

THE AGP - POWER AND PERFORMANCE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY (1985-90)

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled **“THE AGP - POWER AND PERFORMANCE : AN ANALYTICAL STUDY (1985-90)”** submitted by **Sanjay Kumar Gupta**, is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University, or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this Dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

As a result of the six year long agitation led by All Assam Student's Union (AASU) on the question foreign infiltration, an issue which had disturbed the social cultural and economic structure of the state, found wide support from the Assamese people. The agitation terminated with the signing of the historic Assam Accord. As the people of Assam had lost faith in the Congress (I) the formation of the AGP was welcomed by one and all. It was subsequently voted to power not only to solve the 'foreigners issue' but also to protect and preserve the custom, tradition, language and distinct identity of the Assamese society.

Agitating and governing are two distinct processes the AGP soon realised once in the seat of power. The failure of the AGP on the two crucial ground – the foreigner's issue and the language issue proved to be the reason for the disillusionment of the people with the party. Their failure led to the rise of extremism in the form of ULFA and Bodos who believed that the AGP can not provide any solution to the problems that has plagued the state.


The period of study is the first term of the AGP in power (1985-1990). The dissertation is subtitled as The AGP and the Foreigner's Issue : An Analytical Study (1985-1990). The study fundamentally looks at the foreigners and the language issue and the consequent rise of militant movements in the wake of AGP's failure to solve it on which it captured power.

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SANJAY KUMAR GUPTA

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAGSP	-	ALL ASSAM GANA SANGRAM PARISHAD
AAMSU	-	ALL ASSAM MINORITIES STUDENT UNION
ABSU	-	ALL BODO STUDENTS UNION
ACKSA	-	ALL CACHAR-ARIMGANJ STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
AGP	-	ASOM GANA PARISHAD
AJD	-	ASSAM JATIYABADI DAL
AJYCP	-	ASSAM JATIYABADI YUVA CHHATRA PARISHAD
APLF	-	ASSAM PROGRESSIVE LIBERATION FRONT
IMDT	-	INDIAN MIGRATION (DETERMINATION BY TRIBUNALS')
KIA	-	KAICHING INDEPENDENCE ARMY
NEC	-	NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL
NSCN	-	NATIONAL SOCIALIST COUNCIL OF NAGALAND
PLP	-	PURBANCHALIYA LOK PARISHAD
PTCA	-	PLAINS TRIBALS COUNCIL OF ASSAM
ULFA	-	UNITED LIBERATION FRONT OF ASSAM
UMF	-	UNITED MINORITIES FRONT
UTNF	-	UNITED TRIBALS NATIONALIST FRONT

Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

In the last five decades of India has witnessed the consolidation of various regional forces and parties, gradually eroding the dominance of the Congress Party which ruled both at Centre and States for almost four decades. Though the manifestation of regionalism can be traced back to immediately after independence in different forms, prominent among them were linguistic nationalism, cultural sub-nationalism, regionalism emanating from reorganization of states on linguistic criteria and different regional autonomy movements. However, in the earlier phase, it was largely engulfed by the Congress Party representing the Pan-Indian Nationalism. With the gradual development of regional organization and parties like Akali Dal and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which mobilized people on the plank of protection of local language and culture, and came to power in 1967, brought the suspicion that such regional parties are harmful to the Indian nation. But their continued dominance and large mass base (of both Akali Dal and DMK) dispelled these suspicions. The suspicions further evaporated when the Telugu Desam Party, came to power in Andhra Pradesh.

The vigorous All Assam Students Union (AASU) movement in Assam in late 1970's and early 80's , again brought the issue of regionalism to the forefront of Indian Politics. The problem in Assam was slightly different from other states. The major cause of the Assam movement was infiltration from bordering countries and from other states of India, which generated a fear that the local Assamese

people would be swamped away by such infiltration which would put their culture and language in danger.

Immigration into Assam on such a large scale has few parallels anywhere in the world, within a relatively short period of time, and this problem had hopelessly tangled Assam's nationality question.¹ The growing number of migrants in Assam were viewed by a large section of the Assamese people as a threat to their socio-cultural, political and economic life. Linguistically also, Assam is the most diversified state in India. Economically, the people of Assam felt a sense of insecurity, of what they called "Economic exploitation by outsider". Most of the modern sinews of life, such as employment, trade, business etc. are largely in the hands of non-Assamese people of Assam. Whatever little employment opportunities are available, the educated middle class Assamese has to face keen competition from the non-Assamese. The non-Assamese middle class not only have much greater earning but also their style of living stands in sharp contrast to that of their Assamese counter part, which in turn only increased the bitterness². The Assamese felt that if immigration from Bangladesh, Nepal and other states of India remains unchecked and economic backwardness of the state is not removed in favour of indigenous people, the Assamese people would soon lose their distinctive identity. The movement on the issue of (immigration) foreign nationals, has been the manifestation of these accumulated anxieties.

¹ Sanjib Kr. Baruah, *Economic & Political Weekly*, March 15-1980 - pp. 543-45.

² Girin Phukan, *Genesis of AGP* in S. Bhatnagar & P.Kr. ed. *Regional Political Parties in India*. Ess Ess Publication, New Delhi - 1988, p. 56.

Myron Weiner in his book 'Sons of the Soil' has used two hypothesis to explain the 'immigration' problem in India. First, he says, the process of modernization, by providing incentive and opportunities for mobility, creates the condition for increasing internal migration and secondly, that the modernization process nurtures the growth of ethnic identification and ethnic cohesion. And these two process together are often antagonistic and provides space for movements of locals across cultural, linguistic and ethnic regions. It generates anti-migrant sentiments among local people. Economic and demographic changes thus conflict with social, cultural and political tendencies. Migration within a multi-ethnic society, moreover, has destabilizing effects and tends to arouse intense conflict.

Weiner further says, it is not inequalities between ethnic groups that generate conflicts but competition. However, in Assam, it is perceived, both inequality as well as cuthroat competition between local Assamese and 'outsiders' has generated the anti-migrant feelings and sentiments. The central cause to the AASU movement which has not been generally perceived, to me, is that when the local population has recently produced its own educated class that aspires to move into jobs held by migrants (like most of the jobs in Banks, Administration, Teaching, Judiciary etc. are held by Bengalis), in such a situation when the employment market is not expanding as fast as the number of entrants; local middle class entrants view migrants as blocks to their jobs and upward mobility. For example, if we look at the AASU leadership, most of them were unemployed graduates and post graduates. This nascent nationality formation awakening among both the plains tribal and hill tribes and other local groups felt threatened by this

demographic and political change and found a new educated class elite especially among the youth capable of changing the equation through movements. The Indian government always looked at it as 'merely law and order problem,' and never tried to look at it holistically. Essential linkages were lost in this piecemeal approach, leaving the state administration and the people at large unhappy and uncertain. The indigenous Assamese then felt Assam as a 'forgotten and neglected state', within the Indian Union, and its people in danger of being overwhelmed by migrants and absorbed by neighboring states.

So, we find that the whole Assam agitation mainly revolved around two basic issues, migration and linguistic problems. A close look at the colonial legacy and subsequent developments after the independence reveals a few glaring and distinctive developments that made the indigenous Assamese to ponder over and resist it. The new opportunities created and opened up by the extension of British rule in Assam benefited not the Assamese but the migrants. Tribals from Chhota Nagpur became the labour force in tea plantation, the British managed the tea gardens with the help of Marwaris, who in turn became the entrepreneurs, traders, and bankers of the Assamese economy and the Bengalis dominated the administrative structure and constituted the professional classes in the cities.

Another fear that deeply penetrated the Assamese mind was that the Bengali Hindus had taken advantage of their dominant position in the British administration and persuaded the British to establish Bengali as the official language of Assam. The Bengalis treated the Assamese as culturally subordinate

and inferior to them. The Bengali Hindus, it is said were intent upon absorbing Assam into a greater Bengal.³ On the other hand the Bengali Muslims when nurturing the prospects for the creation of an Islamic Pakistan, sought to incorporate Assam into it by increasing their numbers to obtain a majority. Thus, while the Bengali Hindus sought to committ what some Assamese perceived as 'cultural genocide' through a process of cultural absorption, the Bengali Muslims sought to assert their domination through the force of their numbers.⁴ . Hence for the local Assamese people it was necessary to resist the Bengali Hindus by modifying the language and educational policies of the government, and the other by restricting migration.

In India the exercise of political power to 'correct' a perceived state or economic imbalance must take place within a prescribed political framework. The Assamese could not deter migration from other Indian states since the constitution guarantees freedom of movement, settlement, or profession anywhere in India. This region also lacked sufficient political weight and sufficiently compelling voice to make an impact on the central Government. Hence the indigenous population, especially the youth and the politically articulate and numerically expanding urban educated class seeking white collar jobs, saw their failure to achieve equality of income as a consequence of political factors.

³ Myron Wiener, *Sons of the Soil*, Oxford Univ. Press Delhi - 1978. p. 108.

⁴ Ibid.

The six year long Assam Agitation launched and led by AASU along with All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) on the question of 'foreign nationals' culminated with the signing of historic Assam Accord on 14 - 15th, August 1985 with the central government under the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi. After the signing of the Accord the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was formed. It was the leaders of the these two organizations who came out of their parent organizations to form the new party. All section of the Assamese people, particularly the peasants and youth, actively participated in this movement because the issue was one which touched the interests of not only the dominant section of Assamese society, the Assamese middle class, but also of the peasants whose lands were being alienated by large scale immigration both from states within India and foreign states namely Bangladesh and Nepal. Although there was this mass participation yet the movement was by and large led by Assamese middle class represented by AASU and AAGSP. Due to the unique nature of organizational network of AASU, any movement launched and led by it immediately found support from all nooks and corners of Assam ⁵.

Hence, political developments in Assam provide an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of regional parties and allied phenomenon of 'cultural subnationality'. It was once fashionable to view regional parties and the expression of cultural sub-nationalism as parochial and out of tune with the goals of national unity and integrity. India's experience with regional movements, however

⁵ Apurba Kr. Baruah in *North East Quarterly* - Vol-2-No. 2 January -March-87 p. 33

especially since the emergence of DMK in Tamilnadu tells us that this view is too simplistic. The suspicions about the regional movements have their roots in a simple minded notion that the sub national movements are the results of primordial loyalties that conflict with the modern project of nation building.⁶ The problem with such a notion is that, far from being a spontaneous expression of natural or primordial loyalties, these movements are the product of political organizations with their own dynamics and secondly, the case of conflict between a regional party and the goals of national unity has not been proven. Assam's Chief Ministry P.K. Mahanta's, description of his party (AGP) as "a regional party with a national orientation, amply clarifies the position that growth of regional parties are not an impediment towards the goal of national unity.

Another problem with the formula that equates regional movements with parochialism is that it avoids the question as to, why the national parties fail to appeal to the imagination of particular regional electorates. It is the inability of the national parties and ideologies to articulate concerns that originates in a particular region, to a large extent explains the rise of regional parties. Subnationalist movements and regional parties, therefore, perform the necessary function of articulating and aggregating concerns and aspirations of particular constituencies left out by national parties in Indian democracy.

The formation of AGP was the result of the fast growing apprehensions on the part of the Assamese people that they would be swamped by the continuous

⁶ Sanjib Baruah, *Economic & Political Weekly*, February 15, 1986 - pp. 282-84.

inflow of immigrants. The inflow had disturbed the socio-economic structure of Assam, thereby threatening their socio-cultural identity and economic structure. Thus the 'Assamese nationalism' began to take firm roots and the Assamese middle class undertook the task of strengthening, 'self consciousness' among the people with the hope that their mobilization might transform it into a widespread movement to achieve the goals of socio-economic, political and cultural significance⁷. The anti-foreigner movement was directed towards the realization of these goals under the leadership of AASU, and after the Accord was signed, AGP was formed to implement these set goals for the Assamese people.

The AGP fought the 1985 General elections to the Legislative Assembly with a short election manifesto, reciting and reiterating the well known position of the Assam movement and with a programme of action in tune with the aims and objectives of the Party Constitution. Implementation of the Assam Accord was central issue on which it sought the support of the state electorate. Stating and keeping the Assam Accord in view it wanted to seek a permanent solution to the problem of immigration of foreigners, the AGP's Election Manifesto pledged that the party was determined to take effective measures to preserve peace and unity among all sections of the people living in Assam.

The success of the AGP in the 1985 elections, very paradoxically falsified the major ideological proposition that the Assamiyas are losing their political identity. Here it should be admitted that the strength of the AGP depended on the

⁷ Girin Phunkan, Op. cit., p.63.

workers and organizational network of the AASU. In the election, it became very difficult to distinguish between the AGP and the AASU. It was fundamentally the AASU workers, who tirelessly worked for the victory of the AGP. The main plank on which it fought the election battle was the foreigner's issue.

Was the foreigners issue solved by the newly formed AGP government or what steps did it take to resolve this long standing irritating problem? What were the impediments in solving the foreigners issue and how the leadership took this challenge to get rid of illegal migrants. These are the few questions which will be looked into.

The second most powerful opposition i.e. United Minorities Front, which was formed and fought election to oppose the Assam Accord from being implemented gave a new dynamics to the whole issue of 'foreign infiltration'. After the initial euphoria of the victory was over the AASU leaders got desperate and realized that the long years of agitation has yielded nothing, saw it as becoming a fruitless endeavour and few of the leaders got utterly impatient and reached the conclusion that no solution of the 'foreigners problem' could come by adopting a democratic and peaceful path. This impatient group later on formed an extremist front called United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Assam Progressive Liberation Front (APLF).

