress leader Lal Bahadur Sastri who proposed that the Assam Official Language Act 1960 be amended - a) To give local bodies authority to alter the official language of their area by the two-thirds majority; b) To allow communication between the state capital and Cachar and hill districts to continue to be in English; c) At the state level to continue the use of English along with Assamese and d) To incorporate stronger provisions for the protection of linguistic minorities. However, the bill was passed and it sparked strong resistance and opposition. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference and All Tribal Organisation opposed the imposition of the Assamese language on the tribal population of the region. Hill tribes considered that unilingual move was the hegemonic exercise by the plains people. As an immediate consequence, the hill district Nagaland separated in 1963.

⁷Baruah, Sanjib. "Territoriality, indigeneity and rights in the north-east India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 2008: 15-19.

After Independence, there were multiple separations of the region. The spatial division changed the political dimension as well. Although there are diversity and border conflict among the states, the region stands with a specific united forum for composite cause and benefit. North East Council, the North East United MP Forum etc. can be seen as the collective bargain for the region. The claims and counter-claims over territory are not only a continuous phenomenon among the states; it is also there in the Autonomous Council. The plain tribal groups demanded the right to self-determination long after independence. It was after the Assam Movement, the demands of the plain tribes become loud. Bodo, Karbis, Dimasas demanded separation. Most of the movements turned violent, and the need for the independent homeland is still dormant for many communities.

The effort for a Unified State: Bardoloi's policy and politics

Gopinath Bardoloi's push for the building of a unified and inclusive Assamese nationality with the protection and security of the hill tribes was another essential phenomenon in the making of Assam. His continuous efforts for the protection of Assam from the inflow of the illegal immigration from the Bengal were another critical aspect. Syed Saadulla after the resignation of the Bardoloi Ministry in 1939, again came to power. Immediately after taking office, he signed an agreement with the Assam Tribal League where interestingly no specific clause on the protection of land question. Instead, Saadulla went ahead with the settlement of the East Bengal immigrants. In 1943, Saadulla ministry opened the reserved grazing land and the wasteland in the districts of Darrang, Kamrup, and Nowgaon. As part of the "Grow More Food" Saadulla ministry justified the land giving to the Bengali immigrants under the programme aimed at helping the war economy. But in actual practice, as narrated by Wavel, the programme was for "Grow More Muslim" since the overwhelming majority of the landless peasants were Muslim. Maulana Bhasani led the Muslim League had been in continuous demand for the further opening up of the reserved land for the immigrants. They also demanded the abolition of the Line system, a protective measure of the land of the indigenous community. So, the immigration of Muslim was a demographic threat as they were patronised by both, the colonial government and also the Muslim League Ministry. In the meantime, the Congress was voted to power and thus Gopinath Bardoloi was back again to the office. Bardoloi took the initiatives to clear the grazing and forest reserves of illegal encroachers with the

amendment of the Assam Land Revenue Regulations, 1886 and also created reserved tribal belts in different regions. Thus Bardoloi was a strong voice in support of tribal land protection from the non-tribal. He had to fight restlessly in the Constituent Assembly for the protection of the tribal rights, while some of his colleagues opposed his proposal of District Council and Regional Council. Participating in the debate, Brajeshwar Prasad argued,

They will lead to the establishment of another Pakistan in this country. I stand second to none in my enthusiasm for social, educational and cultural advancement in the tribal areas of Assam. For, it is on the achievement of these objectives that the security of the State can be guaranteed. But the step that we have taken is neither in accord with the general well-being of the tribals nor with the interests of the people of India as a whole.⁸

Another member, Kuladhar Chaliha even criticised Bardoloi for the initiative to create a Tribalstan in the like of Pakistan. Bardoloi had to intervene in many issues related to the granting autonomy to the tribal and for the protection of their customs. However, members like J.J.M.Nicholas Ray extended full support to Bardoloi. He argued about the necessity of the self-government of the tribal people to win their trust. However, Bardoloi was not much concerned about the plain tribes of Assam and their land. As argued by Udayan Mishra,

The denial of the sixth Scheduled status for the Bodos which would have given them constitutional protection when they needed it most to protect their land and identity can be seen as one of the primary causes leading to the alienation of the tribal land in the post-independence years.⁹

Reasonable disagreement¹⁰ is inextricably related to constitutional democracy and thus dissents are inevitable among the judges, representatives, and citizens over the interpretation, procedure and institutionalisation of constitutionalism and democracy.C.

⁸ Shri Brajeshwar Prasad, Constituent Assembly Debate, Tuesday, 6th September 1949, Vol. IX.

⁹Misra, Udayan. "Bodoland: The burden of history." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2012): 36-42.

¹⁰See J. Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 102-106, and *The Dignity of Legislation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 153-154.

