

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The tribal population is found in almost all the places in the world. India is well known for having the largest concentration of the tribal population. It may be noted that India is the largest country in terms of surface area, occupying 2.3% of the total surface of the earth and the second largest country in the world in term of population. India as on 1st March 1991 had 843,930,831 people distributed over 25 States and Union Territories.

The present population of India is the outcome of migration of different racial groups at different times and the inter-mixture of various ethnic groups.

The North-East India has an area of 22,50,36 sq.km. and a population of 30.53 million according to the 1991 census. It has 3.62 % of the total population of India. The region comprising of seven states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Tripura is not a homogenous unit both physically and culturally. The isolation from the rest of the country is the only justification for treating this region as one unit. The whole region is connected with the rest of India only through a narrow corridor in the northern part of West Bengal.

With the number of ridges and valleys, plateaus and eroded surfaces, the region is physically uneven. Broadly, three major physiographic features can be identified in the region :

ASSAM



DISTRICTS OF ASSAM

1. Dhubri
2. Kokrajhar
3. Bongaigaon
4. Goalpara
5. Barpeta
6. Nalbari
7. Kamrup
8. Darrang
9. Sonitpur
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Marigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sibsagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi Anglong
20. North Cachar
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

1. The old plateau of Meghalaya state and Karbi Anglong district in Assam.
2. The young folded hills and mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.
3. The riverine plains of Assam, Manipur and Tripura.

Socially North-East India is characterised by intermixture of different racial, linguistic and cultural groups. Besides the non-tribal groups like Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalis and others, the region is inhabited by as many as 150 tribal groups. Almost all the tribes are of Mongoloid origin and speak Tibeto-Burman language, except the Khasis of Meghalaya who linguistically belong to Austro-Ariatic group. The tribal population constitutes 22% of the total population of North-East India. In case of urbanisation also, this is one of the least urbanised regions of India. Only 13% of its population lives in urban areas as against the country's 23.7%.

Economically, North-East India is, perhaps, the most backward region of India. The main factors behind the region's economic backwardness are isolated location, difficult terrain, lack of infrastructural facilities for industrialisation and lack of capital and entrepreneurship. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, both in the hills and the plains. While shifting cultivation i.e. jhuming is the general practice in the tribal inhabited hills, the plains are dominated by subsistence pleasant type of farming. The cultivation of tea and recently coffee, in certain parts is also an important economic activity of the region. As regards industrialisation, the region is lagging far behind. Only Assam, with its tea and oil industries is relatively advanced in industrialisation among the states of North-East India.¹

Assam is the homeland of several population groups such as the tribals, the indigenous non-tribals, the Bengali Hindu immigrants and the tea labourers. These groups have their own culture. The total population of Assam is 55.61 lakh in 1951 which increased to 198.9 lakh in 1981 (projected), then 223 lakh in 1991.

The growth rate of population in the State till 1971 had been relatively high compared to the average growth rate in India.

TABLE – I

Population Growth Rate (%) in Assam (1951–1991)

Decade	Assam	India
1951-1961	35.06	21.52
1961-1971	34.95	24.80
1971-1981	No Census	
1981-1991	23.58	23.50

Among the districts, during 1971-1991, Dhemaji registered highest population growth i.e. 104.48% followed by North Cachar Hills having 96.39%. Kokrajhar and Karbi Anglong registered 75.94% and 72.79% respectively.² (see Appendix 1)

ECONOMY

Assam's Economic Record				
Items	1950-51	1971-72	1995-96	All India
State Domestic Product Per Capita at 1980-81 Prices (Rs.)	1173	1226	1593	-
All India Per Capita NNP (Rs.) 1980-81 Prices	1127	1492	2573	-
Population (million)	8.03	14.6	24.7	84.6
Density (Per sq. km.)	68	150	317	273
Rice Production (million tonnes)	1.39	1.98	3.3	79.69
Productivity of Rice (kg./ha.)	918	969	1350	1855
Per Capita Rice Production (kg)	173	138	134	
Average size of Operational Holdings (ha)	-	1.47	1.31	1.57
Per Capita Electricity Consumption (kwh.)	0.7	34	96	270
Road Length per 1000 sq. km	15	689	869	877
Persons per Hospital Beds	-	2707	1968	1324
Literacy (%)	18.2	28.1	52.9	52.21

