

## II PROFILES OF BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

1. **Historical Background** : Before analysing the theme of our study <sup>it may</sup> be useful to present briefly the history of modern Assam and its place in the North Eastern Region. The pre-historic and proto-historic period of Assam is shrouded in mystery and very little is known about it (Rao & Hazarika, 1983; P. 8). In the most ancient times, Assam was known as Pragjyotisha and as Kamrupa in the early medieval times. Modern Assam was a part of the ancient land, Pragjyotisha (Ibid.). Let us have a quick review of the pre-colonial situation, colonial and post-colonial phases. It is to be mentioned here that the analysis of pre-colonial and colonial situation of Assam would help us to provide a clear picture of post-colonial Assam,

1.1. **Pre-colonial situation** : Pre-colonial Assam is to be explained by looking into its topography and political boundary, social mosaic as well as mode of production. In this connection, more emphasis is to be given on the period of Ahom rule which lasted for about 600 years (1228-1826).

(i) **Topography and Political Boundary** : Assam has been the only state of Indian Union which has witnessed most frequent changes in territorial boundaries since Indian Independence. Neither did it have any clear sense of political and social boundaries before. Even after the advent of the Ahoms (a Tai-Shan tribe of the Patkai Hills) in 1228 A.D. Assam comprised a few scattered kingdoms such as the Ahom kingdoms, the Chutia-Kachari kingdom, the Koch-Kachari kingdom, the Hill-Tribal kingdom etc. comprising Brahmaputra Valley and Surma Valley and the frontier hill areas designated differently at different times. It is doubtful whether there was any dominant social identity in this composite Assam. If there was any that was probably destroyed during the Burmese Rule in Assam (between 1819-1824). A

somewhat clear sense of territorial boundary developed only after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 A.D. through which the British wrested Assam from the Burmese Control.

As stated earlier, originally the Valley was known as Pragjyotishpur and subsequently Kamrupa. The area of Pragjyotishpur (a part of modern Assam) was much extended towards the west. Some scholars observed that the kingdom of Pragjyotisha included a greater part of modern Assam, the Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Rangpur, Bogra, Mymansingh, Decca, Tipperah, a part of Patna and probably a part of Eastern Nepal (Ibid, P. 8). The first authentic information regarding ancient Kamrupa was furnished by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang who visited Kamrupa in 642-43 A.D. At that time Kamrupa was ruled by a Hindu king, Bhaskar Varman. Hiuen – Tsang observed that the country of Kamrupa was about 1,700 miles in circuit. Kamrupa, as observed by Hiuen-Tsang, might have included portions of Bihar, Northern and Eastern Bengal and nearly the whole of modern Assam. Even some scholars observed that ancient Kamrupa included the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley, Coochbehar and Bhutan. After the death of Bhaskar Barman, Avanti-Varman (“Salastambha”) ascended the throne of Kamrupa. It is said that during his reign, the Nalanda region, Punderavardhan (North Bengal), Sylhet and some parts of south-east Bengal were included in the kingdom of Kamrupa. Salastambha dynasty ruled Kamrupa from the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century to the latter part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. After the Salastambhas, the Pala Dynasty ruled for about 150 years. After the fall of the Pala dynasty in the 12 Century the ancient Kamrupa continued to exist with a diminished territory. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, a new kingdom, designated as Kamatapura Kingdom, came into existence. This kingdom was confined only to the Western part of Kamrupa and North Bengal. In the eastern part, the Baro-Bhuyans, the

Chutias, the Ahoms, the Kacharies etc. emerged as independent kingdoms. Thus it can safely be said that during the pre-colonial period (till the beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> Century) no clear political and social boundary existed barring a few scattered kingdoms. The topography of ancient Assam during the same period was marked by a fluctuating condition. The thirteenth century was a turning point in the history of this ancient land (Taher, 1989).

It is also to be noted here that although Sukapha entered North-East India in about 1220 he did not establish his hegemony until 1229 (Ibid). Even during the Ahom rule this ancient land comprised a few scattered kingdoms as mentioned earlier. A clear sense of territorial boundary developed only after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 A.D. through which the British wrested Assam from the Burmese control. It is important to note here that the pre-colonial Ahom-Assam included only the undivided districts of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup and parts of Karbianglong district (M. Hussain : 1993, P. 26). It is apparent from the foregoing discussion that although no distinct political boundary had emerged during the pre-colonial period the major part of Brahmaputra Valley was included in pre-colonial Assam.