Moffee argues that disagreement and agonism result from the irreconcilability of the logic of the two fundamental principles of constitutionalism and democracy.¹¹ Bardoloi, a Gandhian, visualised the state of Assam which would federate all ethnic groups. As the chairperson of the subcommittee, he formalized this federal character. A diverse and disintegrated region was crafted into a state by Bardoloi. He didn't agree to the proposal of Nehru for the refugee resettlement in Assam. Nehru wrote to Bardoloi,

The refugee problem is one of the two or three problems to which we give first priority in India at present. This applies to the utilisation of our financial resources also. Our development schemes are thought of in terms, to some extent, of refugees. If Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help in solving the refugee problem, then the claims of Assam for financial help obviously suffer.¹²

Bardoloi argued how Assam was not capable for the rehabilitation of the refugees in its wasteland. He has written back to Nehru that not more than two lakh acres of waste land were available outside the tribal belt and the hill districts. Most of the land was in scattered blocks with more than 1,000 acres. So, not more than 25,000 acres would be fit for the reclamation. Against this available wasteland, Assam had to settle 1, 86,121 landless peasants families from the seven plain districts and for this 18, 61,201 acres land was necessary if the government were to provide at least 10 acres of land to every family. Besides this, about 50,000 peasant's families were flood affected. Since Assam was the purely agricultural economy, argued by Bardoloi, "it was impossible for a popular government to ignore these facts in the face of continued industrial backwardness due to the Centres inadequate financial allotment."¹³

Assam: From Region to a Besieged State:

Documentation of the history of Assam has been dated back to the fourth century AD. However, little was known about the hill regions. Historians have therefore stressed upon the oral history along with archaeology and social anthropology to understand the region. Most of the hill tribes, unlike Assam, didn't experience the state formation.

¹¹ C. Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Model of Democracy', in *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000) 1-35

¹² Nehru to Bardoloi, 18 May 1949.

¹³ Bardoloi to Nehru, 29 May 1949.

Only Khasis, as argued by Guha, had moved towards state formation before coming to British.¹⁴Majority of Hill languages and dialects are part of Tibeto-Burma group. Shifting cultivation was predominant in the hills. Given the above facts, it justifies that there has been a socio-cultural and political division between Assam and other units of the North East region. In fact, some of the areas of the region didn't even touch by the freedom struggle. That was the reason that the very first challenge to the idea of "one nation" came from the hills of the northeast region. As argued by Udayon Mishra,

The idea that the Partition had led to the creation of a homogenous Indian nation-state with a strong central government soon come to be questioned because of the nationalistic struggles in the northeastern region of the country. The idea of a uni-cultural region with one dominant language held together by a strong state which drew its strength from the diverse strands of the rich and varied Indian civilisation was challenged by the Nagas and Mizos and finally, even by the Assamese.¹⁵

The rise of the nationalistic aspirations among the various communities in undivided Assam rose very strongly in the post Independence era. Thus the very idea of the Indian Nation – the state is being challenged from the periphery. The Naga struggle started with the aim of safeguarding the unique way of life of the Naga soon adopted an insurrectionary form in the early fifties. The Assam movement in 1979-85 was the outburst of anger against the centre's lackadaisical attitude towards the region. United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), an organisation by radical fringe formed on 7 April 1979. Assam Movement, as argued by Bhupen Sharma,

"Became a role model to be followed by the Bodos, who replicated the xenophobia leading to ethnic chauvinism and then to secessionism, with a discernible departure from the earlier form to the political assertion of the Bodos."¹⁶

¹⁴Guha.Amlendu. Planter Raj to Swaraj. Tulika.1977.6-7.

¹⁵Mishra.Udayon. The Periphery Strikes Back Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland. Shimla: IAS.2000.10

¹⁶Sarmah, Bhupen. "India's Northeast and the Enigma of the Nation-state." *Alternatives* 42.3 (2017): 166-178.

Of late, armed militancy has been the key strategy adopted by the hill districts like Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao to fulfill their demand for the separate state. There has been growing challenges for the idea of the composite Assam with the increasing demands from the ethnic groups for self-determination.

Immigration and land have been significant issues of everyday conflict in the region over the years. Demographic change and the problems of identity are other areas that have been proven the core conflict causes. Although protective measures like Line system for the protection of the tribal land, Sixth Schedule status to safeguard the land and identity have been adopted, there is no easy escape from the burden of colonial history. The situation has worsened further with the continuous demand for the self-rule by the politically conscious ethnic groups. Homogeneity amidst different identity has been a real challenge in the idea of unified, composite Assam. Gopinath Bardoloi tried to accommodate diversity into the federal structure and was successful in no small extent. Critical explorations of policies and politics exercised by Gopinath Bardoloi and Saadulla are an essential source for the study of the region. A serious research study on Bardoloi and Saadulla still needs to explore and here lays the possibilities for future research.

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APPENDIX I

Sub Committee on North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal & Excluded Areas.

The 28th July 1947,

From

THE CHAIRMAN,

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER (ASSAM) TRIBAL & EXCLUDED AREAS

To

THE CHAIRMAN,

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, MINORITIES,
TRIBAL SUB-COMMITTEE

AREAS, ETC.,

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF INDIA,

COUNCIL HOUSE, NEW DELHI.