Hence here it becomes interesting to see how the AGP tackled the foreigner's problems and what hindrances it faced when trying to solve this burning issue. The United Minorities Front (UMF) had its own objections and it knew that the AGP cannot afford to ignore the minorities interest. The language

policy of the AGP government disgusted the Bodo people and as a result the latent dissatisfaction took the shape of another movement in lower Assam. While frustrated at the manner in which the AGP was functioning the extremist group ULFA took the militant path. So, here it is interesting to see how the functioning of the AGP government created more problems for the State (Bodo and ULFA problems) and failed to solve either of the problems.

Review of Literature

Most of the studies have dealt with either the causes of social and ethnic tension in Assam or are related to the identity question of the Assamiyas. Some other studies have focussed on the nascent nationality formation among the young Assamiyas which got wide support for the cause. Yet some other studies see the development of regionalism in the context of anti-people development strategy.

Apurba Kumar Baruah's '*Social Tensions in Assam*', *Middle Class Politics* (1991), focuses on the nascent nationality formation by small tribes like Bodos, Karbis and so on. While trying to assert their identity, they found the response from the Assamese middle class, which was negative. He examines the nature of Assamese nationalism which itself was a product of the socio-cultural and economic forces.

Udayon Misra's edited book, *Nation Building and Development in North East India* (1991) argues that the mass-movements and insurgency is clearly linked with underdevelopment and the colonial exploitation by the Indian bourgeoisie. Therefore, to delve into the roots of insurgent politics and movements, he argues, it

would be necessary to analyse the process of the formation of the different nationalities of the region. The inter-ethnic conflict thus generated and the role of the elite. Also the process of alienation from the Indian socio-political system and the failure of the planning process to reduce the regional imbalances which created conditions favourable to movements of secessionist insurgency to grow.

B. Pakem's edited book '*Regionalism in India*' with special reference to North East India (1993) advances the argument that regionalism is a mechanism not only for preserving the language and culture of the area but also involves the propagation of the 'Sons of the Soil' theory. The uneven development process and, lack of access to means of fulfillment of basic human needs among other causes, stoke the flames of regionalism.

Besides these, P.S. Dutta's book '*India's North East: A Study in Transition*'-(1992) contends that identity consciousness or identity assertion by different groups ails Assams. The seeds of these are not new but were sown during the colonial period. The emerging middle class help in articulating their aspirations because they are equipped with modern education and a sense of history. This middle class is destined to occupy the position of leadership to share political power in their otherwise tradition bound and more or less stagnant societies.

Apart from the above there are other works which deals with issues and ideology of the Assam movement; Monirul Hussain *Assam Movement, Class, Ideology and Identity*; on the spurting youth movements in North east India like A. C. Sinha's *Youth Movements in North East India*.

Significance and Objectives of the Study

As pointed out earlier that most of the studies have examined the ethnic or nationality question in the emerging regionalism. None of them have really tried to define into what happens to a movement when it forms a political party. Do they realize the goals for which they were bestowed with political power? What hindrances they face when trying to solve the issue on which they win the elections?

This study is primarily focussed on the performance of AGP on 'foreigners issue' complex and delicate at any time. The hypothesis is that AGP after winning the elections failed to solve the foreigners problems and instead while tackling this most sensitive issue brought militancy on the scene and embittered the Assamese and religious minority and tribal relations. When it tried to push through the imposition of Assamese as third language in non-Assamese schools, it generated the fear of 'Assamese Cultural hegemony' among the minorities and Bodos. The six year long agitation finally yielded nothing as leading a mass movement on emotive slogans and portraying the fear of domination by 'outsiders' (foreigners) and staying in political power is altogether a different game.

The emergence of AGP as a ruling party in Assam, with prominent leadership of the movements, led to the 'institutionalization of Assam movement',⁸ i.e. the movement became a part of the establishment. Though the party came to

⁸ Monirul Hussain- *Assam Movement – Class, Ideology and Identity*, Manak Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p. 283.

taste power soon after its birth, the leaders who operated the government. machinery were young and inexperienced, they had to however, accept the hard reality of operating within the old institutions. Because of their class limitations, they failed to create new institutions, or change tangibly the nature of the old institutions.⁹ The new party and its young leadership proved too weak before the old institutions and they dolefully relied on these old institutions to accommodate them solidly.

Chapterization

To understand the AGP as a regional party, it is necessary to examine the factors which led to its formation and the nature of its leadership. The second chapter deals with genesis and leadership of the AGP. The third chapter looks at the AGP's handling of the foreigners issue and the problems that crept up while trying to implement the Assam Accord to solve the issue. The fourth chapter deals with the coming up of ULFA and development of Bodo movement as a result of AGP's mishandling of the foreigners problem and the delicate issue of language. The conclusion gives an analytical overview of the AGP's performance on foreigners and language issue and its consequences.

⁹ Op. cit., pp. 283-84.

Chapter - II

THE AGP - GENESIS AND LEADERSHIP

The six years of agitation was dominated and dictated by the AASU. Immediately after the signing of the accord, leaders realized the need for a political party to implement the accord as they had no faith in the ruling Congress (I). The Assam movement had faced several crisis in the course of its function. Its nexus with RSS-BJP and expulsion of Muslim leaders severely affected its secular credentials. Most of the prominent student leaders realized that they could not and should not remain as student organization any longer. The AASU executive body and various office barriers completed six years in office in 1985, though they were elected for a year only. A section within the leadership questioned the justness of boycotting and opposing the 1983 elections in Assam. Some felt that their action helped the victory of Congress (I) . Still others felt that the leadership of the movement should have participated in the previous election as they had a fair chance of winning a substantial numbers of seats, if not the majority of seats. Serious introspection began and as a result of this preparation for a 'unified regional party' was initiated.

The AGP's origin can be traced to a series of conscious steps taken by AASU constituting the movement's supreme leadership. In its 1984 convention, it took appropriate steps with a view to organizing the masses politically in keeping with the needs of time.

The report on the section of workshop organized by AASU, AAGSP, and other student organisations in Guwahati University in April 1984, devoted to a consideration of political, constitutional and legal issues which served as a preface to the draft programme. It underlined the point that Assam's most popular movement was in the interests of preserving the unity and integrity of the people of Assam. The people of Assam desire a federal state in which the central government should have control over matters of national importance such as defence, foreign affairs, communication, foreign trade currency etc. and that the rest of the subjects should be entrusted to the care of the state with autonomous power. In the same convention it was aimed at completing the process of various ethnic groups of Assamese nationality for achieving its rightful place in India, which should be a real federation of states. In a sense, Assam movement was the product of political organization at the grass- roots, the process of political socialization was noticeably furthered during the course of the movement and it produced its own dynamics.

By 1982-85, the anti-foreigners movement got its full momentum, the movement leaders and supporters strongly felt the need for a regional party capable of focusing the aspirations and sentiments of Assamese middle class.¹ They strongly felt the need for a well organized regional party and believed that without such a party, the problem of foreign nationals in Assam could not be solved. Although there were already some regional parties such as Assam

¹ *Dainik Janmabhumi*, Jorhat, 26th September, 1983.

Jatibadi Dal, Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad, Plains Tribal council of Assam etc., they fail to embrace all sections of Assamese people. They had their own differences on certain fundamental policy matters. Therefore, AASU took keen interest in the formation of a unified regional party acceptable to all. The leaders of the movement realized that the people could no more rely on Congress (I) for the redressal of their grievances (mainly the foreigners problem), as this problem did not receive due attention during its long regime in the state, neither Congress (I) ever showed any sympathy for the movement nor for its leaders. There was also a strong feeling among the people that they have been neglected by the Congress (I) in all spheres of life. Hence as a first step towards organizing a strong regional party, the AASU organized a national political convention of all the like minded organizations and people of Assam at Jorhat in January, 1985. A consensus emerged over the formation of a strong regional party to capture power in the state.² The consensus authorized AASU to initiate dialogue with the regional parties of Assam for their unification and consolidation of political forces.

The Third National Political Convention was held at Golaghat from 12 to 14th the October, 1985. It was attended by almost all the regional parties of the state. The majority of the delegates showed a great deal of unanimity in the formation of a new regional party embracing all pre-agitationist organizations in order to capture the political power of the state. Both the leaders and the

² *The Telegraph*. Calcutta, January 12, 1984.

prominent members of all the parties agreed that without political power nothing substantial could be achieved. It also became apparent that if the Assam Accord was to be implemented, only a regional party could carry out this job successfully because the existing national parties have never shown ample enthusiasm even to appreciate the cause of the movement. Hence, the formation of a strong regional party became imperative and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came into existence on 14th October, 1985. It embraced in its fold the rank and file of the two other regional parties viz., organizations most of which were constituents of AAGSP which along with AASU had spearheaded the anti-foreigners movement. The most striking and simultaneous development with the formation of AGP was that the leaders and supporters of the counter movement formed the United Minorities Front (UMF). The Plains Tribal Council of Assam, The Karbi Anglong Peoples' Conference and the Cachar Indigenous People's Forum, while expressing inability to join AGP, promised full support to the new party.

Party Organization

The following table shows the different levels of AGP's party organization..

Organization : The following table shows the different levels of party organization.

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TOTAL 27

<p>Central Committee</p> <p align="center">↓</p>	<p>Members of Assembly and Parliament from (AGP)</p> <p>Representatives from Each District Committee</p>
<p>District Committee</p> <p align="center">↓</p>	<p>District Executive Committee - Total 21.</p> <p>5 Representatives from Each Regional committee</p>
<p>Regional Committee</p> <p align="center">↓</p>	<p>Regional Executive Committee -Total 17</p> <p>20 Representatives from Each Village Committee</p>
<p>Village Committee</p>	<p>Village Executive Committee -Total 11.</p>

There are four organically linked tiers in the organization as shown below .

1. **Village Committee (Gaon Sabha):** All the primary members of the party within the village are the members of the village committee. The minimum number of members is 50. The area of a village is the jurisdiction of the Village Committee.

2. **Regional Committee (Anchalik Sabha):** The villages within the jurisdiction of the Regional Committee comprise the area of this Committee. It consists of 20 members elected by the Village Committee.

The organization of the Central Executive Committee is different in some respects with those of the lower tiers as given below:-

TABLE - III

Central Executive Committee

President	1		
Vice –President	3		
General Secretaries	2		
Secretaries	7	Information and Public	1
		Organizing	5
		Office	1
Treasurer	1		
Members	11		
Nominated Members	2		
Total	27		

In the central general body meeting, one president, two general secretaries and eleven members will be elected. The president and the secretaries will nominate eleven members from amongst the members of the general body. From these twenty two members, they will nominate other office bearers thus it is found that the AGP's party structure is well - knitted and sufficiently broad based to have representative till grass - root levels.

The most important factor responsible for the unprecedented victory of the AGP can be attributed to their well-planned political campaign on a

burning issue: the question of foreign nationals; which became a threat to the country's integrity, attracted the attention of all sections of people living in the state in general and the indigenous Assamese in particular. The AGP's promise to solve this issue helped it to capture power. Besides this the party was formed by the movement leaders, the AASU and the AAGSP, who had always enjoyed mass-popular support and the AASU's strength as voters being 13.27% greatly contributed to the AGP's victory. Another important factor was the repression and the resentment born out of humiliation suffered by the indigenous Assamese people during the Congress's (I) regime of Hiteswar Saikia and the 1983 elections. Adding to these was the feeling of the economic exploitation of the state, a feeling termed Assam as 'colonial hinterland,' 'colonial exploitation', 'colony within the Indian State etc.' by the Centre, and the sense of negligence, deprivation and frustration which had developed among the people of Assam, found expression in the election verdict.

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Besides the above, other problems of the day to day administration like rampant corruption, maladministration, misuse of public funds and constant stagnation in respect of all kinds of developmental work during the long Congress (I) regime greatly contributed to the AGP's victory. The people of Assam had lost their faith in national parties and there was little choice left to them. The AGP clearly stood for the ideas like secularism,

socialism, national integration etc. which are essential for any party to win support. Intra-party rivalry with UMF and Congress (I), also contributed to the success of the AGP. A major section of the people viewed that the new regional party (the AGP) is the only alternative to the 'misrule' of the Congress party. They strongly believed that the solution to the all problems of the region would only be provided by their 'self government' (AGP).

With less than a fortnight left for the polls, the wind in Brahmaputra Valley clearly seemed in favour of the AGP, which was barely two months old on the eve of the elections, and it not only emerged as the main rival of Congress (I), but also pushed the other parties to the sidelines. The campaign thrust backed by thousands of volunteers of the AASU took the ruling Congress (I) by surprise and hundreds of election offices of the new party sprang up spontaneously even in the most remote areas.

The AGP put up candidates for 113 Assembly and 10 Loksabha seats. The AGP backed the candidates of the People's Democratic Front in Karbi Anglong and of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam in Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Sidli. In the Tejpur Parliamentary seat, it supported the Janata Party candidate Purna Narayan Sinha, after the nomination paper of the AGP candidate was rejected. The Janata Party which had won 53 seats in the 1978 elections with 27 per cent of votes polled, had set up candidates in

two thirds of the assembly constituencies but faced with erosion of its ranks, several of its candidates opted out in favour of the AGP.

The resentment in the state Congress (I) over nominations had come as a boon for the AGP. The AGP supporters had been apprehensive about the division of Assamese vote because of the failure over seat adjustments with the Janata which had important pockets of influence in some districts. But with Congress (I) in a severe crisis following the resignation of several district Presidents and the filing of nominations by 26 rebel candidates, the chances of the AGP had considerably brightened. Discontent over the party's election list coupled with the possibility of electoral defeat driven a substantial number of Congressmen into the AGP fold. A significant feature of such cross-over had been the desertion of the ruling party by general minority leaders. Several Mandal Congress (I) Presidents belonging to the immigrant Muslim community resigned and joined AGP. IN the midst of a such crisis facing the Congress (I), the normal conclusion drawn was that the AGP, being the party of over 75 percent of the Assamese speaking people, would emerge victorious.

