

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter deals with ultimate findings of the whole dissertation. However, we find that the Muslims have a history of more than seven and a half centuries in Assam. For over four hundred and fifty years, they invaded (many times) in the Brahmaputra Valley consisting of the districts of Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Nawgong and Sibsagar but failed. In course of the invasions, captive mercenaries and others settled in small numbers and could little influence the existing population. Some Muslim professionals were also invited by the Ahom kings. Again, the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon and creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam as new province brought the Muslims and the Assamese to a closer contact.

In the thirties, having secured land and numerical strength, the Muslims became more emphatic and vehement in echoing the views of separate interests in all spheres of life. The establishments of the Muslim League in the Brahmaputra Valley was a turning point in the history of Assam. The Muslim legislators who were so long divided into numerous groups now sank their differences and consolidated their strength under the sectional leadership of Sir Muhammad Saadullah and owed complete allegiance to the All India Muslim League through its provincial organization.

The situation demanded a leader from the Congress to form the new ministry. Gopinath Bardoloi was now the right person to take the reign of the new situation. Bardoloi Ministry assumed office on 19th September, 1938. A no confidence motion moved by the opposition, headed by Sir Muhammad Saadulla and Abdul Matin Choudhury was defeated. Gopinath Bardoloi maintained a balance between national and

regional interests. But Bardoiloi Ministry, however, failed to take a bold and precise stand on the question of 'Line System', for which it had to face severe criticism.

While discussing the attitude of the colonial authorities towards immigration in Assam it appears that since the annexation of Assam the colonial rulers took such steps which were intended to transform Assam's economy to fulfill their economic need. In the process the Brahmaputra valley witnessed the entry and settlement of three kinds of immigrants, tea garden laborers, Nepali grazers, and East Bengal cultivators the bulk which were Mymensinghia Muslims. It was with Mymensinghia peasant cultivators that the conflicts of interest arose with the Assamese cultivators.

Immediately after the conquest, the colonial rulers explored the possibility of tea cultivation in Assam and accordingly tea industry was established in the middle of nineteenth century. As the indigenous cultivators showed little interest in it, the planters had to run to immigrant tea cultivators. Besides tea, for other industries like coal, oil as well for the construction purposes the colonial rulers had to depend upon immigrant labors.

As the tea industry prospered in Assam in the second half of the nineteenth century more and more tea garden laborers were brought to Assam by the planters under modified emigration rules, which created food scarcity. Therefore, to meet the crisis, food grains began to be imported in Assam from outside the province which was considered by the colonial officials as an extra burden for growing tea industries. Besides, there were other factors like black fever disastrous earthquake and subsequent floods which were considered responsible by colonial officials for slow agricultural growth in Assam. Under the circumstances, the colonial rulers decided to bring more land under plough to meet the food deficit.

From the official correspondence between the Government of India and the Chief Commissioner, Assam it appeared that the colonial government was seriously considering a plan of colonization of wasteland in Assam by bring more cultivators from outside the province. Through they considered various risk factors like climate,

language, health and rate of mortality were involved on the way of reclamation of wasteland in Assam, yet the colonial rulers were convinced that for the prospect of Assam immigrant cultivators should be encouraged to settle in Assam under liberal settlement rule.

Meanwhile, the worldwide demand of jute on the eve of twentieth century provided an opportunity to the colonial officials of Assam to encourage East Bengal cultivators to extend jute cultivation in Assam as they had some experience in such cultivation in Bengal. Meanwhile, under the encouragement of Zamindars of Goalpara some peasant cultivators of Bengal had already entered and settled in the riverine tracts of Goalpara which is evident from the Census Report of 1911. It also revealed the movement of Bengal cultivators from bordering districts of Dacca, Bogura, Rangpur and Mymensingh to Assam in search of vacant land for cultivation. Slowly it took the shape of influx affecting the population composition of the Brahmaputra valley.

In 1874, the percentage of Muslim population in the Brahmaputra valley was 5.9%, by 1941 it rose to 23%. Compared to the all India population growth rates of 0.3%, 5.7% and 11% of the first three decades of the twentieth century, Assam population grew at much higher rates at 16.8%, 20.2% and 20.1% and this was considered due to immigration. Moreover, with the increase of immigrants, along with their settlement the homogenous nature of tribal caste population of the 19th century very soon shifted to heterogeneous population of non-tribal complex with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences mainly in the Brahmaputra valley.