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith my Sub-Committee's report on the Tribal and Excluded Areas of Assam. The report has been drawn up by us after a tour of the Province which included visits to the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar Hills Sub-Division, the Mikir Hills and the Naga Hills District. The Committee could not visit the Garo Hills District on account of bad weather and difficult communications and the Jowai Sub-division of the Khasi Hills District could not also be visited for the same reason. We however examined witnesses and representatives of the Garo Hills District at Gauhati and paid a visit also to certain Garo villages on and near the Goalpara road. At most of the places we visited, we had to be satisfied with a visit to the headquarters of the district or tract and with a visit to one or two villages in the neighbourhood. To visit places in the interior would have taken us a great deal more of time and delayed our report considerably. Representatives of the tribes however visited the headquarters, even from long distances, and on the whole we feel that we have been able to get into contact with all the important representatives of the hill people and to take their views on the future administration of the areas. We have also taken the views of the different political organisations in the province and recorded the evidence of officials.

2. Except for the Frontier Tracts and Tribal Areas, we co-opted two members from the tribes of each of the districts visited. The co-opted members, with the exception of Mr. Kezhol (representative of the Kohima section of the Naga National Council and himself an Angami) who submitted his resignation during the final meeting at Shillong,

discussed the proposals and signed (subject to dissent in the case of Mr. Kheloushe & Mr. Aliba Imti) the minutes of the meeting.

3. In connection with the co-option of members we would like to mention the "District Conference" convened by the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills as an elected body purporting to be representative of the whole of the Lushai Hills. The election to this body which consisted of twenty chiefs and twenty commoners with the Superintendent himself as President was boycotted by the Mizo Union which was the only representative body of the Lushais at that time and clearly could not be regarded by us as representing more than a section of opinion, largely that of certain officials and chiefs controlled by them. Consequently the criticism that we co-opted members without consulting the Superintendent or his conference carries, in our opinion, no weight.

4. In the Naga Hills, the Committee had to face a similar situation in the sense that certain officials were influencing the extreme elements of the Naga National Council. Discussion of a number of points could not be carried on to the full extent on account of lack of agreement within the Naga National Council but we understand that on the occasion of the Governor's visit to Kohima, the more reasonable elements put forward their views. We find that our proposals not only contain the substance of these but go further in some respects. The resignation of Mr. Kezehol was due to the fact that his section of the Naga National Council was dissident. Our proposals correspond fully to the spirit of the resolution of the Naga National Council passed at Wokha in June 1946, and we feel confident that the majority of people in the Naga Hills District will find that our proposals go a long way towards meeting even their present point of view.

5. Our report (Volume I) is divided into two parts and the evidence forms a separate volume (Volume II). In the first part of our report we have given a bird's eye view of the areas as a whole, noting in particular their common features and giving the framework of the scheme of administration recommended by us. In Part II a largely descriptive account of the different areas is given separately and we have mentioned their special features or needs.

6. We regret that our colleague Mr. Aliba Imti has not been able to attend the meeting to sign the report and hope that he will be able to attend the meeting of the Advisory Committee.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient servant,

G. N. BARDOLOI,

Chairman,

North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal & Excluded Areas Sub-Committee

[Annexure IV]

APPENDIX C

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON NORTH-EAST FRONTIER (ASSAM) TRIBAL AND EXCLUDED AREAS

Part I

1. INTRODUCTORY -

The Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas of Assam as scheduled by the Order-in-Council under the Government of India Act, 1935, are as follows: -

Excluded Areas

The North-East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur).

Tracts

The Naga Hills Districts.

The Lushai Hills District.

The North Cachar Hills Sub-Division of the Cachar District.

Partially Excluded Areas

The Garo Hills District.

The Mikir Hills (in the Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts).

The British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, other than Shillong Municipality and Cantt.

There is also an area to the east of the Naga Hills District known as the Naga Tribal Area the position of which is covered by the provisions of Section 311 (1) of the Government of India Act: The Tirap Frontier Tract which adjoins the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract has no defined boundary with Burma.

The Assam Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee is required to report on a scheme of administration for all these areas.

2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION -

(a) The Frontier Tracts. - The Schedule quoted above shows the North-East Frontier Tracts as excluded areas. In considering the list of areas to be excluded or partially excluded and making recommendations to H. M. G. in 1935 the Government of India wrote as follows: -

"Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur are essentially frontier areas inhabited by tribes in an early stage of development. Balipara has no defined outer boundaries and extends to

the confines of Bhutan and Tibet." It will be seen that it was mentioned that Balipara has no definite outer boundaries but the position of Sadiya and Lakhimpur or the Tirap Frontier Tract was apparently the same. On the Tirap Frontier Tract in fact, the boundary with Burma has yet to be settled and all three regions include considerable areas of as yet virtually unadministered and only partially explored territory. The position of Balipara and Sadiya however differs from that of the Tirap Frontier in that there exists a boundary between Tibet and India. The facts are that in 1914 there was a tripartite convention with Tibet and China regarding the relations of the three Governments and in particular regarding the frontier between India and Tibet. The convention which contained an agreement about the frontier line between India and Tibet was ratified by the Tibetan authorities at Lhasa, and the line known as the MacMahon Line was indicated on a map of which a copy was given to the Lhasa Government which acknowledged it. The existence of this line was for a long time not known to the Assam Government, and on the other hand it was found that there was no notification under Section 60 of the Government of India Act, 1919, specifying the northern frontier of Assam, with the result that the MacMahon Line which is the frontier between Tibet and India is the legal boundary of Assam as well. In practice the position is peculiar. Though the Governor of Assam is vested with authority over the Frontier Tracts, it is taken to be exercised, not by virtue of the provisions applicable to Excluded Areas of the Government of India Act, 1935, but as the Agent of the Governor-General under Section 123 of the Act, vide Notification No. I-X, dated the 1st April 1937 of the Government of India in the External Affairs Department (Appendix B. page 130). All the costs of administration of the tracts are also borne by the Central Government and the Central Government are inclined to treat them as tribal areas within the meaning of Section 311 of the Government of India Act. On the other hand, the local officials treat the area as consisting of two parts. One which they call the Excluded Area and stretches up to the "Inner Line" boundary, and the Tribal Area, which by them is understood to mean the area beyond the "Inner Line" boundary. The "Inner Line" boundary is roughly along the foot of the hills and the area bounded by it is occupied by a somewhat mixed population, while the hill portions beyond it are purely inhabited by the tribes. This treatment again does not appear to be strictly justifiable in law though it may be convenient to think of the administered plains portion of the area separately from the not fully administered hills. Since the frontier tracts are administered in practice by the Central Government as tribal areas, the absence of a notification under Section 60 of the Government of India Act, 1919, was regarded as an oversight. The position of these areas will be discussed further at a later stage, but it is clear from the foregoing that the Naga Tribal Area on the Eastern Frontier and the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur or Tirap Frontier Tracts on the North-Eastern Frontier fall under one category. The Balipara Frontier Tract which includes the Subansiri area is the tract over which there is as yet the smallest measure of control and administration. This tract and the Sadiya Frontier Tract are inhabited by tribes such as the Senjithonji, Dafla, Apa Tani, Momba (Balipara) the Abor, Mishmi, Hkampti (Sadiya). The Tirap Frontier contains Singphaws (who were originally Kachins) and a number of tribes classed as Naga, while the Naga Tribal Area is largely inhabited by Nagas of the Konyak group. The policy on these Frontiers is to establish administration and control over the whole area right up to the frontier, and a five-year plan has been sanctioned by the Government of India. This plan mostly covers the Sadiya and Balipara Tracts but a few schemes of the Naga Tribal Area are also included in it. A separate plan for the development of the latter is under consideration.

(b) The Excluded Areas. - The Excluded Areas of the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District and the North Cachar Hills Sub-division fall within the second category of areas over which the Provincial Ministry has no jurisdiction whatever and the revenues expended in this area are not subject to the vote of the provincial legislature. The Naga Hills District is the home of a good number of tribes classed as Naga, such as Angami, Ao, Sema, Lhota. Adjoining it is the Naga Tribal Area in the eastern portion of which a good deal of head hunting still goes on. Though the tribes are all called Naga, they speak different languages and have differing customs and practices also. The Lushai on the other hand, though consisting of a number of clans, are practically one people and speak a common language. The Kuki in the North Cachar Hills and elsewhere are people of the same stock as Lushai or Mizo and speak the same language or a dialect. The Lushai Hills District except for an inappreciable number of Lakhers in the extreme south contains a uniform population. The North Cachar Hills, on the other hand, provide sanctuary for the Kachari, Naga, Kuki, Mikir and Khasi. The largest of the tribes here are the Kachari and the villages of the different tribes, are more or less interspersed.

(c) Partially Excluded Areas. - The third category is the Partially Excluded Areas consisting of the Khasi Hills District (British portion), the Garo Hills District and the Mikir Hills which fall in two districts, viz. Nowgong and Sibsagar, are administered by the Provincial Government subject to the powers of the Governor to withhold or apply the laws of the Provincial Legislature with or without modifications, or to make special rules. The Khasias, incidentally, are the only line of the tribes in this area who speak a Monkhmer language; all the other tribes speak Tibeto-Burmese languages. Generally speaking, they inhabit the areas which bear their names but there are villages outside these districts which also contain some of the tribes. Thus, the Garo inhabit a number of villages in the Mymensingh district of Bengal in addition to many villages in the districts of Kamrup and Goalpara in Assam. The Khasi population is not only to be found in the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but the States (which comprise a fairly large area) round about Shillong are inhabited by the Khasis. These States, twenty five in number, have the special feature that their chiefs are actually elected in a few cases by free election, though in the majority of cases the election is confined to a particular clan, the electorate consisting of Myntries of the clan only in some states, by a joint electorate of Myntries and elector selected by the people in general in others. The States have comparatively little revenue or authority and seem to depend for a good deal of support on the Political Officer in their relations with their peoples. There is a strong desire among the people of the States to "federate" with their brothers in the British portion, a feeling which the people on the British side reciprocate. Some of the Siems also appear to favour amalgamation but their idea of the Federation differs from that of the people in that the Chiefs seek a greater power for themselves than the people are prepared to concede to them.