Agriculture

The economy of Assam is agrarian in character. The practice of agriculture is to a large extent, traditionally, and even today primitive type farming, i.e. jhuming covers 1.51% of the State's total area. By occupying more than three-fourth of the total cropped area, food crops dominate cropping pattern. Among the food crops, rice alone covers 68% of the total cropped area. The yield rate of rice has been very low, the per hectare yield brings 985 kgs in 1973-1974, and 169 kgs in 1984-1985. The cash crops cultivated in Assam are mainly tea, jute, sugarcane and tobacco. With an area of 1,95,000 hectares, in 770 tea gardens, tea plantations contribute about 8% of the State's total income (1979). Jute and sugarcane, although occupy 3.26 and 1.49% of the total cropped area (1983-1986) contribute substantially to the agricultural economy of the State.

Minerals

Compared to the other States of the North-East India, Assam is rich in mineral resources such as petroleum, coal and limestone and important mineral resources of the State. Natural gas also occurs in the oil fields of Assam. The petroleum reserves in the State are 140 million tons. Assam produced 4.8 million tons crude oil in 1985. The major oil fields are at Digboi, Naharkatia, Moran and Hoogrijan of Dibrugarh district, and Lakwa, Geleki and Rudrasagar of Sibsagar district. The total coal reserves of Assam are estimated to be 239 million tons. Coal is founded in Ledo, Borgolai, Jaipur etc. the limestone reserves found in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar districts are estimated to be 732 million tons.

Mineral Production in Assam

Item	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Petroleum (crude) (M.Mton)	4.89	4.7	4.73	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.8
Natural Gas (utilized)(SM.Cum)	967	1030	838	893	1024	1232	1316
Coal (M. Mton)	0.982	1.069	1.249	1.292	1.036	0.858	0.702
Limestone (Motto)	0.268	0.243	0.284	0.338	0.416	0.441	--

Industry

In spite of being blessed with a very high potential for development of industries, the pace of industrialisation in Assam is not satisfactory. At present, the major industrial establishment of the State includes oil refineries at Digboi, Noonmati and Bongaigaon, a fertiliser plant at Namrup, a sugar mill at Barua Bamungaon, a silk spun mill and a paper mill at Jagiroad, jute mill at Silghat and a cement factory at Bokajan. Two more large industries – a refinery at Numaligarh at Golaghat district and a gas cracker project will be started during the Eight Plan. The State has nearly 100 medium industries and more than 12000 small scale industries to produce various consumer and durable goods.

Assam is well known for its variety of handloom and handicraft products, such as eri, muga and pat fabrics, bell metal and brass metal products etc. But most of these household industries are almost on the verge of death, mainly due to the dearth of entrepreneurial motivation.

The State earns every year a considerable amount of revenue from its forest products, such as timber, plywood, fuelwood, bamboo, cane etc. The amount of revenue earned from this products totaled about Rs. 21.6 crores in 1985-1986.

Transport and Communication

Among the seven States of North-East India, Assam is relatively developed in transport and communication. The total length of the roads in the State is 32,466 kms (1983). Of these the National Highways covers 1,496 kms and the State Highways have a length of 3,159 kms. The National Highways mostly run east-west in the Brahmaputra Valley and link all the important towns. The Barak Valley is also served by the National Highways. But the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar are poorly developed in respect of road transport.

The State is relatively well served by the railways. The total length of the railway lines is 2,338 kms including the broad gauge section with a length of 269

kms. The recent extension of railways from Balipara to Bhalukpong for a distance of 35 kms is a step to link Assam with Arunachal Pradesh through railway service. There are many other schemes for extension of railway in the State and also for conversion of meter gauge to broad gauge lines.

Many of the towns are linked by airways with Calcutta and the capitals of some neighbouring States. Including Guwahati (Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport) there are eight airports in Assam.³

CONCEPT :

While undertaking the task of research on the Role of ST MLAs in the Assam Legislative Assembly, it is essential to have an idea about the term "Tribe". The Tribes were believed to be the earliest settlers in Indian Peninsula. A Tribe was a homogenous and a self contained unit without any hierarchical discrimination. Each tribe was organised under a Chief. The most efficient person was elected as the Chief by the members of the tribe. Gradually, the Chief started yielding power over his people and assumed certain privileges for him. He was duly recognised military leader whose skill in war and defence was considered essential for his continuance as the Chief of the tribe. The tribes were associated with large Kingdom, Republics and Monarchies.