The push and pull factors also played an important role in the process of migration of East Bengal cultivators to Assam. The scarcity of food grains, shortage of manpower for the reclamation of wasteland, extension of jute cultivation and absence of any restrictive law created pull factor for the migration of East Bengal peasant cultivators in Assam. The Colonial officials saw land abundant Assam as a solution of East Bengal's problem of land scarcity. On the other hand, overpopulation, land shortage, abnormal price hikes on food grains, Zamindari oppression were responsible to push a sizable section of East Bengal agricultural population towards Assam.

The motive of the Colonial officials was also partly political balancing Hindu and Muslim population of Assam. It was undoubtedly one of the striking features of colonial political control. From the statement of Lords Curzon, Viceroy and P.G. Melitus, Revenue Member it appears that they considered Assam a suitable place where the surplus population of other provinces could be absorbed.

In Assam, during the period under study, it appears that in the absence of any proper scheme of settlement or official to regulate their settlement the immigrants started settling wherever vacant lands were found available. Under the squatting system prevailing in Assam at that time, the immigrants were allowed to settle without any let or hindrance on any government wasteland, except reserve land. After the immigrants opened up the land by clearing jungles and prepared it suitable for cultivation they were provided annual *patta* by the concerned authority.

Things went sufficiently well so long as these cultivators were engaged in filling up the vacant spaces in the riverine area. But as they drew nearer to the areas held by the indigenous people, things soon became apparent of the clashes of interests between them and the local people. In those areas in particular which were predominantly peopled by tribal and backward classes, apprehensions were entertained that the introduction of a foreign, advanced and pushing element if permitted would spell disaster to the local population. District officers therefore in absence of any clear direction from Government adopted such measures which were to prevent or check, the spread of immigrants in indigenous areas.

In pursuance of this policy, some lines were laid down on maps and on the ground to demarcate the areas between the immigrants and the local people. This is in general outline what is "Line System", a system has served its purpose as a method of controlling the influx of immigrants and directing it to more or less compact areas instead of allowing indiscriminate squatting all over the province.

But the immigrants opened up the land on their side of the lines more quickly than the indigenous people on their side. Therefore even after the immigrants settlement

had become established, the indigenous village adjoin it still contained much waste land, on which the immigrants often proceeded to encroach.

It was noticed by the colonial Government that the indigenous people had the tendency to sale or transfer of their land to immigrants when they were offered fabulous prices by the immigrants. In the process the immigrants not only purchased land under annual lease but also proceeded to capture lands under periodic lease. The Government considered that such a tendency on the part the indigenous people might prove detrimental in the long run.

Therefore, considering the interest of the local people colonial Government in Assam modified the land settlement policy by which the right of inherit and transfer of land under annual lease was prohibited and allowed only right of use. It also empowered the Deputy Commissioner to eject any person from land who had not acquired requisite norms to possess the land.

But the Line System had failed to restrict the transfer of lands as such executive orders were effective in case of new settlement of waste lands and under annual lease. Moreover, it was found that the Assamese *pattadars* having periodic lease continued to transfer lands to immigrants even within the line of restriction tempted by fabulous prices. This is evident from the report of Devendra Kumar Mukherjee, Assistant Director of Land Records, Assam. As under the existing law no *pattdar* under periodic lease could be prohibited from transferring his land to another cultivator. Such steps on the part of the Assamese *pattadars* made the problem of settlement more acute. Therefore, the Colonial Government considered that certain legislation was necessary to forbade transfer of land under periodic *patta* which should be brought by people's representatives in the Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, to accommodate large number of immigrants in Nowgong and Kamrup, the Government in Assam announced Colonisation Scheme. According to which, large blocks of lands, formerly waste and unattractive to the indigenous people were constituted as colonization areas for settlement of immigrants.

Thus it appears that it was a deliberate colonial policy to encourage immigration in Assam on the one hand for enhancing the economic prosperity of the province as they transformed the vast uncultivated wasteland into a field of multiple crops like paddy, mustard, jute; pulses and others. On the other hand, their settlement was restricted within a certain area considering the interest of indigenous people by the device of Line System. The colonial handling of the land settlement problem gave rise to communal consciousness and gradually the matter was taken up by the public representatives.

Immediately on the ushering in of Provincial Autonomy measures which had been taken earlier for administrative reasons began to be measured by communal and political standards. As a result, the Line System was charged as being an unfair and perhaps illegal method of control, and the evictions which were an inevitable part of it were subjected to one sided criticism. An Enquiry Committee was appointed by the first Saadulla Ministry, formed under the Government of India Act, 1935. It submitted a report with a general conclusion to support the policy of evictions and to recommend a reform of the Line System.