Of the people in the Partially Excluded Areas, the Khasi are the most advanced and the Mikir the least. Unlike the Naga and the Lushai Hills these areas have had much more contact with people in the plains, situated as they are between the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Surma. They have representatives in the provincial legislature who, in the case of the Garo and the Mikir Hills, are elected by franchise of the Nokmas and the village headmen respectively.

3. DEVELOPMENT -

As regards the degree of development and education in the excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, the most backward areas, comparatively appear to be the Mikir and the Garo Hills, both of which are Partially Excluded Areas. The Frontier Tracts, parts of which must be inhabited by people with on contact with civilisation or education, are of course on a different footing. The Khasi Hills have probably benefitted by the fact that the capital of the province is situated in them. In the Garo Hills, Christian Missions have spread some education along with Christianity but the Mikir Hills have suffered from the fact that they are divided between two districts, Nowgong and Sibsagar, and thus nobody's child. Partial exclusion has in a way been responsible for their backwardness also, since both the Governor of the province and the Ministry can disclaim the sole responsibility for the area. The Sub-divisional Officers and Deputy Commissioners of these Hills more over seem to have taken little interest in them and hardly any touring has been performed by officers in the Mikir areas. On the whole, however, the Hill Districts show considerable progress. The Khasi Hills have provided Ministers in the Provincial Government. The people of the Lushai Hills who have benefitted by the activities of the Missionaries among them cannot be said to be behind the people of the plains in culture, education and literacy. In literacy particularly they are in a better position than a good number of the plains areas and the general percentage of literacy among them is about 13 per cent, while the literacy among men only is about 30 per cent. Among the Naga also may be found a number of persons of college education, though the district as a whole appears to be less advanced than the Lushai Hills. In the Naga Hills, the demand for education is keener in the Mokokchung Sub-division than in the Kohima Sub-division. In the North Cachar Hills, the development of the people has not been impressive and the Sub-division as a whole should be classed as more backward than other areas and comparable with the Mikir rather than the Lushai Hills. While education has made some progress in all these areas, the conditions of life and pursuit of non-agricultural occupations cannot be said to have reached the level attained in the plains, although the degree of intelligence necessary is undoubtedly available in most of these areas, even in the tribal areas. We were in fact impressed by the intelligence of the Abor and Mishmi, the Sherdukpen, the Hkampti and even the Konyak of the tribal area. The skill of many of the tribes in weaving and tapestry contains the elements of a very attractive cottage industry-at present articles are made largely for personal use-but agriculture is practically the only occupation, and with the exception of considerable areas occupied by the Angami in the Naga Hill under terraced and irrigated cultivation and the advanced cultivation in the Khasi Hills, the mode of agriculture is still the primitive one of jhuming. Portions of the forest are burnt down and in the ashes of the burnt patch the seeds are sown: the following year a new patch of forest is felled and cultivated and so on, the first patch perhaps being ready again for cultivation after three or four years. The jhuming patches develop a thick growth of bamboo or weeds and trees do not grow on them. Thus the method is destructive of good jungle. In certain parts, of course, conditions may be said to be unfavourable to the terracing of the hillsides and there is no source of water supply other than rainfall. In the Lushai Hills for instance comparatively few areas have the gradual slope which render terracing easy; in the North Cachar Hills Sub-division, irrigation is difficult to arrange and the small hamlets occupied by the tribes cannot provide enough labour for terracing work. Attempts have however been made to introduce terracing and improved methods of cultivation as well as the growing of fruits, and there is little doubt that good progress will soon be feasible in these directions. A certain amount of political consciousness has also developed among the tribes, and we were much impressed by the demand of the Abor in the Sadiya Frontier

Tract for representation in the provincial legislature. The idea of Government by the people through their chosen representatives is not a totally new conception to most of the hill people whose ways of life centre around the tribal and village councils, and what is required now is really an understanding of the mechanism and implications as well as the responsibilities of the higher stages of administration and the impracticability as well as the undesirable results of small groups of rural population being entrusted with too much responsibility. Generally speaking, it can be stated that all the excluded areas of the province, not taking into account at this stage the frontier and tribal areas, have reached the stage of development when they can exercise their votes as intelligently as the people of the plains. On the ground of inability to understand or exercise the franchise therefore, there is absolutely no justification for keeping the excluded areas in that condition any longer.