At present the term "Tribe", according to western writers, generally means a ethnic group, geographically isolated or semi-isolated, identified with one particular territory and having distinct social, economic and cultural traditions and practices.

The main criteria adopted for specifying communities as the Scheduled Tribes include (i) traditional occupation of the definite geographical area, (ii) distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e. language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, art and crafts etc., (iii) primitive

traits depicting occupational pattern, economy etc. and (iv) lack of educational and techno-economic development.

Tracing the historical background of the term "Scheduled" as used in the Constitution, it may be stated that during the debates in the Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh had favoured the use of the term "Adivasi" instead of "Scheduled Tribes". It was however, not accepted. The reason, as explained by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman, Drafting Committee of the Constitution, is "the word Adivasi is really a general term which has no specific legal de jure connotation", whereas, "the word 'Scheduled Tribe' has a fixed meaning, because it enumerates the tribes". In the event of the matter being taken to the Court of Law, there should be precise definition as to who these Adivasis are. It is therefore, decided to enumerate the Adivasis under the term to be called "Scheduled Tribe".

The concept of the tribe has undergone a change from that of a political unit of olden days to a group of people identified with poverty and backwardness. Centuries old exploitation and oppression has resulted in a complete loss of their nerves. It is difficult to reconcile their glorious past with the present state of misery. However, they are gradually awaking up from centuries old slumber. The young generations, particularly the educated class, have now come to realise their potentiality and anxious to face the new challenges.

In the post Independence period, grouping together of all the tribal communities as the "Scheduled Tribes" under the constitution is a significant achievement. It has helped in consolidation of their position as distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural entity. The concessions given to them during the transition period has been increasingly assuming social and political overtones. It has given rise to a serious question which seeks answer from all enlightened people of this country. What is the present social status of Scheduled Tribes and what would be their status after the lapse of special provisions under the Constitution? It is also

a complex issue. The tribals want to maintain their separate identity and would like to be called as "Adivasis" irrespective of their Constitutional status as the Scheduled Tribes.

After the partition of the country in 1947, the tribal population as determined by the Constitutional (Determination of Population) Order 1950, was reduced from 2.47 crores in 1947 to about 1.79 crores. As per the Census Report of 1951, the tribal population was about 1.91 crores, which was 5.39% of the total population of the country. In 1961, the total population rose to 2.99 crores which constituted 6.87% of the total population. In 1971 their strength rose to 3.8 crores, i.e. 6.89 crores which worked out to 7.58% of the total general population of about 68 crores.

As per 1991 census, Scheduled Tribes population was about 6.78 crores in different States/Union Territories in India, excluding Jammu and Kashmir, constituting 8.8% of the total population of about 83.86 crores. The percentage of Scheduled Tribes has marginally increased from 7.85% in 1981 to 8.08% in 1991. The Scheduled Tribes population has increased by 25.67% during the decade 1981-1991. This growth rate is more than the growth of total population of the country which was about 23.79%.

In some of the States and Union Territories, the population was predominantly Scheduled Tribes. For example, in Mizoram, 95.75% of the total population belongs to Scheduled Tribes. The other States and Union Territories with predominantly Scheduled Tribes were : Lakshadweep (93.15%), Nagaland (87.70%), Meghalaya (85.53%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (79.99%) and Arunachal Pradesh (63.66%). Manipur and Tripura also had sustained proportion of population as Scheduled Tribes, the respective proportions being 34.41 and 30.95%. Among the 15 major States, Madhya Pradesh has the largest proportion of Scheduled Tribes population of 23.27% followed by Orissa 22.21%. Gujrat,

Assam and Rajasthan were the other three States in which more than 10% of the population belong to Scheduled Tribes, the respective percentages being 14.92, 12.82 and 12.44.

The British followed the policy of mercantile colonialism and made serious effort to penetrate into the tribal areas with a view to consolidate their position in the country. The tribals could not tolerate an encroachment in their traditional habitats and at times it resulted into armed revolts. The British had to use force very frequently to deal with open manifestations of discontent. But they soon realised their folly and made reconciliatory efforts by declaring the tribal areas as the non-regulatory areas and allowed the administration of these areas according to their traditional system. However, they encouraged the missionaries to enter the tribal areas apparently with a helping hand and a message of love and humanity, but with the ultimate aim of converting the tribals to christianity to intensify their activities. Some of the missionaries did really good work among the tribals in the field of education and health. A new class of exploiters represented by contractors, middlemen, zamindars, revenue and police officials accompanied the missionaries who exploited the tribals and disturbed their traditional social and economic system. Gradually, some of their fertile lands were grabbed by the new immigrants. The tribals who were a happy-go-lucky lot were reduced to a state virtual destitution due to exploitation.⁴