Meanwhile, the inflow of immigrants continued as more immigrants began to come attracted by the prospect of getting land in Assam. However, many immigrants who came earlier had prospered and bought up lands allotted to their neighbours. They formed a small and wealthy class of landowners. With large areas under their control, they began to employ cultivators by importing them from native districts. Such laborers formed the nucleus of that largest class of landless immigrants whose was recognized by all and for whose relief Muslim leaders and later Muslim League ministries had tried to devise further schemes of settlement.

It had become a great controversy whether to provide land to those entire landless immigrants who were working under some person. Because, after getting land they might import another group of laborers from their native places to work under them, and the newcomers might also demand land for them in future. And thus the problem of providing land for the landless would never be any solution.

Therefore, over the question of accommodation of landless immigrants the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly appeared to be divided into two groups and no one could prescribe a real solution. Meanwhile, the Congress Coalition Government issued a Resolution indicating their general policy in the matter just before their resignation in 1939. It was not accepted by Saadulla Ministry which succeeded it.

Since the Muslim League's declaration of Lahore resolution of 1940, the Two Nation Theory became the central theme of Indian politics and in Assam it got mixed up with the immigrant issue. The Line System was condemned by Muslim League as instrument of injustice and oppression and declared that it could be remedied by the establishment of Pakistan.

Saadulla followed a policy of extension of colonization areas for immigrants and re-examination of the necessity or reserving such large areas for professional graziers. Moreover Development Scheme under Saadulla was considered by the Congress party as an attempt to dispose all the available land among the immigrants. Later, under Grow More Food Campaign it appears that 'Lines' had been withdrawn in a number of villages to enable immigrants to obtain settlement of land on the Assamese side of the land. All these steps were severely criticized by the Congress as well as Assamese Hindus which was considered as an attempt by the Muslim League Ministry to incorporate Assam within the scheme of Pakistan.

Again, Bardaloi Government's decision of large scale eviction of illegal immigrants from Assam precipitated the communal tension followed by civil disobedience movement by the Provisional Muslim League in Assam. It soon became a battle cry for Pakistan. The announcement of Mountbatten Plan forced the Provisional Muslim League to accept the fait accompli and naturally the issue of 'Line System' receded to the background.

Another dimension of the immigrant problem was the language issue and valley rivalry. Initially under the encouragement of Colonial officials Bengali Muslim immigrants were willing to identify themselves with the Assamese people but later

began to assert themselves as Bengalis. As the prominent Muslim League leaders of the province were from Sylhet and the Bengali identity of the immigrants were always asserted during the period of evictions, the Assamese leaders wanted to get rid of linguistic problem. So they favoured the idea of immediate transfer of Sylhet to Bengal which, culturally and linguistically was different from the Brahmaputra valley.

The introduction of Line System in Assam also intensified the rivalry of the two valleys as people of Surma Valley were shown as immigrants by the colonial official though Sylhet was a part and parcel of Assam. In fact, one of the factors which created jealousy between the two valleys was the superior position acquired by people of Sylhet in government services. With the influx of immigrants from Bengal, the Bengali speaking population went on increasing from census to census, which alarmed a major section of Assamese community. It further widened over the question of medium of instruction in education, establishment of University and High court in the Brahmaputra valley.

Under the circumstances the separation of Sylhet became a life and death problem for the Assamese who wanted to curb out a linguistically more homogenous province. So they welcomed the plan of referendum declared by Mountbatten which ended up with the separation of Sylhet from Assam. Thus the colonial policy of immigration and Line System proved to be very in the context of Assam and it furnished as one of the pretext for the partition of Assam.

The impact of the provincial of 1937 held under the provisions of the government of India Act 1935 had been enormous all over India but in Assam it was different. The politics in Assam in general and the Muslim politics in particular had centered round to issues of the immigrants and the introduction of line system. Except some sporadic anti-British outbursts of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, almost all the politicians of Assam, irrespective of parties, became involved with the local issues. But the Muslim league became a dominant force in Assam by bringing the immigrant Muslims under its banner. The hard truth was that long before 1940, the year in which the Pakistan Resolution was adopted, immigration and line system had

transformed into a communal issue. Assam politics until the partition of India in 1947 had revolved round it.

The Muslim opinion was against any restriction on the settlement of immigrants. Khan Bahadur Nuruddin Ahmed of Nowgong was the first Muslim member of the Assam legislative council, who had officially moved a resolution in 1936 for the abolition of the line system. The motion was lost by seven votes to twenty, with all seven Muslim members supporting, all Hindu members opposing. The second attempt had been made again in 1937 by Munawwar Ali, a young member of the council from Sylhet, for the total abolition of the line system. His move had been strongly supported by Abdul Matin Choudhury.