The key to any electoral victory in Assam lies with the immigrant Muslims and tea garden workers, hence the AGP manifesto very subtly stressed the point of protection to the minorities and tribals. It is significant

that while the All Assam Student Union termed the Citizenship Act as violative to the Assam Accord and threatened to take to the agitation once again, the former AASU General Secretary and then an important leader of AGP, Bhriku Kumar Phukan welcomed the Act as a necessary step to ensure the rights of the disenfranchised foreigners. From this it was evident that AGP went out of its way to woo the minority voters, realising that without some degree of minority support, it would never be able to secure a viable majority. Its ambivalent attitude towards the United Minorities Front was also the indicative of keeping its option open for a coalition with the UMF, if the need arise. While just before going into the election fray, it promised to the people to bring about a pragmatic approach both towards the centre and the minorities and it can be gauged from the statement of one of the AGP General Secretary that his party supports Citizenship Amendment Act, conferring property and other rights of the disenfranchised citizens. This was in sharp contrast to the stand adopted throughout the movement by the AASU leaders. Even the new leadership of the AASU, after the formation of the AGP, made it clear that it would oppose the amendment as it was a violation of the Assam Accord.

In the election battle, disproving much of the speculation of ruling Congress (I) the AGP was voted to power with a clear majority in the state Assembly. It secured 64 seats in an Assembly of 128 seats and later on two

independents from Cachar and Karbi Anglong joined and it rose to 66. This was the second time that a non-Congress Government was voted to power, the last being the Janata government in 1978. The emergence of UMF along with the AGP, come as an indirect boon for the AGP, as it was greatly benefited in all those constituencies where the traditional Congress (I) vote was split between the UMF and the ruling party.³

The most significant feature of Assam election was the rejection of the national parties and the emergence of two regional parties, AGP and UMF, one pro Accord and another anti-Accord. These two shared 83 seats out of total 124. While the AGP had clearly stated in its manifesto that it would not adopt a course of confrontation with the Centre and would protect the interests of the minorities.

The election in 1985, brought into fray two diametrical opposite political parties, the AGP and the UMF. The AGP received absolute mandate from the Assamese speaking people to implement the Assam Accord, and the UMF got a sizeable number of seats to oppose the implementation of this Accord, which they believed was against their rights and interests. As such on assumption of power the AGP took some concrete steps to implement the terms of the Accord. The first was to detect and

³ *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 4, 1986.

depart the foreign nationals, the Foreigners Tribunals numbers had been increased and activated. Secondly, the AGP and AASU jointly put pressure on the Union Government to amend the IMDT Act 1983, as per term of the Accord; shifting the burden of proof on the accused.

Leadership

A few words will be appropriate to show why and how the AASU got the leadership of both the movement and the newly formed AGP. The only party of National level Congress (I) had never shown any sympathy for the movement, the existing regional legacy if parties failed to embrace and get support of all the Assamiya people, and the right wing parties remained largely unacceptable to the Assamiyas, hence the obvious choice fell on AASU, which had then a very apolitical image and was not affiliated to any political organization. The AASU had successfully led a movement to make Assamese as sole medium of instruction in education in 1972. It must be admitted that AASU had proved its capability to lead and mobilize the Assamiya masses on certain sensitive issues, when the existing traditional political parties hesitated to take part actively. Therefore , AASU was the most obvious choice. It brought about an acceptability to the issue of foreign nationals (immigration or foreigners problem) as a crucial one and lent respectability to the movement.

When the party was formed there remained within a section of movement which criticized AASU for boycotting the 1983 elections, because they thought that this only helped Congress (I) to win and consolidate its waning popular base.

The problem of the existence of foreign nationals in Assam was first highlighted by a newly formed political party called the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad(PLP) for political purposes connected with a by election in 1983. The leadership of the AASU was quick to hijack the issue, which soon got converted into a mass movement because it touched a sensitive chord of the minds of the Assamese middle class, ensuing Assamese bourgeoisie and the peasantry in particular. However, this middle class leadership never went out from the hands of this middle class, and the leadership remained some even when the AGP was formed ⁴

The Election Manifesto of the AGP of 1985, clearly reflected the middle class interests of the Assamiya Society.⁵ The manifesto declared that the party was pledged to protect the political and economic rights of the Assamese people, to bring about their economic prosperity and protect their cultural identity and interests (a demand vociferously put during the movement period). The manifesto further promised to implement the Assam accord of 15 August 1985, to put an end to separatist tendencies and strengthen national integration, (to win over the good will of other sections of society particularly non-Assamiya for whom they had

⁴ Apurba K. Baruah in *North East Quarterly*. Vol. No, 2, Jan-March, 1987. p.32.

⁵ Ibid.,

generated a lot of ill-will) These assertions appeared to be in charges of separatism and secessionism against the Assam movement generally levelled by many national parties and a large section of national press and people during the six years of agitation.

The young educated leadership, which had a strong middle class background, needed to play the role of safeguarding the interests of garden labourers and the indigenous people and at the sometime the nascent Assamese bourgeoisie, still not in a position to compete with the national bourgeoisie, had to deal with these severe problems. And when the leadership decided to take up the issues like 'colonial exploitation of Assam', it was sure to get an overwhelming support from the large peasantry because at this moment, the ideas associated with the slogan 'Jai Ai Assam' had acquired an universal acceptance in the Assamiya society.⁶

The recently formed AGP along the expected lines demanded more powers for the state within the federal structure of India, the assertion of the rights of the state to mobilize resources and plan their development on their own, the demand of the manning the state administration of the North East Council (NEC) by the offices of the state concerned and the promises of returning 80% of the administrative posts for the state were raised in the manifesto. This was viewed in the context of the emergence of various regional parties which were actively backed mainly by regional bourgeoisie and middle class of the respective regions.

⁶ Apurba K. Baruah, Op. cit., - pp. 33, 34.

But as this nascent bourgeoisie was still weak, it had to depend on the educated sections of Assamese middle class for political leadership, and that's why the manifesto focused repeatedly on the issues like giving utmost importance to the appointment of local candidates in all jobs.

After the Election, Mahanta promised that the new government will take care of all the people residing in the state and the responsibility of carrying out the job of good governance and the implementation of the historic Assam Accord lies both with them (the AGP government) and the people. In his speech Mahanta said:

“You have formed your own government and there is great responsibility on both the leaders and the people. I am sure the people will help us to work for the development of the state, implementation of the Assam Accord and remove corruption. We are a regional party with a national outlook. It is not parochial. People belonging to different religions and speaking different languages need not have any fear, nor have Indian citizens who had come from other states. They will all be protected and the Government will work for the benefit of all.” He appealed to the opposition to help and cooperate in building a new Assam. He put a ban for one month on people on making petitions to the ministers and also on acception felicitation and receptions. For during this time the new ministers must first learn their jobs. Phukan speaking later laid stress on removal of corruption which ‘flourished’ during the regime of Hiteswar Saikai as of paramount importance. He talked of “odious image” of ministers and of MLAs since independence. “That will be changed now”. If we indulge in corruption we should vacate the seat”, he

declared. Both Mahanta and Phukan promised that the Government's first task was to implement the Assam Accord and remove corruption. It would protect the interests of all sections of society including the minorities. They referred to the anxieties that had arisen among sections of the minorities about the AGP's victory and assured them that under the AGP government political exploitation of the minorities for party purposes would not take place.. The minorities would enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Constitution.⁷

(Complete AGP Manifesto in the Appendix).

⁷ D.P. Kumar, *Challenge to India's Unity*, B.R. Publication, New Delhi , 1990, p. 261, 62.

Chapter - III

THE FOREIGNER'S ISSUE AND THE IMDT ACT - 1983

The real problem of the leaders of the AGP was those faced by any and every radical movement, the problem of transition from being leaders of an agitation against established authorities to being leaders who after their success have to move on to the far more arduous task of translating the gains of the agitation into practical terms. Having come to power, the students turned politicians had to confront realities which none seemed to foresee, as everything had seemed so wonderful about the Accord. Things were easier earlier said than done, impediments to the implementation of the Accord surfaced quite early after assuming power at Dispur.¹

The state government soon after its accession to power realised the practical difficulties and charged the centre that it is not doing enough nor heeding the advice or initiating steps to implement the Accord. Some of the AASU workers criticized the AGP that certain things could be independently initiated by the AGP. Here the a situation because one where the AASU charged the AGP of not doing anything to implement the Accord, and the AGP blaming the Centre of not heeding and initiating any action for the implementation of the Accord. The AGP party sent a letter to the Centre asking its machinery to detect and deport foreigners and to stop further infiltration. After 6 months, i.e. in May, 1986 the ASSU not only charged the Union Government with 'lacking the sincerity, determination and

¹ *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 17, 1985.

efforts' for honouring its obligations, but also in a resolution, "severely criticized the functioning of state government." With six months in power AASU brought charges of corruption and favoritism against some of AGP ministers.²

The AGP government realised the practical difficulties; that simply by implementing clause 5 of the Accord, they cannot reach the goal of the putting a stop to infiltration. Some other measures have to be taken to supplement the Accord.

The detection and deportation of foreigners, delicate and complex at any time was not rendered easier during the post Accord period, with the ULFA developing a blind spot with regard to infiltration. AASU strongly supported the Election Commissioner's drive for intrusive revision of rolls, the All Assam Minorities Students Union (AAMSU) and the United Minorities Front (UMF) challenged the special revision instruction issued by the Election Commissioner, classifying voters under two list – List I – including 'Citizens' and List –II 'Suspected citizens.' With the Guwahati High Court and Supreme Court both holding that the classification in List II should be reasonably well founded and not based merely on suspicions, gave a new twist to the whole issue.

During the movement period the demand for the deletion of infiltrators was to consider 1961 as the cut-off year but on the insistence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi it was agreed that 1965 will be the cut-off year, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, the then most important leader after P. K. Mahanta said, that it was in a spirit of give

² M. Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 1946-91, Vikash Publishing House, Delhi 1997, pp. 390.

and take with the Centre. Hiteshwar Saikia the then Chief Minister of Assam, not to be beaten in the game of Agitationers and Accord, almost immediately claimed that the victory was his. He got the Accord printed and wrote a preface to it under his name, almost claiming its authorship. He said that it was he who had got the best possible terms for the minorities who came into the state upto 1971 and whose stay in Assam has now been regularised. W. Bengal's CM. Jyoti Basu criticized the Accord in a different way. He said that 'Pushing Back' of the cut off year from 1971, which was the original stand of the Centre, to 1965 had been agreed to appease the agitators. Thousands of genuine Indians, particularly those belonging to minority community would now be deprived of their citizenship rights, he pointed out. But-Phukan said that the minorities should not be misled by Jyoti Basu.

The main provision of the Accord relating to the deletion and deportation of the foreigners were:

- I. Those who came up before (upto) 1 - 1, - 1966 would be regularised.
- II. Others who came between 1 - 1 - 1966 to 24th March, 1971, would also be legalised, but would not be able to vote in the elections for 10 years. Their names (from the electoral roll) would be struck off.
- III. Those who came after 24th March, 1971, will be deported.

Article 30 of the Constitution - Protection of the Rights of Minorities

Article 30 of the Constitution guarantees the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. In the case of Assam, the state has now to take the burden of allegedly around 5 million people who were originally not citizens of India. It was therefore suggested that the Right conferred by Article 30 of the Constitution should not be available for enjoyment by the following categories of persons :

- a. The foreigners who would be retained in Assam in terms of the Assam Accord the (1966-71 category);
- b. Foreigners who came from Bangladesh and Nepal and who acquired Indian Citizenship and have settled in Assam.

'It is reiterated that this measure will help in the rapid assimilation of such migrants into the indigenous cultural and linguistic mainstream of Assam'.³

The AGP demanded the amendment of Section 3 of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, to make it clear that citizenship by birth cannot be claimed by a person whose parents are foreigners and who have entered India illegally without valid passports and visas, or if a person's father or mother is a foreigner who has entered India illegally without a passport and visa. It asked for delimitation of constituencies in Assam and the National Register of Citizen for Assam to be updated.⁴

³ D. P. Kumar - Op. Cit, pp. 285.

⁴ Ibid.

The Assam Accord was vague on 1966-71 group of stateless persons on the rights they might still enjoy. The point the Accord made on the contrary was that they shall have to register themselves under the Foreigner's Registration Act 1939, and the rules framed there under, that the right of the franchise would be restricted for such a person detected as foreigner, and their rights would be restored after 10 years from the date of detection. The Accord had described the 1966-71 stream of entrants as foreigners, who apart from being disenfranchised for 10 years would also have to register themselves under the Foreigner's Act, like all foreign nationals in the Country. The objection of the minority was not on disfranchisement, but on the repeated use of the word foreigner's in the Accord. It was pointed out that the use of the word 'foreigners' to describe the 1966-71 category of entrants was to put this category of people outside the scope of the term 'Assamese people.'⁵ The minorities began saying that this virtually meant the 1966-71 category were not really citizen of India at all, or if yes, then that they were effectively made to be class second class citizens who did not have citizenship rights and would suffer from several infirmities, i.e. – their rights to government jobs, property and all other privileges enjoyed as citizens stood curtailed.

On assumption of power the AGP government realised that simply by implementing clause 5 of the Accord, they can not reach their goal of permanent political hegemony. Some more measures have to be taken to supplement the Accord. These measures are:-

⁵ D. P. Kumar, Op. Cit, pp. 76

- a. Eviction operation to be carried out to erase any evidence of citizenship/residentship so that their names can be deleted from the voter's list.
- b. Introduction of Permanent Resident Certificate (PRC).
- c. Identity Cards.

The circular regarding Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) issued on 21st May, 1988, made the following category of persons eligible to get PRC:-

- i. A person who along with his parents and forefathers or whose parents and forefathers has / have continuously resided in Assam for a minimum period of 50 years.
- ii. A person who has continuously resided in Assam for a minimum of 20 years.
- iii. A person who is a child of any person falling in any of the preceding categories. Only citizen of India are eligible for grant of PRC.