The tribes of Assam are Boro-Kachari, Deuri, Dimasa-Kachari, Karbi, Tiwa, Mising, Rabha, Barmans, Rengma Nagas, Sonowal Kachari, Zeme Nagas, Hajong, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Mech etc.⁵

Formation of Modern Assam :

The formation of modern Assam shows that the political history of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa may be said to have begun with the foundation of the Barman Dynasty which ruled Assam from the fourth to the middle of the seventh

century AD. In the thirteenth century a new kingdom i.e. Kamatapura Kingdom came into existence and the Brahmaputra valley was divided into twelve divisions amongst the Bhuyans. The establishment of Muslim power in Bengal also changed the destiny of Assam. Meanwhile Ahoms entered Assam through the Patkai range. However, three successive rebellions of the Moamorias shook the foundation of the Ahom rule. During the time of Chandrakanta i.e. in the early part of 1800 AD, Burmese entered and interfered the internal affairs of the Ahom Kingdom. Since then it invaded Assam three times. When the Burmese invaded Assam for the third time the British declared war against the Burmese and occupied the entire Brahmaputra valley including Sadiya Frontier Tract. On 24th February 1826 the Treaty of Yandaboo was concluded and by this treaty the British acquired the control of the East India Company and was attached to Bengal as Commissioner's Province. David Scott was appointed as the first Commissioner of Assam. From 1826 to 1874 Assam was Commissioner's Division under the Bengal Government.

Sir John Lawrence realised that Assam occupied a geo-politically important position and it possessed enormous unexplored potentialities. Therefore, it might be constituted into a Chief Commissioner's Province. Though Sir John Campbell, Lt. Governor of Bengal did not agree with the proposal of the Secretary of State for India he continued to pursue the matter.⁶

Assam was declared as a Scheduled district under the Scheduled Act 1874. Under a proclamation of 6th February, 1874, the Governor General constituted the territories of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Naga Hills, the Garo Hills and Cachar into a Chief Commissionership. Shillong, the present capital of Meghalaya State, was considered as its headquarter on the recommendation of Col. R.H. Keating, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam. On 12th September 1874, Sylhet, a Bengali

speaking area and an integral part of Bengal was attached to Assam. The Chief Commissioner as entrusted with supreme administrative and legislative powers. He worked as a delegate of the Governor General in Council and was appointed by the Governor General at his discretion. Again on 16th October 1905 Assam was dragged with East Bengal and Assam was placed under the control of Lt. Governor. Assam was represented in the Legislative Council by two members out of 15 members. The representatives of Assam were sent on the recommendation of the local bodies, subject to the approval of the Lt. Governor.

In 1906 at the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji stressed on the demand for Self-Government or Swaraj and after nearly four years of prolonged discussion, Morley presented the Indian Council's Bill in the House of Lords on 17th February 1909 and Indian Council's Act came into being on 1st January 1910 which provided for increase of the strength of the Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam from 15 to 40. The number of representatives from Assam was increased from 2 to 5. Out of 5 members one was elected by the Tea Industry and one from Muslim community from Surma Valley.

In April 1912 Assam was reconstituted into the Chief Commissioner's Province and for the first time a 24 members Legislative Council was provided for the province of Assam. Out of 24 members the Chief Commissioner nominated 13 members and remaining 11 members were elected from different communities of Brahmaputra and Surma Valley. The Muslim community was represented by two members, one from each valley. Similarly the landlords were represented by two members, one from Brahmaputra Valley and the other from the Surma Valley. The Local Bodies had the power of electing remaining seven members.

While implementing the reform incorporated in the Government of India Act 1919 the Chief Commissioner of Assam Sir Beatson Bell was appointed as

the Acting Governor of Assam and he took oath on 3rd January 1921. Two Ministers, Rai Bahadur, a Hindu from Brahmaputra Valley and Abdul Hamid, a Muslim from Surma Valley were appointed Ministers.