As regards the Frontier Tracts, not only has there been little education except in the fringes or plains portions, but administration has yet to be fully established over large tracts and the tribes freed from feuds or raids among themselves and from the encroachment and oppression of Tibetan tax collectors. The removal of the trade blocks setup by these Tibetans on the Indian side of the Mac Mahon Line sometimes creates delicate situations. Thus the country is in many ways unripe for regular administration. Only when the new five year programme has made good headway will there be an adequate improvement in the position. Even the village councils in these tracts appear to be ill-organised and there seems to be little material as yet for local self-governing institutions though it may be possible to find a few people who can speak for their tribe. The plains portions are however on a different footing and the question of including them in the provincial administration needs careful examination. For example, we are of the view that prima facie there is little justification to keep the Saikhoagh at, the Sadiya plains portion and possibly portions of the Balipara Frontier Tract under special administration.

4. THE HILL PEOPLE'S VIEWS -

Though the Constituent Assembly Secretariat and we ourselves, issued a leaflet to provide information and create interest in the political future of India, the Constituent Assembly's functions and the objects of our tour, the Hill people, even of the Excluded Areas, were not found lacking in political consciousness. Perhaps not without instigation by certain elements, this consciousness has even instilled ideas of an independent status the external relations under which would be governed by treaty or agreement only. In the Lushai Hills District the idea of the Superintendent who constituted himself the President of the "District Conference" which he himself had convened (see para, 5 Part II) was that the District should manage all affairs with the exception of defence in regard to which it should enter into an agreement with the Government of India. A "Constitution" based on this principle was later drafted by the Conference. (The great majority of the Lushai however cannot be regarded as holding these views and it is doubtful if the District Conference represents the views of anybody other than certain officials and chiefs). In the Naga Hills, although the original resolution as passed by the Naga National Council at Wokha contemplated the administration of the area more or less like other parts of Assam, a demand was subsequently put forward for "an interim Government of the Naga people" under the protection of a benevolent "guardian power" who would provide funds for development and defence for a period often years after which the Naga people would

decide what they would do with themselves. Here again it seems to us clear that the views of a small group of people, following the vogue in the Naga Hills of decisions being taken by general agreement and not by majority-gained the acceptance of the National Council, for little more purpose than that of presenting a common front. In other areas more moderate views prevail. In the Garo Hills the draft constitution asked for all powers of government including taxation ,administration of justice etc. to be vested in the legal council and the only link proposed with the Provincial Government was in respect of a few subjects like higher education, medical aid etc., other than the subjects of defence, external affairs and communications which were not provincial subjects. In the Mikir Hills and in the North Cachar Hills, which are the least vocal and advanced of the areas under consideration, there would probably be satisfaction if control over land and local customs and administration of justice are left to the local people. The Khasi Hills proposals were for a federation of the States and British portions; otherwise the proposals were similar to those made for the Garo Hills. A feeling common to all of the Hill Districts is that people of the same tribe should be brought together under a common administration. This has led to a demand for rectification of boundaries. The Lushai want the Kuki of Manipur and other areas in their boundaries, the Naga want the Zemi areas of the North Cachar Hills included in their district and so on.

5. POLITICAL EXPERIENCE -

Except for the Municipality of Shillong, there are no statutory local self-governing bodies in any of the Hill Districts. The partially excluded areas have elected representatives in the provincial legislature but in the Garo Hills the franchise is limited to the Nokmas and in the Mikir Hills to the headmen. Generally, however, the tribes are all highly democratic in the sense that their village councils are created by general assent or election .Chief ship among certain tribes like the Lushai is hereditary(although certain chiefs have been appointed by the Superintendent) but among other tribes appointment of headmen is by common consent or by election or, in some cases, selection from particular families. Disputes are usually settled by the Chief or headman or council of elders. In the Naga Hills what is aimed at is general agreement in settling disputes. Allotment of land for jhumis generally the function of the Chiefs or headmen (exceptin the Khasi & Jaintia Hills) and there are doubtless many other matters pertaining to the life of the village which are dealt with by the chiefs or elders, but while this may form a suitable background for local self-government the tribes altogether lack experience of modern self-governing institutions. The "District Conference" of the Lushai Hills, the tribal council of the North Cachar Hills and the Naga National Council are very recent essays in organising representative bodies for the district as a whole and have no statutory sanction. While there is no doubt that the Naga, Lushai, Khasi and Garo will be able to manage a large measure of local autonomy, the North Cachar tribes and the Mikir may yet want a period of supervision and guidance.

6. THE SPECIAL FEATURES -

Whatever the capacity of the different councils or conferences to manage the affairs of the areas may be, the general proposals for the administration of these areas must be based upon the following considerations: -

(a) The distinct social customs and tribal organisations of the different peoples as well as their religious beliefs. For instance, the Khasi and the Garo have a matriarchal system, the Lushai have hereditary chiefs, the Ao Naga have got the council of elders called 'tatar' which is periodically renewed by election. The laws of succession of the Lushai permit the youngest son of the family to succeed to the property of his father. Similarly, in the case of the Garo, the youngest daughter gets her mother's property and so on. Christianity has made considerable headway among the Lushai, Khasi and the Garo, but large numbers of the hill people still continue their own tribal forms of worship which some people describe as 'animism'.