This was considered to be an attempt, feels UMF, to implement the policy of the Congress government laid down in 1950 categorising people into indigenous and non-indigenous. As against this policy the UMF submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam on 28th November 1986, stating. "It was framed to out lakhs and lakhs of people residing permanently in Assam in getting the PRC. As a result they or their children will be deprived of admission in educational institutions as well as employment in government and public

undertaking offices.”

The government has on the one hand stopped issuance of PRC, while on the other hand some of the departments of the same government were making PRC a pre-condition for job and confirmation of services. The central government job is an all India service but recently the N.F.Railway by its circular of 10.1.1989 had made P.R.C. a pre-condition for ‘D’ class jobs.⁶

The Chief Minister of Assam made a statement in Guwahati on 13th May, 1987, about introduction of identity cards for citizens living in Assam. He divided the people into three categories:-

- I. The first category would be for those whose names appeared in the 1951 National Register of Citizen and in the subsequent electoral rolls of 1966. The names of these categories would be automatically included in this category and would be treated as citizens;
- II. The second category would be for those whose names appeared in electoral rolls between 1st January 1966 and 24th March 1971. They are liable to register their names as foreigners and would lose their franchise as per clause 5.4 of the Assam Accord for 10 years;
- III. The third category would be for those whose names appeared in the electoral rolls between 25th March, 1971 and 1985. They are liable to be expelled from the state as per clause 5.8 of the Assam Accord.

The AGP government adopted the policy of issuing identity cards

categorizing the people on the basis of voter's list, with decision to throw the burden on all the minority communities to prove themselves as citizen of India; this was done in order to by-pass the burden imposed on the state government, created under pressure from the union government, for amendment of the Act. To overcome the aforesaid legal obligation required to be discharged by the union government the AGP adopted the policy of issuing of identity cards for the above mentioned three categories of persons.⁷

Immediately after the Accord was signed, elections were held for AASU's Organisational Body and the newly elected President and General Secretary visited Delhi and presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Home Minister S. B. Chavan alleging that the Accord on the foreigners issue was not being implemented in the spirit in which it was reached. The memorandum said "though more than 2 months have passed after the signing of the Accord, no effective step whatever has been taken to implement any of its clauses and there is already move to undermine what you promised to the nation on August 15, 1985." The delegation members also referred to reports that rumours were being spread by the Congress (I) leaders in Assam that an Ordinance would be passed to ensure that the 1966-71 group of entrants were given all the citizenship rights minus the right to vote for 10 years. They asked the Centre not to do anything to amend the Foreigners Act and the Citizenship Act through an ordinance, saying that an amendment of this nature would be viewed by the Assamese people as a unilateral

⁶ D.P. Kumar, Op. cit., p. 69.

⁷ D.K. Deb-UMF President in a Press Conference (quoted in – Emergence of UMF in Assam in L.S. Gassah, (ed.), *Regional Political Parties in N.E. India*, Omsons Pub. New Delhi, 1992, pp.69.

violation of the Accord by the Centre. They said that Assamese people were feeling disturbed over such moves and regarded this to be the first step to undermine the Accord.” We apprehend that the political lobbies behind this move are the same as those that were against the Accord,” the memorandum further said.

In the legislative Assembly debate Mr. A.F.L. Osmani of UMF questioned the AGP’s initiative of evicting the people from Char areas (riverine belts) of Brahmaputra Valley who according to AGP government were foreigners. Mr. Osmani said that if 15 to 20 lakhs of people are inhabiting these areas, the government should not only reconsider the decision of evicting them, but also find out whether they are really foreigners or tribals. Before this step, the Janata government in 1978 took a decision that upto 1978 whoever occupied government land will not be evicted and then later on Saikia government made 1980 as the date line.⁸

One thing was very obvious that not only UMF, but also the Janata Party and the long rule of Congress had always been sympathetic to the foreigners as they constituted a considerable vote bank.

Mr. Osmani also said that the Assam Accord has been signed by one party (AASU/AAGSP) only, and that there was no consensus on the foreigners issue and demanded that all the parties should be consulted in implementing it and the issue should have a broad national consensus.

⁸ *Assam Legislative Assembly Debates*, 21st Jan. 1986.

Mr. Charan Narzary, another member of the opposition party contended that while there is no doubt that the Accord should be implemented, we shall have to see that by going to detect and expel the foreigners, genuine Indian citizen are not harassed. While the new government was committed to implementing clause 10 of the Accord, which covers the implementation of the amended provisions of the Chapter X of Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act. Here the AGP government believed that majority living in Char area are foreigners who have unlawfully occupied the land and by evicting them, the government will solve the double problem of the encroachment of tribal land and detection of foreigners. But UMF believed that it was to harass the minorities living in Char areas.

Mr. Altaf Hussain Muzumdar, another member of the Legislative Assembly, said that no doubt there is the lingering problem of foreigners, but because of certain interested quarters the problem has been magnified beyond all proportions. He said even the Congress (I) and other opposition parties wanted a solution or settlement of this problem, since the country's unity and integrity is of topmost importance. He further said that the Accord is definitely met against the interests of the minorities. He said that the implementation of the Accord must be judicious and the government should not misuse its machinery and turn the agreement into an instrument of oppression and harassment to minorities, he also maintained that if the government persists, we will resist it. His opinion was that since any eviction is done under specific government rule, and for that there exist already the Assam Land Revenue Manual is already in existence. Most of the

opposition disagreed with the government's eviction policy.⁹

Mr. Santi Ranjan Das Gupta categorically said in the House that he and his party stand against the Assam Accord. He said, we fought the election with the assurance to scrape the Accord. Previously when the Congress government was in power, they played a dual role. He wrote two letters to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, one prior to the signing of the Accord and another after the conclusion of the Accord. He was quoted as saying that even the Ex Law Minister had said that the re-revision of the electoral roll and the order of the Election Commissioner was highly illegal. He cited the example of Hojai constituency where 45,000 names were found illegal and deleted. The member was furious about the action taken under the government decision. He gave an instance that a medical certificate issued to a pregnant lady by a doctor to exempt her from personally appearing before the electoral legislation authority as she was not in a position to go. But neither the Sub-Divisional Officer (S.D.O.) nor the other officers agreed to it and the lady gave birth to a child while standing in the queue. The doctor who issued the certificate resigned and denied to serve under such an oppressive government, and fought the election and became an MLA.¹⁰

In a press conference in Guwahati, the President of the AGP Party organisation complained that the state government did not give priority to the implementation of the Accord and that it had remained inactive. The AASU threatened the government with its agitational programme 'culminating in an

⁹ *Assam Legislative Assembly Debates*, 21st Jan. 1986.

¹⁰ *Assam Legislative Assembly Debates*, 30th Jan. 1986.

Assam Bandh, evidently to embarrass the AGP government and to exert pressure on Centre'. Similarly the Jatiyabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad, which was a close associate during the long agitation, gave a call for a 24 hour bandh (strike) of rail, demanding the early implementation of the Accord. To discourage such actions of different students unions the Chief Minister Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanta made a public accusation that the "All Guwahati Students Union had been infiltrated by terrorists."

The implementation of the Accord particularly on the foreigners question, took a back seat and individual ambitions for ministerial berth came on the forefront. An example of this was that just after 5 months in power, Mohanta had to reconstitute his cabinet due to pressure from his associates. He inducted 12 new ministers in one go and his team now consisted of 32 members, and of them 13 belonged to the individual Kamrup district alone. It was the biggest cabinet since independence. An Assamese writer Apurba Bhattacharji made an assessment of this: 'the long rule of the Congress had disgusted the people because it failed to solve any of their problems. A section of Assamese people provoked aggressive national feelings and made their power struggle easier. This strategy of capturing power is a general practice and it was also behind the formation of AGP government. The indirect objective of the anti-foreigners agitation spearheaded by the political AASU was to capture state (political) power. These leaders of the agitation had created emotions and illusions in the minds of the people and utilised the same to take to politics in the name of Asom Gana Parishad. But surprisingly during the six years of agitation as well as in the Accord neither the State nor the Centre could define a foreigner. This was apparently willful because to remain in

power in future further the 'undefined foreigner' would be of considerable help.¹¹

If the AGP government is to subsist in this situation it will have to resort to creating emotions by manipulating in the name of solving the most delicate issue of foreigners and get the people behind it. In other words, they will have to utilise the same issues which brought them to power, by manoeuvring them to suit their purpose.¹² For the last five-six years no definition of foreigners was formulated. One who is a foreigner in this state is an Indian in another state. In the mean time, a new terminology came in usage i.e. suspected foreigners. That meant that there are two types of foreigners in Assam. Such confusion were deliberately spread among the people with regard to foreigners issue. As a result the masses will be divided and will not be able to unite on a common issue. And the present government (AGP) want exactly this. That is why these so called foreigners (support) will secure the future of the AGP government.¹³

At the end of the Third Anniversary of the Accord and AGP's rule, there was little to rejoice. The fight with the Central Government to get an amendment carried out in the IMDT Act has taken more than two and half years, but even after that the amended Act appeared to both the AGP and the AASU to be useless because the Assam Government found that it could not make headway. Mahanta spoke despondently of being unable to do anything to detect or deport a substantial number of infiltrators in terms of the Accord. The Chief Minister blamed the Centre for this and said, "our main problem is in respect of the IMDT Act and its

¹¹ Saptahik Janajagan, 29 May 1986, p. 3-6.

¹² M. Kar, Op. cit., pp. 390,391.

¹³ M. Kar, Op. cit., p. 391.

cumbersome provisions. It is really strange that it is only in the case of Assam that there has to be an IMDT Act which is to determine who is a foreigner, but in case of all other states, it is the Foreigners Act, 1946.” It can be safely said that the Centre was frustrating some of the attempts of the Government in this regard and seeing to it that the AGP Government fails to keep its promises. Now the AGP Government openly started saying that IMDT Act is a Black Act, basically designed to benefit illegal migrants.¹⁴

The IMDT Act 1983 as an Impediment

A good reading of the Accord could have made clear to any layman that the issue of foreigners could not be solved as long as the IMDT Act of 1983, remains operative. The Memorandum of Settlement only assured that the Central Government would give due consideration to certain problems expressed by both the AASU and the AAGSP. And such assurances of consideration is not sufficient because such ‘considerations’ has no legal and constitutional validity.

Clause 5.3 of the Accord says :

‘Foreigners who came to Assam after 1st January, 1966 and upto 24th March, 1971, shall be detected in accordance with the provision of the Foreigners Act 1946, and Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.’

Clause 5.4 further says :

‘Names of the foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls presently in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the

¹⁴ D. P. Kumar, Op. cit, pp. 312.

Registration Officer of the respective districts in accordance with the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, and the Registration of Foreigners Rule, 1939.¹⁵

The above two clauses in effect implied that these citizens who had cast their votes in 1985 elections the voters list of which was prepared on the basis of 1971 Electoral Rolls, would lose their status of Indian Citizenship for a period of 10 years after which they will again become citizens with all constitutional rights.¹⁶ This brought into fore two kinds of citizens - one - citizens, another 'suspended citizens'. This was against the Constitutional principle of "once a citizen, always a citizen". Such things were hitherto unknown to the Indian Constitution.¹⁷

The main features of the IMDT Act, 1983 were :

- a. In the Act, the primary responsibility was given to the police to investigate the cases of Illegal Migrants. The Police after investigation is required to forward the cases to the District Advisory Committee consisted of Officials and Non-Officials. If the Committee is satisfied , it would forward the cases to the Tribunal for adjudication.
- b. In addition to the power given to the police to investigate cases, the private person is given the scope to lodge complaints about the presence of a post 1971 migrant provided :
 1. The person complaining is residing within 3 kms. of residence of the person

¹⁵ Source, M. Kar, Op. cit., pp. 449.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

against whom he complains.

2. The private complaint has to swear on affidavit about the genuineness of his allegation.
 3. The complaint has to pay Rs. 25 along with the complaint which would be forfeited if the complaint is found to be false.
- c. The adjudicating Tribunals are to be composed of 3 Judges from Assam, two from rest of India.
- d. In matters of procedure, the Tribunals are to be guided by the provisions of Civil Procedure code and Indian Evidence Act.
- e. In 1983 Act a right of appeal against the verdict of the Tribunal has been given to an Appellate Tribunal consisting of two Judges and a further right of revision to the High Court.

Clause 5.7 of the Accord says :

“All persons who were expelled earlier but have since re-entered illegally into Assam shall be expelled”.¹⁸

Since agitation days AASU was complaining that the Pakistani Nationals who infiltrated into Assam in 1960 and were subsequently deported from 1964 to 1969, had again came back through different routes.

Clause 5.9 of the Assam Accord had provided that the government will

¹⁸ Source, K. Kar, Op. cit., pp. 450 - 51.

give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Accord. Surprisingly enough, the parties signing the Accord never said what those difficulties were. The press was also silent about these difficulties. Now the Act had provided for some checks and restrictions so that no one could utilise it for harassment, personal vendetta or communal considerations in the name of identification of foreigners. The UMF alleged that these checks and restrictions now had come to be obstacles to arbitrary actions against the alleged foreigners.¹⁹

The undefined and unspecified 'certain difficulties' referred to in clause 5.9 were neither considered insurmountable nor was the implementations of the Accord conditional on the removal of those difficulties. In a way nothing much stood in the work being started in right earnest. Now both AGP and AASU having found themselves in the embarrassing situation created by their own incompetence blamed the Central Government in dragging its feet in bringing about the desired and necessary amendments to the Act. According to them "it was only after the Act was suitably changed that it would be possible to detect the post 1971 migrants and deport them out of the state". They cautioned 'if this was not done' the Brahmaputra Valley would be on fire again, and more stridently they set the deadline as August 15th, 1986, the first anniversary of the Accord, which they said would become a day of discord, 'if their demands for amendments were not given urgent attention.'²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ D. P. Kumar, Op. cit., p.282.