In 1937 Provisional Autonomy was introduced in Assam under the Government of India Act 1935. The first general election held in 1937 produced unexpected result causing great inconvenience to the Governor in the process of Ministry making. The Congress secured only 33 seats and the Muslim Party was divided into three factions – The United Muslim Party, The Assam Muslim League and The Assam Muslim Party. Since no party was in a position to form the ministry, Micheal Keane, Governor of Assam, tried to unite the Muslim Party under the leadership of Md. Saadulla. Keane was succeeded by Robert Reid and he also adopted the technique of his predecessor and requested Md. Saadulla to proceed on the line. Saadulla met the Governor on 15th March 1937 and accepted the request. All the three factions of the Muslim party agreed to form a coalition under the leadership of Md. Saadulla. The United Peoples Party headed by Rohini Kumar Chowdhury also extended its support to the coalition. Saadulla successfully secured the support of the European Group and the tribal members. Thus the first Saadulla Ministry represented both Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys and also the hill areas of Assam. But the Saadulla Ministry faced serious crisis on the question of dropping two of his Ministers leading to his resignation on 13th September, 1938. The Governor asked Gopinath Bordoloi, the Opposition Leader to form the Ministry. When Bordoloi started formation of the ministry the Opposition groups viz. The Constitutional Party of Akhay Kumar Das, the United Muslim Party of Ali Hyder Khan, the Muslim League Party, The United Peoples' Party, The Progressive Nationalist Party passed a resolution that the majority of the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly was willing to work under the leadership of Sir. Md. Saadulla as Chief Minister. It was resolved to request His Excellency to call upon Sir. Md. Saadulla to form the Ministry.

On 29th September 1939 the Second World War broke out. Britain declared war against Germany. Therefore the Congress Working Committee decided to withdraw the Congress Ministry from the province. The Governor also wanted Md. Saadulla to form the Ministry. Under this circumstances Bordoloi Ministry resigned after ruling the province for 421 days. On 17th November 1939 Md. Saadulla formed the Ministry. The third Saadulla ministry consisted of ten members – five Muslims, four Hindus and one Christian. Both the valleys of Assam were equally represented in the Ministry.

Another important feature in the politics of the Province of Assam under the Government of India Act was the establishment of Second Chamber or the creation of Bicameral Legislature. The idea of Second Chamber was not favoured by the people of Assam. On 17th September 1932 a resolution was moved in the House for the establishment of a Second Chamber so that the experience and expertness of different personalities could be utilised. This resolution was supported by E.S. Boffey, a member of Tea Plantation Community and Nagendra Nath Choudhury, a Landlord. The resolution was opposed by several members like Sarbeswar Baruah, Keramat Ali, R.K. Choudhury and J.J.M. Nichols Roy.

In April 1937 a Joint Select Committee of British Parliament was appointed to consider the future Government of India. While discussing the establishment of the Second Chamber in the Provinces of India at the House Commons, Lt. Colonel Sir Walter Smiles, an ex-member of the Assam Legislative Council, pointed out that the proposal for establishment of Bicameral Legislature in Assam was opposed on ground of non-availability of suitable personnel. The proposal was supported by another member of the House of Commons viz. Colonel Wedgwood, Sir William Wayland, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India supported the proposal. Ultimately Assam had a Bicameral Legislature for a period of ten years from 1937 to 1947.⁷

Now let me analyse the politics of Assam in independent India (see Appendix 2). It may be discussed under the following head :

Formation of Government :

As regards, the formation of Government of Assam, it is remarkable to note that the Congress Party remained as a ruling party till 1996 with two breaks (1977 for a short time and 1985 for about a five year period) (see Appendix 3A to 3E). In 1952 general election to Assembly the Congress secured 72 seats out of 108 seats and formed the Government under the leadership of Bishnuram Medhi. His cabinet members were Sidhinath Sarma, Motiram Bora, Omeo Kumar Das, Mohendra Mohan Choudhury, Baidyanath Mukherjee, Rupnath Brahma, Ramnath Das, Abdul M. Mazumdar and J.J.M. Nicholas Roy.⁸