(b) The fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of their superior organisation and experience of business, the hill people fear that if suitable provisions are not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, large numbers of them will settle down and not only occupy land belonging to the hill people but will also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions. Thus, the hill people seem to attach special value to the present system of an 'Inner Line' to cross which non-tribals entering the area require a pass, and the provisions prohibiting non-tribals from settling down or carrying on business without the approval of the district-officer. It is felt that even industries should not be started in the hill areas by non-tribals because that might mean exploitation of the people and the land by the non-tribals. In addition to these main points there is the question of preserving their ways of life and language, and method of cultivation etc. Opinions are expressed that there could be adequate protection in these matters only by transferring the government of the area entirely into the hands of the hill people themselves.

(c) In the making suitable financial provisions it is feared that unless suitable provisions are made or powers are conferred upon the local councils themselves, the provincial government may not, due to the pressure of the plains people, set apart adequate funds for the development of the tribal areas. In this connection we invite a reference to the views expressed in the Assam Government's Factual Memorandum on p. 67 of Constituent Assembly Pamphlet Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas - I.

7. PROVISIONS OF 1935 ACT -

The provisions of the Government of India Act are based on the principle that legislation which is passed by the Provincial Legislature is often likely to be unsuitable for application to the Hill Districts. The mechanism provided for "filtering" the legislation is therefore to empower the Governor of the Province to apply or not to apply such legislation. The full implications of the provisions of the Government of India Act are discussed in the Constituent Assembly pamphlets on "Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas" Parts I and II, and it is perhaps not necessary to discuss them exhaustively here. The main features of the provisions are that certain areas have been scheduled as excluded or partially excluded; it is possible for areas to be transferred from the category of excluded to the category of partially excluded by an Order-in-Council and, similarly, from the category of partially excluded to the category of non-excluded; legislation will not apply automatically to any such scheduled area even if it is a partially excluded area, but will have to be notified by the Governor who, if he applies them at all, can make alterations. The revenues for excluded areas are charged to the revenues of the Province and special regulations, which do not apply to the rest

of the Province, may be made by the Governor in his discretion for excluded and partially excluded areas.

8. FUTURE POLICY -

The continuance or otherwise of exclusion cannot be considered solely from the point of view of the general advancement of an area. If that were so, all that would be necessary in the case of areas like the Lushai Hills which are considered sufficiently advanced would be to remove the feature of exclusion or partial exclusion. such action maybe suitable in the case of certain partially excluded areas in other parts of India. But in the Hills of Assam the fact that the hill people have not yet been assimilated with the people of the plains of Assam has to be taken into account though a great proportion of hill people now classed as plains tribals have gone a long way towards such assimilation. Assimilation has probably advanced least in the Naga Hills and in the Lushai Hills, and the policy of exclusion has of course tended to create a feeling of separateness.

On the other hand, it is the advice of anthropologists(see Dr. Guha's evidence) that assimilation cannot take place by the sudden breaking up of tribal institutions and what is required is evolution or growth on the old foundations. This means that the evolution should come as far as possible from the tribe itself but it is equally clear that contact with outside influences is necessary though not in a compelling way. The distinct features of their way of life have at any rate to be taken into account. Some of the tribal systems such as the system of the tribal council for the decision of disputes afford by far the simplest and the best way of dispensation of justice for the rural areas without the costly system of courts and codified laws. Until there is a change in the way of life brought about by the hill people themselves, it would not be desirable to permit any different system to be imposed from outside. The future of these hills now does not seem to lie in absorption in the hill people will become indistinguishable from non-hill people but in political and social amalgamation.

9. THE HILL PEOPLE'S LAND -

The anxiety of the hill people about their land and their fear of exploitation are undoubtedly matters for making special provisions; it has been the experience in other parts of India and in other countries, that unless protection is given, land is taken up by people from the more advanced and crowded areas. The question has already acquired serious proportions in the plains portions of Assam and the pressure of population from outside has brought it up as a serious problem which in the next few years may be expected to become very much more acute. There seems to be no doubt whatever therefore that the hill people should have the largest possible measure of protection for their land and provisions for the control of immigration into their areas for agricultural or non-agricultural purposes. It seems also clear that the hill people will not have sufficient confidence if the control on such matters is kept in the hands of the provincial Government which may only be too amenable to the pressure of its supporters. Even the Head of the State under the new Constitution will probably be an elected head, and even though he may be elected also by the votes of the hill people, they may still have the fear that he will give way to the pressure of the plainspeople on whose votes he may be largely dependent. The atmosphere of fear and suspicion which now prevails, even if it is argued that it is unjustified, is nevertheless one which must