The AASU and the AGP government demanded the following amendments to the IMDT Act. 1983.

1. Removal of the territorial restrictions with respect to application for determination of the Indian Citizenship of the person concerned. To this, the Chief Minister said that such a provision would expose a complaint to unnecessary risk. He further said, such a complaint would be subjected to intimidation and attack by the foreigner the complaint would like to be deported. There are areas in Assam, particularly Chars belt (riverine islands) inhabited only by immigrants where the writ of Assam government or its police do not run at all”.
2. There should be no limitation to the number of objections field by any person.
3. The Tribunals should consist of one judge only.
4. The member of each Tribunal should be from the state of Assam only and not from any other state.
5. Instead of prescribed forms, application on plain paper should be accepted.
6. No application fee should be charged.
7. No right to appeal against or for revision of the Tribunals’ judgments should be there.
8. And lastly, the onus of proof should be shifted from the complaint to the accused.

Both the AGP government and AASU raised a hue and cry over the alleged flaws of the Act, through certain things could have been done under the IMDT Act, the validity of which was never challenged at any stage of the negotiations between Centre and AASU/AGP. The AGP Chief Minister indirectly admitted the failure when he said, “we have not been able to fulfill the aspirations and an overnight change is not possible.”²¹

By mid 1987, the rift between Centre and AGP widened further. P. Chidambaram, Union Minister for Home affairs advised that “the wise course for the Assam government is to cooperate with the Centre in implementing the Accord. He criticized the state government by saying that no government can work on slogans, rhetoric and suspicion.” He was more scathing on the Chief Minister and stated that “you can not be a statesman in Delhi and a politician in Guwahati”. On the most important tool of the government for executing the Accord i.e. the Tribunals, he observed :

“While 20 tribunals on foreigners were set up with 18 judges from Assam, only four Tribunals are functioning. All those judges who came from outside have been encouraged to go back. This is hardly good management. The state government should persuade judges to come to Assam, not to leave.”²²

Mahanta too reacted bitterly,

“Chidambaram is putting out a blatantly distorted picture before the

²¹ *Times of India*, 23rd Nov. 1986.

²² D. P. Kumar – op. Cit. p. 291.

Parliament. If Assam government's demands are unfair why does not the Centre revert to the Foreigners Act 1946, which is applicable everywhere else in the country except in Assam? All we ask is that there must be correct provisions of law which can determine who a foreigner is. Twenty kilometers away from Dispur, in Meghalaya, the Foreigners Act 1946 applies why not in Assam? Without adequately amending the IMDT Act, identification of foreigners would not be possible.²³

On 21st March, 1988, on Debates on Governor's address, Shri Altaf Hussain Mazumdar blamed the AGP government for doing nothing to solve the foreigners issue, instead he said, the AGP is trying to give its own burden on the Central Government. Hussain Observed, "the government has a special responsibility to tell its people what this Accord is and how sincere they are in implementing them. But instead of doing that, they are blaming the Central government day in and day out. He further said, it cannot be denied that the implementation of the Accord will drive away lakhs of people from Assam, and when these people are driven out from the state, naturally many problems will be solved. More houses will be available and economically more people will be benefited". He alleged, the government is collecting figures which are incorrect. They are giving different figures every other day.²⁴

The government claims, he further added, that because of the cumbersome process of IMDT Act, 1983, progress of the work is hindered. But Hussain

²³ Ibid, p. 292.

²⁴ *Assam Legislative Assambly Debates*, 21st March, 1988.

maintained that amendment of IMDT Act 1983, has got nothing to do with the stream of people coming before 1971. The IMDT Act is a Charter of Protection for the minorities. He also said that in the signed Accord, there was no commitment on the part of the Government of India to amend the IMDT Act. Nowhere in the Accord the Government of India has made such a commitment that IMDT Act will be amended.²⁵

A full-fledged conference took place between the State and the Central government with the Chief Minister, the Home Minister and the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, but the talk didn't yield any thing concrete. Subsequently Mahanta made an observation on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, 'it will be difficult for us to contain the peoples' sentiments if things continue like this. The Prime Minister tells us overtime that he is for implementation of the Accord in Letter and spirit, but he gives nothing more than assurance.'²⁶

Mahanta claimed to have fulfilled his responsibility but the Prime Minister had not. He said, the whole matter is being dealt in a bureaucratic manner and there is a big chasm between the Prime Minister's promises and his government's performance in the matter of implementation of the Accord he said."²⁷ Thus a duel of words centered around the IMDT Act, which related to foreigners who entered into Assam on or after 25th March, 1971.

It also appeared that by this time AASU had not only lost faith in AGP but initiated steps to play a different kind of role. The AASU, here got divided into two

²⁵ *Assam Legislative Assembly Debate*, 21st March, 1988.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

groups – the moderates and the extremists. The extremists declared that ‘the implementation of the Accord would have to be overseen by the AASU, and that it is our responsibility to see that the AGP lives upto the promises we have made to the people and since the AGP is not doing enough, the AASU will have to step in and force the AGP’s hands.’ In fact they started an agitation for this purpose.²⁸

On April 24, 1987, the United Minorities front submitted a memorandum to the central government of harassment and citing the following number of cases investigated and found illegal immigrants between dec. 1985 and January 1984.

A.	Number of cares investigated by the Police :	245197.
B.	Number of cares referred to the Tribunals :	77771
C.	Number of persons declared foreigners :	528

In this connection the front observed :

“From the above data it is difficult to understand the extent of harassment made to large number of persons. Out of 245167 ultimately 528 persons were adjudged foreigners liable to disenfranchisement, whereas it was quite possible to find out who came after 1st Jan., 1966 and before 24th March, 1971, by comparing the Electoral Rolls of 1967 and 1971. People were indiscriminately summoned to the police stations to prove their antecedents. A regular racket is now prevalent in the name of investigations.”²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 292.

²⁹ Girban Biswas in L.S. Gassah ed. *Regional Political Parties in North East India*, Omsons Publication, New Delhi - 1992, p. 67.

The Union Home Ministry referred the issue regarding the amendment of IMDT Act 1983, as demanded by the UMF through a memorandum from the Home Ministry to the Attorney General of India. The three largest parties, the AGP, the Congress I and the UMF collected legal opinion and submitted the same to the Home Ministry for referring the same to the Attorney General of India. But surprisingly the report of the Attorney General was not published by Union government and keeping all the linguistic minorities in dark, it amended the IMDT Act of 1983, much to the displeasure of the minorities. The AGP took it as its achievement towards solving the problem of foreign nationals. The Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in an earlier meeting held on 5.6.87 assured the UMF delegation that no amendment of the said Act will be made. But later on the AGP government by submitting the legal opinion of three legal luminaries came out with a statement that the Union government of India has agreed to amend the Act. After amending the Act, the Union and the Congress leaders came out with the statement that the minorities have nothing to be afraid of. But certain sections of the amended Act if properly analysed, gave the impression that another weapon has been given to the AGP to harass and intimidate the religious minorities.³⁰ The implication of the Act was so grave and serious that advocate Dilip Kumar Dev, legal expert of UMF said, "it transpires from sections 20 and 21 of the amendment that the fate of the minorities has been entirely surrendered to the police officers. And admittedly the Union government has created a situation in favour of AGP to start "Police Raj" in Assam to legalise harassment and intimidation under the cover of legal

³⁰ Girban Biswas, in L. S. Gassah ed. Op. Cit., p. 66-67.

framework.” In the same tone, he also complained that by changing the composition of the Tribunal and taking away the revisional jurisdiction of the High Court, ventilation of the democratic rights of the people has been permanently shelved.³¹

The Central Government Amends IMDT Act-1983.

After three years of quarrels between the State (AGP) government and Central Government over the various provisions of the IMDT Act, which provided our good excuses for the AGP, the IMDT Act was pushed through the Parliament in 1988. Some of the important amendments of this Acts were:

1. Each Tribunal shall consist of two members.
2. ‘Within three kilometers’ was substituted by ‘within the jurisdiction of same police station. The application fee of Rs. 25/- was reduced to Rs. 10.
3. A new section 8 (1) and (2) was inserted in the amended Act. It provided that an application must be made on prescribed form. No person could make more than 10 application and no persons could give more than ten declarations. Every application shall be accomplished by a declaration by any other person residing within the jurisdiction of the same sub-division to which the applicant resides.

The most important amendment was to enlarge the jurisdiction of the applicant from three kilometers to nearest police station. The persons endorsing the

³¹ Op. Cit., p. 67.

applicant would hail from the same sub-division of the applicant and the person making the declaration. But the amended Act did not give the AGP and the AASU the long rope they wanted.³² Now anyone anywhere in Assam could not accuse a person to be a foreigner, as the case would be if their all demands for amendments were accepted.

Immediately after the amendment had been brought about, there was a change in rulers in New Delhi. The National Front Government took over. The Assam Gana Parishad became a partner to the National Front. One of AGP's prominent member, Dinesh Goswami, became the Union Law Minister. At this stage all the Central Government's actions had to be accepted by Assam Government, as it was being a party to it, and in such a situation it was not possible to pass the buck to the Central government.

Though the amendment was done with a view to help the AGP government; the AGP did not appear to be very happy with this. Buta Singh, the then Home Minister, claimed that the amendments had been carried out with full consent of the Assam government. But Mr. Mohanta not only opposed the amendments brought about because 'those would serve no purpose or meet the requirements of the situation,' Mahanta also wrote a letter to the Home Minister Buta Singh, stating:

"We have grave reservations about the amendments. You have laid down a cumbersome procedure which would make detection and deportation of foreigners

³² M. Kar, *Muslims in Assam*, p. 400.

extremely difficult. We told you that you should not have a separate law for Assam, which will enable foreigners to live here permanently, and have another set of rules for the rest of the Country.’³³

But after the passing of the amendments, Buta Singh had declared ‘that all actions required to be taken by the centre had now been taken and now it depends on the detection machinery of the state government to identify the illegal immigrants.’ The then Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Chidambaram alleged that the Assam government had failed to carry out the border survey for the purpose of funding and construction of border roads. But the state government denied that to be its responsibility.

Rajiv Gandhi in his visit to Assam in 1988 complained that the agitation leaders have misled the people by ‘trying to make out as if a massive number of foreign nationals had illegally entered the state.’ But they were able to deport only 150 foreigners since coming to power. He therefore wondered whether it is only for these 150 odd expelled foreigners that thousands had died and the state had to undergo an agitation for six years. He said, ‘the central government on its part had nothing more to be done about the Act.’ The Chief Minister and AASU both complained that the Central Government was abdicating its responsibility.³⁴

In almost all the Assembly Sessions, a considerable amount of time was spent discussing and questioning, who is a foreigner and what the government in doing to detect and deport them, as mentioned in the Assam Accord. While for

³³ D. P. Kumar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 293.

³⁴ M. Kar, *Muslims in India*, p. 101.

some members, it was clear who is a foreigner for other it was always vague. They said, according to the Accord, subject to sub-clause 3.4 and 6 of clause 5, those who came to Assam till 24th March, 1971 are Indian Nationals, though those who came between 1966 and March 24, 1971, should be disenfranchised for 10 years, means their names will be detected from the electoral rolls i.e. right to vote will be taken off. They cannot be driven out according to the Accord.

Shri Sarat Chandra Sinha, once Chief Minister said, that this groups of people who entered Assam between 1st Jan. 1966 to 24th March, 1971, though termed as foreigners should be treated at par with citizen. Their names are there in electoral rolls and they have voted in the last election and voted this government to power. He questioned the very rationality of detecting and deleting their names from the electoral rolls for 10 years and again putting them on the electoral rolls after 10 years.³⁵ As a matter of fact, the government cannot serve any useful purpose by doing this, it is a fruitless exercise. It could only generate a fear psychosis among the minorities, since the Accord itself accepted them as 'potential citizens.' It would have tried to detect the immigrants who came after 24th march, 1971, and asking the Central government to have bilateral talks with Bangladesh for their deportation.

Since the Accord was signed, an air of confusion prevailed in entire Assam about the very definition of 'foreigners'. Though the Accord clearly mentioned that those who came before 1-1-1966 are citizens of India, enjoying all kinds of rights, those who came after 1.1.1966 till 24th March, 1971, are to be treated as potential

³⁵ *Assam Legislative Assembly Debate*, 14th march, 1986.

citizens, i.e. their name will be detected and deleted from electoral rolls for 10 years, but after that they can enjoy the right to vote and the third category, those who came after 24th March 1971, will be deported. But things were never expressed in a clear manner by the AGP government at any stage, instead of which they kept giving different figures of foreigners detection and deportation. This led to a fear psychosis among the minorities, particularly Bengali Muslims.

The problem with the foreigners issue was that without any bilateral treaty with Bangladesh, the deportation of the foreign nationals was not possible. Although if the AGP Government were really interested in detection and deletion of the post 1966 and 1971 stream of infiltrators, they could have done it by comparing the 1965 Electoral Rolls and that of 1971-72 Electoral Rolls. But their inactivity and reluctance only gave the impression that either the alleged 46-50 Laks of infiltrators donot exist or if they did exist, it is not possible to deport them because without some amount of minority support, it is not possible to win elections in future. It is also true that after the severe debacle in the 1985 elections in Assam, the Congress (I) at Centre was no more enthusiastic about the sincere implementation of the Accord and hence always dragged its feet when the question of amending the IMDT Act came up. The desertion of the crucial and vital minority vote bank gave a lesson to Congress (I) that without them they can never hope to capture power. So neither parties- AGP or Congress (I) wanted to displease the minorities. The AGP miserably failed to implement the Accord with regard to the foreigners issue, even after the half -hearted amendment of the IMDT Act.