- (ii) **Social Mosaic** : Assam has been the meeting place of different races, languages, culture and religions since pre-historic period. It is said that at the time of immigration of the Aryans into India, various groups of people belonging to Mongoloid race entered Assam from the directions of China, Tibet and Burma (Ibid : 1993, P. 26). In the subsequent years, we can also witness that the Aryans entered into Assam through Bengal. It is also to be noted here that Assam has been the meeting place of two great world civilisations – Indian and Chinese. Thus, interaction, assimilation and integration of different culture and civilisations produced a distinctive synthesis of Assam's culture, economy, polity and society (Ibid). It is also worth mentioning that although Assam became successful in maintaining isolation from India yet we cannot

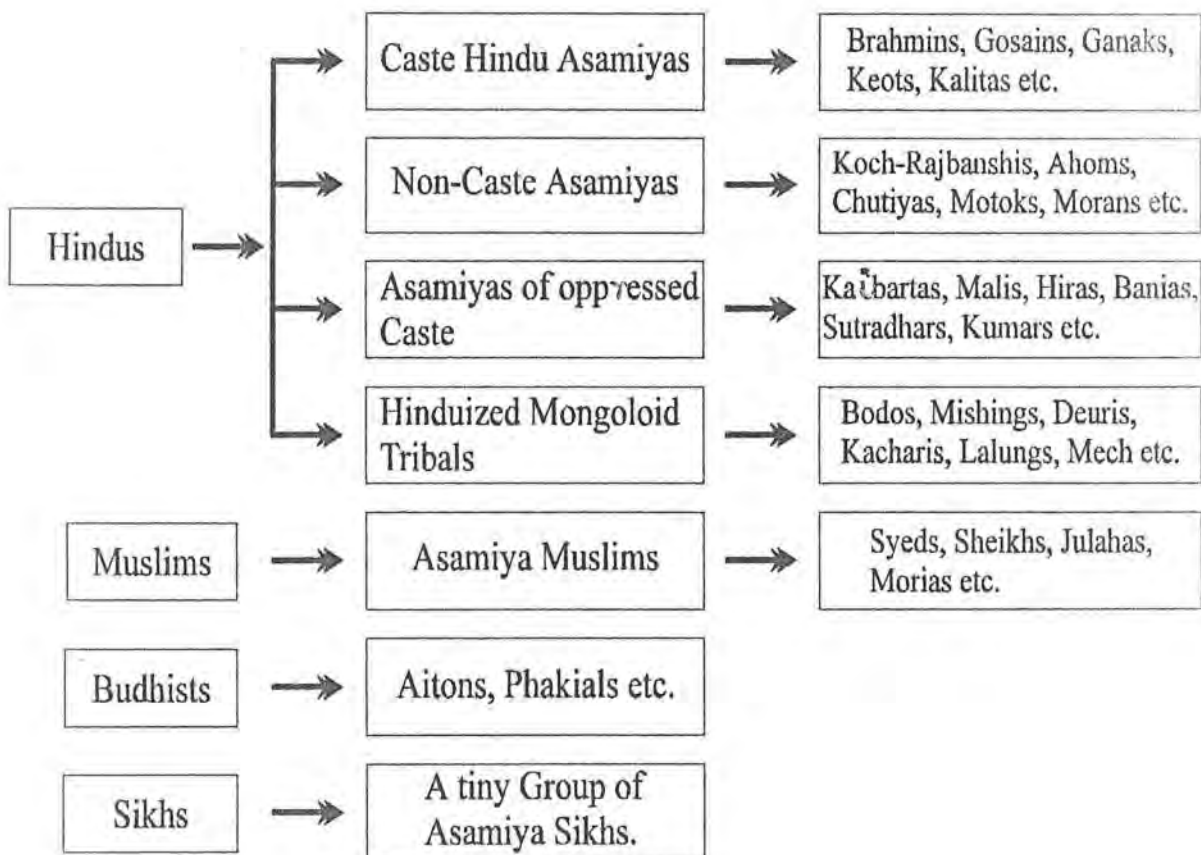
ignore its connections with India. About the relations of Assam with India Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1970; P. 16) observed “The Kirata or Mongoloid people were certainly very well-known to the Vedic Aryans and we find mention of them in Yajur and Atharva Vedas”. Even the epic Mahabharata mentions about Kamrupa’s (Assam’s) Indo-Mongoloid powerful king Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta along with his “Kirata” or “Chino” or Chinese soldiers fought a great battle of Kurukshetra as an ally of the Kouravas although he was defeated and slain by the Pandavas. After the Mahabharata connection, in history, we can also witness that Kamrupa’s (Assam’s) king Bhaskar Varman had to maintain a very intimate relationship with Indian Harsha Vardhan. Even Bhaskar Barman had to maintain a cordial relationship with China and during his reign Hieun Tsang visited Kamrupa (Assam) who had left very careful observations about the Mongoloid features of the people of the land (Kamrupa).