be recognised and in order to allay these suspicions and fears, it would appear necessary to provide as far as possible such constitutional provisions and safeguards as would give no room for them. Moreover, in the areas where no right of private property or proprietor right of the chief is recognised the land is regarded as the property of the clan, including the forests. Boundaries between the area of one hill or tribe are recognised and violation may result in fighting. Large areas of land are required for jhum and this explains in part the fear of the tribesman that its availability will be reduced if incursions by outsiders is permitted. In all the hill areas visited by us, there was an emphatic unanimity of opinion among the hill people that there should be control of immigration and allocation of land to outsiders, and that such controls should be vested in the hands of the hill people themselves. Accepting this then as a fundamental feature of the administration of the hills, we recommend that the Hill Districts should have powers of legislation over occupation or use of land other than land comprising reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891 rather law applicable. The only limitation we would place upon this is to provide that the local councils should not require payment for the occupation of vacant land by the Provisional Government for public purposes or prevent the acquisition of private land, also required for public purposes, on payment of compensation

APPENDIX II

The ASSAM OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ACT, 1960

(Published in the Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, dated the 19th December, 1960)

An Act to declare Official Language of the State of Assam **Preamble**

Whereas Article 345 of the Constitution provides that the Legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State as the language to be used for official purposes of the State and for matters hereinafter appearing:

It is hereby enacted in the Eleventh Year of the Republic of India, as follows: —

Short title extent and commencement

1. (1) This Act may be called the Assam Official Language Act, 1960.

(2) It extends to the whole of the State of Assam.

(3) It shall come into force, on such date as the State Government may, by notification, in the official Gazette, appoint and different dates may be appointed for different official purposes and for different parts of the State of Assam:

Provided that the date of dates appointed by the State Government in respect of any of the parts of the State of Assam shall not be later than five years from the date the assent to this Act is first published in the official Gazette.

Definitions

2. In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context, —

(a) “Autonomous District” means an area deemed as such under paragraph 1(1) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

(b) “Autonomous Region” means an area deemed as such under paragraph 1(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

(c) “District Council” means a District Council constituted under paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

(d) “Mohkuma Parishad” means a Mohkuma Parishad established under the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959. (Assam Act XXIV of 1959)

(e) “Municipal Board” means a Municipal Board established under the Assam Municipal Act 1956 and shall include Town Committees established under the said Act. (Assam Act XV of 1957)

(f) “Prescribed” means prescribed by rules made under this Act.

(g) “Regional Council” means a Regional Council constituted under paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Official language for official purposes of the State of Assam

3. Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 346 and 347 of the Constitution of India and subject as hereinafter provided, Assamese shall be used for all or any of the official purpose, of the State of Assam:

Provided that the English language, so long as the use thereof is permissible under Article 343 of the Constitution of India, and thereafter Hindi in place of English, shall also be used for such official purposes of the Secretariat and the offices of the Heads of the Departments of the State Government and in such manner as may be prescribed:

Provided further that, —

- (a) All Ordinance promulgated under Article 213 of the Constitution of India;
- (b) All Acts passed by the State Legislature;
- (c) All Bills to be introduced or amendments thereto to be moved in the State Legislature; and
- (d) All Orders, Regulations, Rules and Bye-laws issued by the State Government under the Constitution of India or any law made by Parliament or the Legislature of the State.

Shall be published in the official Gazette in the Assamese language.

Safeguard of the use of language in the Autonomous Region and in the Autonomous District

4. Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, only languages which are in use immediately before the commencement of this Act shall continue to be used for administrative and other official purposes upto and including the level of the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous District, as the case may be, until the Regional Council or the District Council in respect of the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous District, as the case may be, by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of any other language for any of the administrative or official purposes within that region or district.

Safeguard of the use of Bengali language in the district of Cachar

5. Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, the Bengali language shall be used for administrative and other official purposes upto and including the district level in the district of Cachar until the Mohkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards of the district in a joint meeting by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of the official language for use in the district for the aforesaid purposes.

The use of English as official language in respect of examination conducted by the Assam Public Service Commission

6. Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, any examination held by the Assam Public Service Commission, which immediately before the commencement of this Act used to be conducted in the English language shall continue to be so conducted till such time as the use thereof is permissible under clause (2) of Article 343 of the Constitution of India:

Provided that a candidate shall have the right to choose the language in use in the State of Assam, which was the medium of his University examination.

Rights of the various linguistic group

7. Subject to the provision of this Act, the State Government may by notification issued from time to time, direct the use of the language as may be specified in the notification and in such parts of the State of Assam as may be specified therein:

Provided that —

(a) The rights of the various linguistic groups in respect of medium of instruction in educational institutions as laid down in the Constitution of India shall not be affected;

(b) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational and cultural institutions, discriminate against any such institutions on grounds of language;

(c) The rights to appointments in the Assam Public Services and to contracts and other avocations shall be maintained without discrimination on the ground of language; and

(d) In regard to noting in the offices in the region or district if any member of the staff is unable to note in any of the district language, the use of English shall be permitted by the Heads of Departments so long as the use thereof is permissible under Article 343 of the Constitution of India.

Power to make rules

8. The State Government shall have the power to make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Act.