Chapter – IV

FAILURE OF THE AGP AND RISE OF MILITANCY

The failure of the AGP regarding foreigners issue brought extremism and militancy in the state. ULFA, which was consisted of the extremists among the AASU, not only openly criticised the AGP but to ‘violence on outsiders’ as a method to throw away the outsiders. They acted as pressure group on the AGP and had sufficient influence in the AGP party organisation to get away with all their violent activities. While on the other side dissatisfaction among tribals particularly Bodos grew every day to due eviction of tribals from forest lands and the imposition of Assamese language on them. They firmly believed that the AGP is their mainly to preserve the interest of Assamese only and hence felt insecure and their demand for separate statehood began to increase with Bodo Security Force and United Tribal National Liberation Front opting for a militant path to achieve their goals. Violence and intimidation escalated both from ULFA and Bodo Militant organisation with the familiar tactics of killing, extortion, kidnapping and damaging government property.

The ULFA

When the AASU leaders had despaired of long and fruitless agitation, and were getting impatient then there rose from out of them a few who reached the conclusion that no solution to the foreigners problem could

come by adopting a democratic and peaceful path. They were not happy at the way AGP was trying to handle this most sensitive issue. They acted first as pressure groups from within AASU, and when nothing concrete yielded they went on to form a front called United Liberation Front of Assam and Assam Progressive Liberation Front and took extremist path to achieve their objectives. Here, it was due to failure of AGP and allegedly uncooperative attitude of Centre, extremists and terrorist came up on the scene. The ULFA blamed AASU for being soft to the Centre and bending its knees.¹ In propagating an extreme path, the ULFA went to the extent of asking for separation of Assam from the rest of the country and accusing both AASU and AGP of having compromised their stand and reaching an agreement with the Centre which was 'unjust' to Assam and for the sake of getting into power and becoming ministers.

ULFA had been dormant after its formation in 1979, watching the unfolding of Assam Movement which it saw as battling symptom rather than the disease. They thought that the real problem could be diagnosed 'as the colonial exploitation' of Assam which could only be ended by a revolutionary purge of the existing "infected and decayed system". An ULFA publication explained, "if Assam would have been an independent country then we could have brought (about) progressive changes by means of agitation or elections. But in the present context if we agitate or

¹ D.P. Kumar, Op. cit., p. 9.

participate in Parliamentary politics then the government formed by us (will) have to work as per the Constitution of India and guidelines fixed by the government. This system is prone to exploitation and corruption. This is proved by the gradual change in phase from the AASU to the AGP. Therefore, to create an exploitation free society, our next step must be a national war of liberation. We have no alternative to liberation”.

The founders of ULFA were Arobindo Rajkhowa, Golap Barua, alias Anup Chetia, Pradip (Samiran) Gogai and Paresh Barua (Head of the Armed wing). Most of the leadership was of Muttock origin and belonged to upper Assam.

In 1986, first contacts (and cooperation) with the Kachin Independence Army and the National Socialist Council (NSC) in Myanmar for training and procuring of arms was established. This entailed raising money for payments and gradually set in motion a train of extortions, kidnapping and demand for ransom that were soon to menace a everyday widening circle of traders, businessmen, tea garden owners both Indian and foreign owned. Simultaneously, public relations were promoted through a campaign of social welfare and vigilantism, helping villagers to built road and flood embarkments through self-help and fighting social evils such as ban on liquor, molestation of women, corruption, drug pushing and rhino poaching. The police and the lower administration had been infiltrated with

ULFA people and were unable to intervene against an incipient parallel government while the Robinhood image (a tactical ploy not uncommon among many terrorist groups at the initial year of formation to get public sympathy and support) attracted a large number of educated youth into its fold.

ULFA, surely was born out of a political void left over by the inner conflict within the AGP. For ULFA, the AASU and AAGSP turned AGP was continuously ridden by differences, factions and conflicts. They said that even an all embracing popular and nearly a consensual movement like the Assam Agitation, could not cement the divergent factions. The ULFA people thought that the AGP's disastrous rule (which they called non-rule) had only exacerbated the ethnic tensions between the Assamese and the non-Assamese minorities, mostly Bengali Muslims, and between tribals and non-tribals.² ULFA had serious objections the way AGP, according to them, let down the 'Assamese Nationalism'. For them the way AGP came to power itself acted as a fetter on its future functioning. Whereas a strong 'Assamese Nationalism' crystallised during the movement was the major clutch that it could hold on to, the logic of running the state is a multi-ethnic land like Assam was in sharp conflict with it. ULFA said, that the AGP wanted to play 'Elephant' with the centre but they were disgracefully out played in

² Samir Kumar Das, *ULFA- A Political Analysis*, Ajanta Publication, New Delhi, 1994, p. 39.

their own game. AGP's rule, they observed, could satisfy none- the Bodos, the Karbis, the Bengalis; the minorities in general and ultimately the Assamese majority.³

For the extremists among AASU and already growing up ULFA, the disenchantment with the AGP phenomenon did not take too long to take shape when it became amply clear that the implementation of the Accord was beyond the competence of AGP. The AGP government's performance concerning the identification, leave alone, deportation of the foreigners was in one word dismal. Joynath Sarma, the Minister in charge of Accord Implementation denied, however, that nothing has been done. Giving a figure, he said that more than 10,320 persons have been expelled for illegal re-entry into Assam and more than 16,000 cases have been referred to the Tribunals until November, 1989.⁴ Even if this figure is to be believed, they were by no means impressive when placed against the rather cock and bull estimates (which always ranged between 46 to 50 lakhs of foreigners) made by the avid enthusiasts of the movement.⁵ This had created so much of anguish in Assamese society with the AGP's rule that the editor of *Agradoot*, an Assamese bi-weekly, lashed out against the government, 'I am surprised how these guys are *getting* on pocketing so much of public insult

³ Op. cit., p. 39.

⁴ *India Today*, 15 May, 1990, p. 36.

⁵ Samir Kumar Das. Op. cit., p. 40.

and without committing suicide'.⁶

It is interesting to know that in the December 1985 elections, ULFA firmly decided to keep away from, but not to interfere with and stall, was termed in journalistic circles as an 'elections full of ULFA'.⁷ The organisation supposedly pulled the strings from behind the curtain and presented to the Assamese people a symbol of unity, order and resolve among disunity, disorder and indiscipline that plagued the Assamese political life. It was like an Assamese dream coming true for them.⁸ ULFA too, as reported in India Today had a stake in AGP's Unity. "There is a tremendous pressure on the discredited AGP leaders to stop squabbling and to get their act together so as not to turn the great Assamese dream into a nightmare. ULFA played a different role in AGP unity by working as a pressure group. It was widely believed that one of the main reason for the leadership conflict between Mahanta and Phukan was to keep ULFA on their own side. This way they could not only present a formidable electoral front in future against the other parties but could also have a reserve force of ULFA sympathizers in the Assembly.

There were cases against the press relate to the alleged glorification of ULFA by the editor of Sadin, an Assamese weekly, and the proscription

⁶ *ULFA – The Elusive Enemy – in Frontier*, 15th June, 1991, p. 4.

⁷ *India Today*, 15 May, 1990, p. 36.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

of a book by the editor of Boodhbar – ‘Proposal for Freedom’ which would grant the right to secession from Indian State. The ULFA people were supposed to had close links with the AGP cabinet ministers and also had considerable influence in the party organisation. These actions had been criticised, but no attempt was made to such seditious role of press and misuse of freedom of expression. The deteriorating law and order problem in the states due to militancy of ULFA, and the AGP’s inaction only went on to prove the close connivance between the two. In press, it was reported that some of the police station even refused to lodge FIR asked by traders and general public, where allegedly ULFA man had troubled them seriously, The Home Minister, it was reported even did not take notice of it and it had surreptitious links with it and it grew under its invisible protection.

The AGP government always seemed impervious to or helpless in the face of ULFA’s mounting depredations which had assumed fearful levels of violence and coercion. Blatant attempts to blackmail major industrial houses, tea garden owners and killing of government officers. In 1990, the Governor of Assam, D.D. Thakur, made an assessment of the Assam situation and reported to the President:

“The situation is disturbing and grim calling for immediate action of government of India”.

“Referring to the ULFA as an off-shoot of the so-called Assam

Movement, he indicated its objects and modus operandi as 'murder, abduction, loot and plunder'. The ULFA is consisted of a sizable number of youth and is involved in sabotage and violence and have parted company with AGP; and has embarked upon the armed struggle for the liberation of Assam". In November 1990, President's Rule was imposed and ULFA was declared a terrorist organisation and banned.

The Bodos

Unlike ULFA, a high caste non-tribal movement seeking independence from India, spread over mostly in upper Assam, most other "identity movements" since then were tribal movements. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal etc. were such movements which later on were separated from Assam and made new states. The Bodos, an aboriginal ethnic tribe not only started movement for a separate state but also resorted to armed struggle to achieve its goals. Though ethnic consciousness was growing since 1970s but the Bodos decided to put their energy and caste their lot with the Assam movement against the continuous influx of foreigners. Great were their disenchantment with the Assam Accord which sought to protect Assamese identity and culture but made no mention of tribal identities. They thought that the movement leaders betrayed them.

When the AGP government decided to evict all people residing in the forest areas, the United Tribal National Liberation Front (A Militant

Organisation) protested against the AGP government's eviction of plains tribals from their traditional lands that had been in their possession for centuries, for lack of record of rights. They accordingly sought a constitutional directive under Article 339 (2) to register records of rights of all plains tribals in Assam forest areas.

In March, 1987, after a great disappointment with the working and policies of AGP government the Bodos initiated a vigorous movement for a separate state. The ground for the demand included land alienation, a niggardly tribal sub-plan allegedly designed to perpetuate tribal backwardness, discrimination in education, language and employment, gerrymending of constituencies, atrocities on tribal population and the fact of exclusion from Vth and VIth schedules of the constitution. It was said that the plains tribals had been denied central grants under Art. 275 after Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram had separated from Assam. The grievance were vending but it could be basically traced at that point of time to "Assamese Chauvinism".

Disillusioned by what it read as the AGPs lack of commitment to equity and justice for the tribals, the Bodos prepared for battle, with the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF) under Premsingh Brahma as its Militant Commander, while ULFA stepped in to assist the rival Bodo Security Force (BdSE) under Ranjan Daimuri, which later on got together with the Kaichin

Independence Army (KIA) in Myanmar and National Security Council of Nagaland (NSCN). Earlier also the Bodos had been exposed to elementary guerrilla tactics as far back as 1962 when the Special Security Bureau (SSB) established in the wake of the Sino Indian Conflict set up training camps at Haflong, Chakrata and elsewhere, where Bodos had volunteered. Subsequently it bruted about that the Congress had moved to build up the Bodo Security Force through Central Intelligence Agencies to counter both ULFA and the AGP.

As the initial euphoria of being in government started receding, AASU pressurised the government to implement Assamese language as medium of instruction and knowledge of Assamese for taking government jobs. The AGP not realizing the past resistance of such language policies took the decision that “people seeking government jobs should have studied in the Assamese medium or should have taken Assamese as an optional language”.

Bhriku Kumar Phukan’s remarked that the non-Assamese seeking to live in Assam must imbibe Assamese culture and heritage, immediately evoked protests, on the ground that ‘the culture of each state has been recognised as part of national culture and questions were asked, ‘why the culture of a particular group should be imposed on Indian’s at large just

because some of them happen to live in a particular state'.⁹ Jyoti Basu said that such assertions were being made by Assamese Chauvinists.

The language controversy had been a perennial problem in Assam and such actions had led to the break-up of the state more than once between 1960-70. After the language disturbance of 1960, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had described as 'a new type which has shook the foundation of the country and its unity' and what has happened here is 'ghastly'. And again after the language disturbance of 1972, Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha, went to Calcutta, spoke in Bengali and apologized for everything that had happened in the state. And yet with such grave past results AGP fell to the same prey.¹⁰

Regarding this D. P. Kumar has made a very apt observation, "just as the Assamese people in the old days resented the imposition of Bengali language in Assam, now Bengalis and Plains tribals are reacting in the same manner. The ruling youthful government of Assam had thus inherited a peculiar legacy. The Assam students were fighting against the domination of others. Paradoxically now others were fighting against the Assamese domination in a much smaller state that Assam is today. It is thus a reaction

⁹ D. P. Kumar, *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁰ M. Kar, *Op. cit.*, p. 403.

in reverse threatening to cut up Assam in ever more parts in future, with dreadful prospects of total balkanisation of Assam”.¹¹

Though to guard the Assamese language the AASU/AAGSP had secured a provision in the accord that would give constitutional and legal protection to Assamese language. Now finding stiff resistance from many areas that included Cachar and proposed Udayachal, both the AASU and AGP demanded a special status for Assam under article 370 of the constitution, so that the people of Cachar and Plain Tribal area could be compelled to fall in line with language policy.

The Bodos were already smarting under a deep sense of discrimination and neglect when in 1986 the Secondary Education Board of Assam notified Assamese as a compulsory third language from class 8 in all schools and the AGP government announced requirement of Assamese language for certain government and semi-government appointments. This SEBA circular met with stiff resistance from the Plains Tribals, the cultural body of Bodo's – Bodo Sahitya Sabha. All Cachar Karimganj Student's Association (ACKSA) and the All Assam Tribals Students Union (AATSU) termed this as a 'chauvinist ideology' and warned that it would be 'vehemently resisted'. The AATSU also warned that linking government jobs with Assamese language would become a 'sensitive and dangerous

¹¹ D. P. Kumar, Op. cit., p. 7.

issue'. The Bengalis objected to this new language policy on the logic that 'now they would have to study four languages, Assamese, Hindi, English and their mother tongue, the Assamese student would benefit from this as for them there would not be a third compulsory language.¹² Though the Chief Minister said that it has been independently issued by SEBA, since it is an autonomous body, but it failed to appeal to the minorities as some of the government's members were representatives of this 'autonomous body'. However, the Education Minister said that the non-Assamese students would have to bear this burden of extra language, but the circular has been kept open for debate and discussion. Later on when the protest movement geared up he made a statement that the government would honour the sentiments of the minorities and would not impose this on them. Consequently, the most protested circular had to be withdrawn but only after generating very bitter communal feelings.