In 1958 general election the Congress secured 67 seats out of 102 contested seats. Surprisingly enough, a very strong Congress candidate Bimala Prasad Chaliha who would have been the candidate for leadership was defeated. In the election Bishnuram Medhi defeated Debeswar Sarma by 39 to 31 votes and he became the leader under whom again Government was formed. He included his rival Dimbeswar Sarma in his cabinet. But Medhi was appointed Governor of Madras. It provided the opportunity to Bimala Prasad Chaliha to contest election for the leadership of the party along with Sidhinath Sarma. Chaliha defeated Sarma and assumed the office of Chief Minister on 26th December 1957. Chaliha Government faced three major problems relating to Oil Refinery, demand for the formation of separate States for the Tribals and the language issue. East India Tribal Union was formed to move for separate State for the tribal. To liquidate this effort Chaliha included William A. Sangma from the Khasi Hills in his cabinet. Besides, two Mizos were appointed as Deputy Minister and Parliamentary Secretary. As regards the language issue, he tried to solve the problem by declaring on 3rd March 1960 Assamese as the State language. While

satisfying the Assamese speaking people the declaration caused resignation of Tribal Ministers from the Cabinet. Further the resignation of Debeswar Sarma from the Cabinet brought split in the party.⁹

In the third general election held in 8th March 1962 Congress secured majority seats in the Assembly and Bimala Prasad Chaliha again became the leader of the party. On March 1962 he formed the Ministry consisting of ten cabinet Ministers; two Muslims, two Scheduled Tribes, one Scheduled Caste and rest general castes. This time also there was a split in the party bringing two groups due to resignation of Debakanta Barooah from the cabinet.¹⁰

The Fourth general election was held in 1967 and Congress Party secured majority seats. This time Bimala Prasad Chaliha defeated Devakanta Barooah in the leadership election held on 7th March 1967. On 16th March 1967, Chaliha Ministry sworn in and it followed the structural pattern of his previous Ministry. But Chaliha's health did not permit him to continue for a long time. In November 1970 Assam Legislative Party met under the Chairmanship of Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati and it selected Mahendra Mohan Choudhury to form the Ministry with 12 cabinet members. He made the attempt to have representatives from all the districts, communities and the regions. One notable feature of the Ministry was that Choudhury included one Lady, Padma Kumari Gohain in his Cabinet. This time a group headed by Sarat Chandra Sinha opposed the leadership of the Chief Minister and ultimately Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, requested Choudhury to step down and Choudhury did it. In the Legislative Party meeting he himself proposed the name of Sarat Chandra Sinha as the leader and on 7th February 1972 he formed the Ministry with two Cabinet members.

On 17th March 1972 Fifth general election was held in which again the Congress Party won the highest number of seats in the Assembly. It enabled Sarat

Chandra Sinha to form the Ministry on 21st March 1972 with 13 members of which 9 were Cabinet Ministers.¹¹

In the Sixth general election to the Assam Assembly no party secured absolute majority. Congress occupied second position and Janata became the biggest party. Since no party secured absolute majority, Golap Borbora formed the Government with Congress (R), Plain Tribal Council and Independent candidates. But this Ministry could not survive for a long time and Jogendra Hazarika, the former Speaker, formed the Ministry with Congress, C.P.I., Janata (S) and Independents. On 12th Decemeber 1979 his ministry was dissolved with the emergence of Presidential Rule in the State. Smt. Anowara Taimur, Congress (I) was asked to form the Ministry so that there would not be any constitutional crisis. The movement launched by All Assam Students' Union against foreigners in Assam affected very badly the politics of Assam causing imposition of Presidents Rule three times during this period (see Appendix 4). Anowara Ministry resigned on 29th June 1981. On 13th January 1982 again Congress formed the Government under the new leader Keshab Chandra Gogoi and on March 18th, 1982 with the declaration of emergency in Assam and the Ministry was also dissolved.¹²

The Seventh general election was held in 1983 in the midst of heavy political tensions and protests from almost all the corners and at a heavy cost of man and material. In this election also Congress could form the Government under the Chief Ministership of Hiteswar Saikia on 27th February 1983. He stabilised the Government till the next general election.¹³

The most notable feature of the politics of Assam was the Eighth general election which was held immediately after the historic Assam Accord signed on 15th August 1985. The newly constituted regional political party viz. Asom Gana Parishad contested election along with other parties in Assam. Surprisingly enough, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the ex-President of AASU could form the

Government in Assam. Before this election, Plains Tribal Council contested general election in 1972 but it could not form Government. For the first time a regional party came to power in 1985. Besides, it inculcated young blood to the politics of the State.¹⁴

In June 1991, Ninth general election was held in which Congress secured majority of seats and formed the Government under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia, ex-Governor of Mizoram.¹⁵ (see Appendix 5)

In 1996 general election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Asom Gana Parishad Party formed the Government under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (see Appendix 6). Just a few days before the election Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister of Assam, expired.¹⁶

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