It is to be noted here that migration of various groups and races to Kamrupa and Assam did not take place at one time. Various groups and races migrated to Kamrupa (Assam) gradually from time to time and from different directions. A very significant group known as the Ahoms (A tai-shan tribe from Burma) migrated into Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century as mentioned earlier who not only consolidated its position but also ruled the land for about 600 years (1228 – 1826), It is to be noted here that even before the advent of the Ahoms, many Muslims entered Assam and settled down permanently (Ibid). The process of migration also continued from outside Assam even during the reign of the Ahom rulers. Now we can analyse the social mosaic of pre-colonial Assam highlighting the various social groups on which the society was based on.

Hussain (1993; P. 28) has given a clear picture about the social groups in pre-colonial Assam which is shown in the following chart.

## 2.1 Social Groups in Pre-Colonial Assam

Language : Asamiya



From the above it is clear that various groups lived in pre-Colonial Assam since ancient times. The various groups of people belonging to different race, religion and culture migrated into Assam since ancient times from different areas (that is, China, India, Burma, Tibbet) which made the population of Assam diverse with a multiplicity of race, religion and culture. Although the major portions of the population racially belonged to the non-Aryan Mongoloid groups yet we can witness the presence of a thin portion of population which composed of various castes and Muslims. This has been the notable characteristics of Assam's demography and society since ancient

times (M. Hussain, 1993). It is to be noted here that all the Mongoloid groups who migrated into Assam at different period, barring the Ahoms, belonged to the Tibeto-Burman stock. The Ahoms who migrated into Assam, belonged to the Sino-Tai linguistic family.

Hinduism played a very important role among the people living in the Brahmaputra valley though the major portion of the population belonged to the Mongoloid stock. Of course, the caste system in Assam was less rigid as compared to the other parts of India, but it is also true that the Brahmins and the other high castes played a significant role in society. M. Hussain (1993 : p. 28) observes.

During the later stages of the Ahom rule, the Brahmin priests could successfully reduce the importance of the traditional Ahom priest, the Deodhai-Bailungs. The Grahapipras/Daivajna/Ganaks who belonged to the astrologer caste and the literate castes like the Kaiths/Kayasthas, in addition to the Ahom rulers played a decisive role both in polity and society of pre-colonial Assam.

As a result of the pan-Indian Bhakti movement Vaisnavite movement, which was launched by the Mahapurusha Sankardeva, attained popularity in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century of Assam. Mahapurusha Sankardeva (1449-1568) took the responsibility to re-orient Assam's society and succeeded in popularising Vaisnavism among the different sections of people who spoke different languages and dialects because of diverse shades of cultural life. The 'Satras' (monasteries) of Vaisnavism which were popular and powerful institutions led to a conflict between the clerics of Shaktism/Shakti cult (prevailed before the emergence of Vaishnavism) and the emerging Vaishnavism. It is also to be mentioned here that although both the sects got equal treatment from the Ahom kings in the initial years, yet in the subsequent years Shaktism was favoured in comparison to Vaishnavism. It would be relevant to point out that the conflict between the two sects (Shakticism and Vaishnavism) during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century precipitated the rebellion of the Moamoria Vaishnabs (for details of the rebellion see Gait : Reprint ed. 1983). This rebellion ultimately paved the downfall of Ahom rule. Of course, it must be admitted that Vaisnavite movement not only enriched the Asamiya language, literature along with dance and drama but also helped in reducing the gap of Assam's isolation from India. It also helped in

simplifying the caste problem of Asamiya society and in detribalising the society in Assam. The comparative laxity of class distinction in Assam's social system was primarily due to the Vaishnava reformation along with inter-mixture of peoples, during the Ahom rule (P.C. Choudhury : 1966 : 318). It may be mentioned that the propagator of Vaishnavite movement in Assam, Saint Sankardeva, spent a complete chapter "Bharatvarsha Prasansa" (In praise of India) in his Sanskrit anthology entitled *Bhakti-Ratnakara* by which he brought Assam closer to India. He also kept confidence more in the people of the so-called "low castes" while propagating his religion. In his rendering of the 12<sup>th</sup> Book, the *Bhagavata* he deviated from the original text and said that in the *Kali* age, "Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas – these three castes will not listen (to matters concerning) *Haribhakti*. Great *Hari* will be adored by the Sudras, Kaivartas and the outcastes and thereby realize God without effort. Hence in the *Kali* age it will be the Sudras and Kaivartas who will take the lead." (Cited from article published in the Assam Tribune : November 9, 1998 – Sibnath Barman).

Along with the two sects of Hinduism, we can witness a significant number of followers of Islam in the pre-colonial Assam (Bhuyan : 1985, Kar : 1990 etc.). It is to be noted here that like the Saint Sankardeva (propagator of Vaisnavite Movement in Assam), Syed Shah Milan (popularly known as Ajan Fakir) who was a great Sufi reformer in Assam attracted a large number of non-Muslims together with the followers of Islam under his fold. Like Sankardeva this saint also made notable contribution to Asamiya culture enriching Assamese language and literature through his *Jikirs* and *Jaris* which had secular and devotional appeal.