However, in December 1938, the Muslims of Assam living in Calcutta formed the Assam Muslim Association of Calcutta and unanimously made Moulana Mohammad Ali as the president and Abdul Matin Choudhury as the Secretary. The main objective of the Association was to serve Islam, the country and the people. But Mohammad Sadulla was an advocate of Assam's interest but joined the Muslim league for leadership and power which he ensured to himself by alliance to other groups. But neither he nor Bhasani had direct hand in the formulation of the league demand on Assam. It was of course inspired by the success of the Assam league in the election of 1946.

But we find a different picture in the Surma valley. The creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam was more significant for the Muslims as it awakened in them a new sense of political importance derived from superiority to the Hindus. The Muslims now considered the new province as a boon but the Hindus looked upon it as conspiracy to Bengali Nationalism. As a result, the Surma valley conference led by Bipin Chandra Pal failed to attract Muslim support and stirred the Hindu minds. The Muslim league did not rise to prominence in the Surma Valley till late twenties and under the influence of Muslim leaders of Bengal, the Muslims of Sylhet remained essentially pro-partition. None of the later Muslim leaders of the district has any record of participation in the movement. When the Assam Association adopted the Non Co-Operation programme, it

was dominated by young Hindu leaders. No Muslim name is available. Tayyabulla was the first Muslim to court arrest in connection with the movement.

The Muslims in Assam gathered round the Assam provincial Muslim league and it became the sole spokesman of the community. Abdul Matin Choudhury and Mohammad Saadulla became its leaders. As the most respected leader of the Muslims and occupying the most important position of the party and its parliamentary forum, Saadulla was considered as the main architect of the Muslim league in Assam. On the other hand, Abdul Matin Choudhury of Sylhet had started his political career as a non co-operator and later he joined the Muslim league and represented Assam. More than that, he was a close associate and confidant of Jinnah as well as a influential member of the Saadulla cabinet. He participated in the league Legislators conference in 1946 which demanded the creation of Eastern Pakistan with Bengal and Assam. Sayeed Abdur Rouf of Barpeta and Abdul Mazid of Dhubri and Mayeenuddin Ahmed Choudhury of South Sylhet also supported the demand of Pakistan and criticized the congress government for its policy towards the Muslims. Thus, the demand for Pakistan alienated the Hindus and the Muslims. This exposes the complete divergence of attitude of the two major communities of the province. It also reveals a total lack of a universal leadership based on the concepts of democracy and secularism.

It has highlighted the virgin field that focused the colonial manipulation to divide the two religious, communities with the help of various colonial devises like ‘Line System’, ‘Divide and Rule’, etc.. In the dissertation, it has also explored how the British Colonial Government followed the policy of racial segregation in Assam, which had a serious impact in the history of Assam, which still exists as a problematic issue in Assam.

The ‘Line System’ in the context of Assam, is defined as a colonial device of racial segregation, which is associated with the immigration of land hungry peasants from the districts of Bengal province especially from the district of Mymensingh of East Bengal. By the ‘Line System’, the villages were divided into few categories, by which, some villages were exclusively reserved for indigenous people and some for

immigrants. There were certain villages in which a line was drawn on the map or on the ground, on the side of which, immigrants could settle and on the other of which, their settlement was forbidden. The 'Line System' at first owed its origin in the district of Nowgang in 1920. It was, in fact, a device to segregate the Bengali Muslims from the indigenous population, including the tribal and backward classes.

We found that the immigrants from Bengal and its adjoining regions spread in different and by 1931 had gone to every nook and corner of the Brahmaputra valley. At the initial stage, it was purely economic in nature, but later on it became political.

However, the provincial government treated immigration as an economic necessity. The government was encouraging immigration particularly to the Char areas which were properties of private Zamindars as well as to the Government lands. The Deputy Commissioners were empowered to make settlements on an annual *Patta* basis, which conferred on the settlers only the right of users and no right to inheritance and transfer. It was therefore, not unnatural that the Government settled large areas of land to the immigrants. The indigenous Assamese people still did not offer to accept any restrictions to their right to transfer land.