The AGP government tried that the protests of tribals and other minorities should not take an ugly turn, hence the Education Minister, Brindaban Goswami announced that 'the language agitation in the Barak Valley would not be dealt with harshly. Doors were kept open for discussions'. Two rounds of talk took place and the dates for the third was fixed but in the middle of it repressive measures and police firing occurred on protesting students. Then the President of All Cachar-Karimganj Students

¹² M. Kar, Op. cit., p. 404.

Association's (ACKSA) P. Dutta. Roy declared, "we will not resume talks with the Assam government on this question unless a judicial probe is ordered into the firing incident in which four persons were seriously injured."¹³ The agitation took a violent turn in Karimganj and the Army had flag march twice and curfew continued to be in force due to mob violence and police firing in which altogether 6 persons were killed and many other were injured. Though Mahanta had been known to be of moderate views on language issue but this new development added to bitterness and tensions on both sides and it embittered community relations between Assam's two most numerous language speaking groups, so soon after the Accord.¹⁴

In the Assembly Elections of 1985 both Cachar and Karimganj people had sided with the Congress (I) and hence they were looking forward to the Central Government to intervene. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi himself visited Silchar after the outbreak of trouble on the issue of imposition of Assamese language in Cachar, and while there, he remarked significantly "it is high time that the Asom Gana Parishad government reach out to the linguistic minorities in the state to create an atmosphere of goodwill and fraternity among different linguistic communities in the state". Rajiv Gandhi told a Congress (I) workers' rally that "the AGP during the last Assembly elections has directed its appeal only to one community, not

¹³ D. P. Kumar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 268-69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

paying much attention to the linguistic minorities. It should now win back their trust".¹⁵ While speaking in the Lok Sabha, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ghulam Nabi Azad also retorted that the study of Assamese language in non-Assamese medium schools as a third language was not a part of the Assam Accord.

The AGP government like the previous Congress regime had no answer to the central question of the Bodo tribal problems i.e. how to reconcile the urge for Assamese nationality and identity without in any way interfering with tribal culture.¹⁶

It is very interesting to keep in mind that the Assamese intelligentsia, while duly and genuinely concerned about the influx of these 'non Assamese', do go to the tribal areas for administrative, managerial and other jobs. And for quite the same reason i.e. the right sort of qualified people were not available among the tribals.¹⁷

The resentment of the religious and linguistic minorities played a role which made the AGP government full of itching problems. A new alignment was taking shape between the tribals of Assam against the Assamese. Assam was caught in a whirlpool of an ethnic and political turmoil with the tribals,

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 270.

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 397.

¹⁷ Shanti Swarup in B. L. Abbi ed. *North East Region – Problems and Prospects of development*, New Delhi, p. 341

first the plains tribals and then the hill tribals.¹⁸ For suppressing the Bodo movement for statehood, the government sometime later adopted repressive measures like the Assam Disturbed Areas Act., 1955, Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 (amended in 1972) and the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act. (TADA).¹⁹ The AGP, who severely criticised such measures of Hiteswar Saikia during agitation period resorted to same against Bodos.

The Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was very critical of the AGP government. In a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi it alleged that neither the State Government nor the Central Leadership was taking adequate care of the interest and aspirations of the Plains Tribals. They demanded for the creation of 'Udayachal' (in 1986) as a union territory. While speaking in Loksabha in April 11, 1986, Samir Brahma Choudhry of PTCA, had alleged that 600 Tribal families had been ruthlessly evicted during the regime of the AGP government, and asked. "is it not a strange way of implementing the Assam Accord?" He also alleged that the tribal homes and hearths were being demolished, though the Central Government has instructed Assam government not to evict any tribal family. He claimed that "not one foreign national has been evicted till now but the

¹⁸ D. P. Kumar, p. 293.

¹⁹ M. Kar, Op. cit., p. 397.

tribals are being uprooted and thrown out. What does it mean? Is it that the foreign national problem is only a cover or a political camouflage?²⁰

A breaking group of PTCA, the United Tribal National Front, met the President of India and submitted a memorandum alleging that the Assam Gana Parishad's activities are 'detrimental to the peace and progress of aboriginal, ethnic and linguistic minorities like the Schedule Tribes of Assam Plains'.²¹ They also threatened that if their demands are not conceded, "we shall be forced to launch a movement".²²

Gradually, the student wing of Bodos, known as All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) mostly grew violent. Though a moderate ABSU faction led by Gangadhar Ramchiary pleaded with the government at Guwahati for the social, cultural and linguistic upliftment of the Bodos and also for development programme for the areas to raise them economically. He soon came to an agreement with the Chief Minister, but the more militant young Upendra Brahma declared, "Mahanta is no authority to decide whether Assam will be divided or not, for it is a central subject." There were even a demand for "fifty-fifty" that is to say a division of Assam in two halves to give the Bodos their homeland. The ABSU mounted a major agitation, as the AASU had done on the issue of foreigners, but the ABSU slogan was

²⁰ D. P. Kumar, *Op. cit.*, p. 275.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

²² *Ibid.*

against 'the alleged AGP policy of Assamese Chauvinism and to resist imposition of Assamese language on the tribals and the eviction of tribals from their forest lands'.²³

The All Cachar- Karimganj students Association too had begun an agitation against the AGP's policies of imposition of Assamese language. The ABSU and ACKSA started a joint agitation against the attempt of the 'Assamese Chauvinists' to crush the minorities and tribals of Assam. The two went ahead to enlist the cooperation of other minority and tribal organisations, causing both AGP and AASU much anxiety.

Home Minister Bhriгу Kumar Phukan, charged, Santosh Mohan Deb, Congress Union Minister, for enticing a separatist Bodo Movement. He said that the Congress's objective is to embarrass AGP and Assamese people and impose president's rule in Assam. He warned that if Centre went on with this game, the 1983 agitation days will return to Assam. Phukan said the AGP was sympathetic to genuine grievances of Bodos and would do everything possible to redress them but it would not tolerate any form of violence.²⁴

By seeking varying forms of autonomy and even outright separation, the cherished view of Assamese people 'of a composite Assamese and

²³ Op. cit., p.307.

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 309.

Assam' was being challenged by the Bodos and other minority groups. The threat was not merely to the territorial integrity of Assam, or even of Brahmaputra Valley, the challenge was grave since it undermined the very personality of the Assamese as a people. The Bodo people had been driven to pose such a challenge through sheer desperation because of prolonged social and economic neglect. They were more dissatisfied because after putting all their energy into Assam Agitation, they realized that for them nothing productive has been done. The AGP by trying to impose Assamese language, consciously or unconsciously, sparked of the feeling of bitterness to more minority and tribal groups.

Linguistic chauvinism was the dominant politics of the state and like the Congress, the AGP also pursued the same politics to make Assam a unilingual state and force other linguistic groups to assimilate with the Assamese. Having failed to made Assamese the soul official language, repeated attempts were made to introduce learning of Assamese language compulsory in primary, secondary and university stage. Every circular brought out by the government faced with stiff resistance from the linguistic minorities and ethnic tribes for which the government had to relent back. The AGP in 1986 issued a similar circular introducing Assamese as third language for non-Assamese people and Hindi for the Assamese in the secondary stage compulsory was put to vehement resistance. The UMF memorandum to the President of India on 25th July, 1986 stated, "the

circular is violative of the three language formula followed at national level. Sooner the circular is withdrawn is better for the state and the people.²⁵ Previously the resistance used to come from the student of Barak Valley only which is predominantly a Bengali speaking area. But with the emergence of UMF, the linguistic, the religious and the ethnic minorities (ABSU & PTCA) of Brahmaputra Valley also joined the linguistic resistance movements.

²⁵ Girban Biswas, Op. cit., p. 66.

CONCLUSION

The large influx of immigrants from Bangladesh into Assam led to a movement for the expulsion of all the foreigners, which bred intolerance, antagonism and hatredness. A succession of recent refugee emergencies have demonstrated, people who do not enjoy security and freedom in their own country, may be left with no alternative but to flee from their own homeland and seek refuge in another state. Such forced migration has in turn generated new forms of tensions and insecurity among the locals, particularly in States which are unable to meet the needs of their own citizens. In such cases, infiltrators are increasingly confronted with rejection and exclusion. Over a period of time pressure builds-up first to contain such migration and later even to push them back.

After independence, as a result of the partition and later after the formation of Bangladesh, millions of illegal foreigners infiltrated Assam, Tripura and other areas of North East. These people were mostly peasants and other manual job seekers. Assam, as an economically backward state was not prepared to absorb such a huge influx. Both pressure on land and other jobs, on petty trade and commerce accompanied by conflicts between the big Indian bourgeoisie and the rising regional bourgeoisie contributed to the growing fear in the Assamese middle class educated people of being overwhelmed by 'outsiders' and consequently losing their identity. This pulls and pressures slowly pushed the entire state into turbulence.

The end of six years long agitation with the signing of historic Assam Accord on 14-15 August, 1985, and AGP's accession to power generated a euphoria where people hoped that the long years of sacrifice during the agitation would prove fruitful. They strongly hoped that the 'foreigners issue' would be solved on first priority since they have crowned their own party (AGP) for the most important task. From the very first year things started changing in a dramatic way as the issue itself took a back seat in Dispur. It did not take much time for people to be disillusioned by their own 'Self Rule'. They realized that the six years of agitation has yielded just one thing 'a forbidden fruit - the AGP' and nothing else.

A section of the Assamese people believed that a new regional party was the only alternative to the 'misrule of the Congress government'. They hoped that a regional party would be able to provide a government that understood the hopes and aspirations of the local people and that would be able to resolve to the problems that has plagued the state. The new government that was constituted was led by an inexperienced middle class leadership, failed to bring any solution to the problems. In the process militancy and disunity in a multi-lingual state became endemic. The policies of the government led to a fear psychosis amongst the tribal minorities and religious groups. This fear of Assamese hegemony and extreme regionalism resulted in permanent conflict among various groups. The Bodos and other Plains and Hill Tribals and Bengalis believed that the AGP was interested only in preserving the 'Assamese interests'. This insecurity in-turn led to the demand for self-determination and consequently for a separate state by the Bodos.

The Bengalis on the other hand, now felt they were the victims of the language policy. It can be said that the earlier situation was being played out in the game, but the players were different. This language issue sensitive at any time was put to trial at a time when the tribals and other religious minorities had not recovered from the disillusionment of the AGP's rule. Now the Bengalis, the religious minorities and the tribal groups were fighting against the 'Assamese hegemony' in the same way the Assamese had fought against the imposition of Bengali in the state as official language. It was a situation in reverse and a paradox too.

The AASU, while signing the Accord, ensured that Assamese ethnic identity and language would get constitutional and legal protection. However, when the AGP attempted to implement the policy of having Assamese as a third language in schools, they faced resistance from both the religious minority and tribal groups. It became apparent that solving problems on paper and putting them into practice are two different things.

The Assam Accord and consequently the rise and rule of the AGP did not solve the foreigners issue. No substantial progress was made in terms of deportation and the names of foreigners continued to have on the electoral rolls as it was in 1983. Even the 1985 elections, in which AGP participated, was on the basis of the 1983 electoral rolls. The hopes of Assamese people with crowning the AGP to power came to naught. They were totally disillusioned as nothing much

was done about foreigners. May be that due to the Accord and AGP coming to power; fresh infiltration had taken a pause or dwindled.¹

The AGP too on its way to power realized that mobilizing people on emotive issues like language problem, and threat to cultural and ethnic identity due to infiltration, though a truth, nothing much could be done if staying power is the prime motive. They blamed the Central Government for every failure in detection and deportation of the foreigners. The AGP government even failed to utilize the money sanctioned for border fencing along the Bangladesh-Assam border.

The failure of the AGP was due to an inexperienced leadership. Being new to power, they attempted the task in the most haphazard way. They were also new to the administration and they neither tried to reform the administration nor to change it tangibly, rather they were absorbed by it, and their greed for power did a great deal of damage. No doubt after signing the Accord and to power, Congress realized that it has harmed its own politics in the region and hence started dragging its feet.

The Congress government at Center in a bid to maintain its vote bank among the minorities kept postponing the amendment of IMDT Act 1983, and when they amended, it was not an desired by the ruling AGP. However, the Centre alone cannot be blamed for all its ills that continued to plague Assam. The state

¹ D. P. Kumar, Op. cit., p. 7.

government led by the AGP also neglected its vital tasks. Even without the amendment of the IMDT Act the government by comparing the electoral rolls of 1967 and 1971 could have easily found out who entered Assam prior to 1967 and after 1971. At least, they could have given a 'true figure to the public about the real number of foreigners', but instead they kept giving different figures every other day. Apparently they were afraid that the alleged 46 to 50 lakhs infiltrators were a crucial vote bank to stay in power.

The reluctance of the AGP to implement the Accord brought extremism within the AASU and sparked off the dormant ULFA. ULFA began a violent movement against the Indian State and also ran parallel government at places, knowing fully well that their old comrades now in power would not come down harshly upon them. It was, therefore, the failure of the AGP to implement the Accord that actually stimulated extremists among AASU to take arms to achieve its objectives.

Sabita Goswami, a journalist aptly commented, "Inspired by political interests, the leaders of Assam Agitation signed the Accord to come to power and seduce the voters. Without signing it they could not have generated an emotional atmosphere for the fulfillment of their political ambitions. For the last five years, the AGP has been pursuing a ghost in the name of detection, deletion and deportation of lakhs of illegal infiltrators. The very concept of deportation of foreigners was meaningless without an international treaty with Bangladesh. The agitation leaders had claimed the existence of lakhs and lakhs of foreigners in

Assam. But while in power, they were able to expel only 481 persons upto June, 1990 out of those who had allegedly come after 1971.