As the colonial Government, encouraging immigration, there arose frictions between immigrants and the indigenous Assamese people. The Deputy Commissioners considered steps to meet the situations. The same was noted first in Nowgang that new comers should not be allowed any longer to settle anywhere they liked but would be confined to certain areas in villages demarcated by lines. On 16th May 1923, at Nowgang, the 'Line System' was first officially inaugurated. By it, villages were grouped under different categories such as, Assamese villages, Muslim villages, mixed villages, unsettled villages, etc. and as the number of new comers increased, and they obtained approval to the 'Line System'. Thus, the Government accorded sanction to the line system in Revenue Department, Letter No. 2132, R, dated August 1925. Henceforth, it became a Government policy to encourage the immigration in the region.

Parliamentary politics in Assam probe the different phases of constitutional development, congress policy and its reaction ensuring further Anglo – Muslim alliance and Muslim predominance in parliamentary politics till partition. The politics of defection which was a special feature in Assam have been thoroughly enquired into and brought to light in their aspects including function of the legislature.

In 1956, the first Congress Ministry formed in Assam and Bardoloi came to office on February 1946. The ministry favored the immigrants but the Muslim league vehemently opposed the congress Govt. policy of immigration. And they found the remedy only to lay in the creation of Pakistan including Assam. Premier Bardoloi stood firm and declared that the congress Govt. were doing nothing new but following the policies of Muslim League Ministry of Saadullah. It was also the opinion of All India Jamiat-e-Ulema.

Thus, a thorough discussion has been made on immigration policies of the Govt. socio – cultural and linguistic aggression over the Assamese society, language and culture. Finally, all these ended in smoke after the Mountbatten plan on 3rd June, 1947, which prescribed the partition of India by creating Pakistan and Sylhet district of Assam included in East Pakistan by a Referendum. Thus the colonial Government was successful with the help of their policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ to sow the seeds of hostility between the Hindus and Muslims as well as between the Bangalees and the Assamese, which hampered the progress in all directions even after the independence of India.

The Two Nation Theory of the Muslim League got mixed up with the immigrant issue. But Bardoloi Ministry strongly opposed it and it became a battle cry which divided Assam on communal lines. Again with the influx of immigrants and the increase of Bengali speaking people, both the community, Bengali and Assamese divided linguistically and finally it ended up with cessation of Sylhet from Assam to East Pakistan (Modern Bangladesh) by a Referendum offered by Lord Mountbatten in 1947.

It has also exposed the divergence of attitude of the two major communities and how they drifted away from the main stream of an all India Nationalism and subscribed to the demand for Pakistan (with a few exceptions).

Thus, we find the complete divergence of attitude of the two major communities of Assam. The study revealed a total lack of leadership based on the concepts of democracy and secularism. The Muslim masses and intelligentsia with a few exceptions drifted far away from the main current of all India Nationalism and supported the demand for Pakistan which also aggravated the process of parting of the way between the two communities and the valleys.

Hence, the 'Line System', immigration issue and the policy of eviction had split up the province more deeply and widely than any other things. The rise and fall of ministers was linked up with the issue which defied any solution because of divergent approaches of the political leaders, which only hastened communal bitterness and tension. Against such background, the emergence of Muslim League as a formidable force in Assam politics serves only to intensify the communal cleavages. The All India Muslim League officially took up the matter of immigration problem in Assam condemning the 'Line System' as an instrument of justice and oppression and declared that it could be remedied only by the establishment of Pakistan. Finally, the British colonial policy of 'Divide and Rule' furnished as a pretext for the separation of Sylhet district from the main land of Assam.

However, the colonial manipulation to divide the two religious communities also stirred the ethnic, racial and religious politics which began with the large scale immigrant Muslim in Assam which had a serious impact not only in the history of Assam but of India as well and which still exists as a problematic issue in Assam.

Basically, economic in character, immigration soon became an administrative and social issue causing grave apprehension of being swamped in the minds of the local Hindus, who, however, refused to accept any restraint on their right to transfer land. But the British colonial government encouraged immigration as a matter of political politics.

Thus, the steady stream of agricultural immigrants from adjoining districts of Bengal and Bihar, viz., Mymensingh, Dacca, Bagura and Rangpur, started to come to Assam, most of them, were the Muslims. They settled permanently with their families mainly on the vast cultivable wastelands lying in the riverine belt of the lower and central districts namely Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgang, etc.

Therefore, it is not so easy to associate migration with the development especially in the state like Assam. Various nature and form of migration ultimately decided the fate of Assam. On one hand, due to the immigration especially the Bangalees, the age old, socio – economic and linguistic structure of Assam was disturbed while on the other hand, due to large scale immigration, the aborigines of the state were outnumbered, their socio – economic and political status were dropped, they lost their lands and many of them became landless in their own lands, which ultimately led the Assamese youths toward terrorism.