In the final analysis it can be safely said that the Assam Accord which seemingly solved the foreigner's issue, in reality, after a period of five years of AGP in power achieved nothing substantial. The AGP realized that though they sensitized the masses on the disturbing question of foreign infiltration with a successful mass movement; they themselves could not solve the problem once in the seat of power. The middle class leadership of the AGP failed to tackle the delicate and complex issue of foreigner and in the process they only prepared the ground for militancy, violent movements and embittered community relationship.

APPENDIX

MEMORANDUM OF SETTLEMENT

1. Government have all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) have also expressed their keennes to find such a solution.
2. The AASU through their Memorandum dated 2nd February, 1980 presented to the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals into Assam and the fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, cultural and economic life of the State.
3. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the people of Assam, the Prime Minister initiated the dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP, Subsequently, talks were held at the Prime Minister's and Home Minister's levels during the period 1980-83. Several rounds of informal talks were held during 1984. Formal discussions were resumed in March 1985.
4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal provisions international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian considerations, it has been deiced to proceed as follows: Foreigners issue :
 - 5.1 For purposes of detection and deletion foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base date and year.
 - 5.2 All persons who came to Assam prior to 1.1.1966, including those amongst them whose name appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections, shall be regularised.

- 5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and upto 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.
- 5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939.
- 5.5 For this purpose, Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the Governmental machinery.
- 5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored.
- 5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since re-entered illegally into Assam, shall be expelled.
- 5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after, March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.
- 5.9 The Government will give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

Safeguards and Economic Developments

6. Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.
7. The Government take this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people. Special emphasis will be placed on education and science and technology through establishment on national institutions.

Other Issues

- 8.1 The Government will arrange for the issue of citizenship certificates in future only by the authorities of the Central Government.
- 8.2 Specific complaints that may be made by the AASU/AAGSP about irregular issuance of Indian Citizenship Certificates (ICC) will be looked into.
- 9.1 The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security arrangements to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up.
- 9.2 Besides the arrangements mentioned above and keeping in view security considerations, a road all along the international border shall be constructed so as to facilitate patrolling by security forces. Land between border and the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Riverine patrolling along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border.

10. 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.
11. It will be ensured that the relevant law restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners in Assam is strictly enforced.
12. It will be ensured that Birth and Death Registers are duly maintained.

Restoration of Normalcy

13. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) call off the agitation, assure full co-operation and dedicate themselves towards the development of the country.
14. The Central and the State Government have agreed to:
 - a. Review with sympathy and withdraw cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation and to ensure that there is no victimisation;
 - b. Frame a scheme of ex-gratia payment to next of kin of those who were killed in the course of the agitation.
 - c. Give sympathetic consideration to proposal for relaxation of upper age limit for employment in public services in Assam, having regard to exceptional situation that prevailed in holding of academic and competitive examinations, etc. in the context of agitation in Assam;
 - d. Undertake review of detention cases, if any, as well as case against persons charged with criminal offences in connection with the agitation, except those charged with the commission of heinous offences;
 - e. Consider withdrawal of prohibitory orders/notifications in force, if any.

15. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be the nodal Ministry for the implementation of the above.

Sd/- P. K. Mahanta
President All Assam Students Union

Sd/- R.D. Pradhan
Home Secretary
Government of India

Sd/- B.K. Phukan
General Secretary
All Assam Students Union

Sd/- Biraj Sarma
Convenor
All Assam Gana Sana Sangram Parishad

Sd/- Smt. P.P. Trivedi
Chief Secretary
Government of Assam

In presence of

Sd/-

Rajiv Gandhi

Prime Minister of India

Dated : 15th August, 1985

Place : New Delhi.

ELECTION MANIFESTO OF THE ASOM GANA PARISHAD

Translated by
Manorama Sharma

The Asom Gana Parishad means the 'people of Assam' and the 'people of Assam' means the Asom Gana Parishad because the Ason Gana Parishad is the political Party of the people of Assam. Though newly formed, it is the only, strong political party of all religious, linguistic and ethnic communities of Assam. At the end of the six year long democratic, non-violent and non-communal struggle under the leadership of the All Assam Students' Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad the people of Assam have formed the Asom Gana Parishad in order to unit all strata of the people of the State to secure peace and bring about an all round development of the state.

The identity of the Asom Gana Parished (AGP) is symbolised by the white colour of peace, the green of prosperity and by the joint red wheels signifying the revolutionary progress of agriculture and industry. The AGP goes to the people of Assam with the pledges of safeguar ling the political rights of the people, of bringing about economic development and of protecting the cultural identity of the state. if this pledge has to be honoured the electorate of Assam, irrespective of caste, creed, language or religion will have to vote the AGP to power in the forthcoming elections.

The AGP will enter the election fray keeping in mind the aims and aspirations with which the people of Assam have formed the AGP, and once in power the AGP will devote itself to the interests of the people of Assam. Unlike many of the other political parties of India the AGP, instead of making false promises on the election platform, has pledged itself to work according to the programme given below :

Implementation Of The Accord

Keeping in mind the Assam Accord, the AGP is pledged to take up measures for a permanent solution to the issue of immigration of foreign nationals in Assam, and also for the maintenance of peace and amity amongst all classes of people residing in the state. While doing this, the AGP will ensure that no Indian National is harassed in the name of language or religion.

Removal of Divisive Policies

The so-called government of the Congress (I) which came to power through the scandalous, inhuman elections of 1983, has, while mouthing the slogan of unity shamelessly divide the people of the state in the name of language, caste, religion and creed.

To put an end to this policy of divide and rule the AGP will make all attempts to build an atmosphere of true unity and amity. On this foundation of mutual trust, good - will and love amongst the various linguistic and religious communities of the state the AGP will foster the true spirit of national integration.

End of Repressive Policies

The tyrannical government has restricted all the democratic fundamental rights of the citizens, and has suppressed the people of Assam by establishing a rule of repression and torture. The AGP will put an end to this oppressive rule and restore the democratic rights of the citizens. The use of Central Reserve Forces will be restricted and instead of using all reserve against the people, their services will be utilised in public welfare programmes.

A Clean Administration

The ruling party has made the whole administrative machinery of the state corrupt, through nepotism and favouritism, and by using the machinery for furthering its own interests. The public has been harassed as a result of such a policy. In all

matters of employment, promotion etc. the deserving one has been deprived unless one is an underling of the ruling party or one takes recourse to bribes. The independent and honest employees and officers have had to face various insults and harassment's. The AGP is determined to put an end to this situation and give shape to a clean administration free of all political influences.

Economic Development

An industrial, agricultural and business programme will be adopted which will be useful in the real sense of the term to the people of the state. In every sphere utmost importance will be given to the utilisation of peoples' strength. The false promises made by the ruling party so long in the sphere of economic planning will be put an end to and such measures will be taken which can give economic relief to the people. The AGP will take steps to remove exploitation of weaker sections of the people.

While working for the major objectives stated above, the AGP will never give any preference to party interests and will always take into consideration the overall interests of the people. The AGP will set up a Government and an administration in Assam which, for the first time, will be a Government the people can call its own and in this the AGP will be guided by a broad nationalist outlook, democratic consciousness and humanitarian principles.

After attaining power the AGP will go ahead with its work in the following manner:

While solving the problem of foreign nationals it will also give an ex-gratia payment of a minimum of Rs. 20,000 to every martyr's family or given employment to any qualified person of the family.

Government aid will be given for the treatment of those who were injured during the movement and suitable means of rehabilitation will be found for those crippled.

All punitive measures imposed on teachers, employees, officers and all grades of employees will be immediately lifted and they will be re-instated in their earlier positions with all due pay allowances and increments. Those officers and employees whose promotions had been stayed for their participation in the movement, will be given all their due benefits again.

All prohibitory orders which curtail the fundamental rights of the people will be withdrawn and steps taken to amend Section 167 CrPC and put an end to police oppression.

All charges against those participating in the movement will be withdrawn.

It will be ensured that no person has to face social injustice or any other kind of injustice on linguistic, religious or communal considerations.

To rescue the people from the clutches of corruption very stern action will be taken against all corrupt government or non-government employees, officers, businessmen etc.

Essential commodities like rice, pulses, salt, sugar edible oil, kerosene oils, vegetables etc. will be fairly distributed throughout the state at controlled prices.

In every village, 'bast', town, tea-garden and industrial area speedy arrangements will be made for the supply of clean drinking water and for the adoption of scientific cleanliness measures.

While making the state self-sufficient in the matter of food supplies systematic planning will be undertaken to provide the necessary amount of fish, milk, etc. to every person in the state.

Health - services will be made free and the weaker section will be supplied free medicines.

To remove the discrepancies in land policies a land commission will be set up and on the basis of the recommendations of this commission the laws relating to land will be amended. Forests will be reserved in keeping with the national forest policy. All tribal belts and blocks will be totally protected and steps will be taken to remove the loopholes in the laws in this matter.

A strict watch will be kept on all kinds of land transfers and effective measures will be taken to see that the indigenous people do not become landless.

Farmers' training centres will be set up in the district headquarters to introduce more developed agricultural techniques.

The 'char' areas will be surveyed and agrarian programmes will be undertaken for the speedy economic development of the residents of those areas.

Landless peasants, ex-tea garden labourers and flood victims will be rehabilitated on a priority basis.

Effective plans will be drawn up for controlling the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Farreaching changes will be made in the Brahmaputra Flood Control Board, and short term and long term measures will be taken for scientific methods of flood-control.

Remission of revenue for flood-ravaged areas will be incorporated into the existing laws, and the agricultural fields, houses and the cattle wealth of these areas will be brought under the agricultural insurance schemes.

Immediate steps will be taken to increase government income from the forests.

A defence force will be formed to stop poaching and smuggling of timber.

Special measures will be taken for the development of endi, muga, pat and brass-metal industries in the state which are the only traditional industries of the local people.

The planting of medicinal plants, scented grass used for perfumes etc. and other valuable trees, will be extended and labour power invested in it.

For the protection of the interests of the tea garden labourers, the Government will take necessary measures in the sphere of management of the gardens so that :

- a. The tea labourers get their due bonus
- b. They get free medical facilities
- c. Get regular supply of the essential commodities, and
- d. Children of tea garden labourers get all necessary educational facilities.

All schools in the tea-gardens will be brought to the Government sector and their standards made equal with other schools.

The Government will determine the minimum number of labourers to be maintained per acre of garden land so that there cannot be retrenchment in the services of tea labourers.

Excess land held by the tea gardens will be acquired by the Government and 'Pattas' to ex-tea garden labourers will be given on these lands.

The Government will consider the question of reservation of seats for children of tea garden labourers in the institutions for higher education.

Keeping the requirements of the state in view a plan of vocational education will be drawn up and implemented.

The independence of the educational institutions will be safeguarded and will be ensured that unqualified persons backed by party interests are not selected for inclusion in the management of educational institutions.

Speedy measures will be provided at the primary level. Arrangements will be made for pre-primary education in the rural areas.

Special importance will be given to sports and physical training in the secondary schools and arrangements for qualified trained teachers will made.

Definite academic years from the primary to university level will be determined.

Measures will be taken to see that corrupt practices do not prevail either in the admission of student's or in the appointment of teacher or in their transfers.

It will be ensured that the official languages Act is effectively implemented at all levels.

Effective steps will be taken and a university level research centre will be set up to safeguard, develop and conduct researches in local languages.

The local cultural wealth will be safeguarded through scientific methods.

The co-operative movement will be strengthened so that it can form the mainstay of far-reaching socio-economic changes in the rural areas.

The STATFED will be extended to the rural and tea - garden areas to make the goods of daily use easily available.

The role of banks in economic development will be activated and steps will be taken to see that the entire wealth collected from the region is invested in the region alone.

The Tea Auction Centre will be developed as an attractive international centre.

Steps will be taken for the settlement of able bodied unemployed :

- a. By giving facilities for the establishment of agriculture based small scale industries.
- b. By helping in the setting up of petroleum based small scale industries.
- c. Through the establishment of new markets on government initiative.

d. By providing avenues of employment through the establishment of 'Bhumi Sena'.

Utmost importance will be given to the appointment of local candidates in all jobs.

Only 20% of the administrative and other officers will be drawn from the all India Services, the other 80% will be drawn from the Assam Administrative Service.

Training centres will be set up in each district headquarters to prepare the local youth to compete in the All India Services, bank services etc.

The existing boundary disputes with neighbouring states will be settled peacefully through mutual understanding.

The relationship amongst the North Eastern States will be strengthened.

More power, within the federal structure, will be sought for the states.

Steps will be taken to see that the states can draw up their own plans for the acquisition of resources and for their development.

Steps will be taken to see that the North East Council Act is amended so that the chairmanship of the council rotates among the chief ministers of the region. A move will also be made to further amend the Act of NEC so that the Governments of the region remain as advisors of the Council and the Council's secretariat is manned by personnel from the administrative services of the states of the region.

Further, effective measures will be taken to re-open the sick industries of the region and also to see that these industries do not face the same problems again. The Ashok Paper Mill, Glass Factory, Jute Mill, and the cycle factory will be opened up again.

Scientific methods will be adopted for the development of transport and communication in the state.

The State Transport Services will be extended to all areas and through a greater control of the private bus Services, passengers' safety and convenience will be ensured.

The AGP has pledged itself to uphold the political rights of all strata of the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion language or community, to speed up their economic development and strengthen cultural ties. The people of Assam are standing as one with the AGP and with this strength the AGP will go ahead, after winning the elections, to build a prosperous Assam by getting from the centre all due and demandable rights and grants and also through planned utilisation of the resources of the state. With the peoples' blessing the AGP will become the ablest and strongest political power in the state.

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