Together with Hinduism and Islam, there was a small section of people in Assam who followed Sikhism and Buddhism. Although they were a small section of the society yet their presence in Assam's demographic composition and their role in the development of the culture of Assam cannot be overlooked. From the above it is apparent that the pre-colonial Assam was based on different religions although the above mentioned social groups operated through mutual interdependence under the Ahom state.

Now we are turning our attention to the class structure of Assam's pre-colonial society. Though scholars like S. Chattopadhyaya; (1990 : 196-218) and P.C. Choudhury; (1966 : 305 –319) elaborately analysed the social life of pre-colonial Assam they did not give us clear picture of the class-structure of pre-colonial Assam in the stricter sense of the term. Regarding the class-structure of pre-colonial Ahom Assam. Guha; (1991 : 51) observed :

The top secular aristocracy was composed of the seven leading Ahom clans (Satgharia Ahom) who monopolised all important offices. The spiritual aristocracy was constituted of temple priests, goswamis and mahantas of approved satras (abbots of Vaishnava monasteries) and such Brahmans as were favoured with land grants. Besides, there were the vassal rajahs and border chieftains as well as other apaikan, chamua of considerable means.

Hussain; (1993 : 30-32) has given somewhat clear picture about the ruling class of pre-colonial Ahom society. According to him ruling class of pre-colonial Assam during Ahom rule was mainly composed of three hierarchically distinct aristocracies (1) higher aristocracy-Ahom kings, Royal Members, Ministers and the high officials of Ahom state; (2) middle aristocracy – Sivaite Brahmin Priest, Vaishnavite Brahmin, Kayastha, Kalita priests, Ganaks, Landed Vassals etc; (3) lower aristocracy – officials of lower rank in Ahom state, Chamua Paiks and Merchants etc.

Thus it can safely be said that the ruling class of Ahom society was numerically small but it controlled and dominated almost all the aspects of society. The toiling classes or the exploited classes in pre-colonial Assam were the Paiks – foot soldiers-cum-peasants, fishermen, artisans etc. At the bottom of the social ladder were bondmen, bahatia (Serf) and the bandi-beti (male and female slave) which constituted 5% to 9% of total population (Guha; 1991 : 56).

From the above analysis it is clear that various social groups, races and tribes made the social mosaic with all its beauty and splendour in the pre-colonial Assam.

(iii) **Mode of Production :**

In connection with the mode of production during the pre-colonial society in Assam it is necessary to highlight the "Paik System" along with the peculiar land system in Ahom Assam. During the Ahom rule in Assam, the major portion of the population belonged to the "Paik" class. The whole male population during the Ahom rule, between the ages of 15 and 50 (except the noblemen, priests and persons of high caste and their slaves and servants) were liable to render service to the state. They were known as "Paiks" or foot-soldiers-cum-peasants. The paiks would fight for the protection and expansion of the Ahom territory during war. In this connection it is important to note here that the Ahom state did not have a regular salaried army. The Paiks would perform the duties of militiamen during the war. Of course, the Paiks would not get salary while performing the duties of militia-men or state servants. For rendering the service to the state, a Paik got 2 puras or nearly 3 acres of the best paddy land free of charge from the state. At the time of peace, the Paiks were employed on public works such as road and bridge building, embankment building, temple building etc. Even Paiks were used as peasants, fishermen, goldsmiths etc (for details see Gait: 1992 : 227 – 229; Hussain : 1993 : 32-33). The Paiks were organised into (Gots) units. A Got or Unit was composed of 4 Paiks, although subsequently, the number was reduced to 3; one member of each Got served the state for 4 months on rotation. When a Paik was on a militia service, the remaining two of his unit were obliged to cultivate the land of the absentee Paik who was serving the state (Hussain; 1993 : P. 33). But, this rule of rotation did not work in an emergency. It is interesting to note here that the allotment of land was mainly depended on the real owner of the land i.e. the state. Naturally equal distribution of land was alien during the pre-colonial Ahom Assam. Land was in-equally distributed between the ruling classes and the toiling classes barring the slaves who had not possessed land at all.

The Paiks were arranged by 'khels', which were provided with a regular gradation of officers; 20 Paiks were commanded by a Bora, 100 by a Saikia, 1000 by a Hazarika, 3000 by a Rajkhowa and 6000 by a Phukan (Gait; 1992 : 223). In this connection it should be noted here that instead of getting salary the ministers and

officers of Ahom State (superior officers recruited from blue-blooded families) used to acquire land for individual private estate (khat) along with the services of the Paiks through the state apparatus. Land was also allotted for religious institutions and priestly classes. This type of land was totally revenue-free land. Because of this revenue-free land the priestly classes were largely benefited which ultimately led to Shaktism and Vaishnavite movement in Assam. Even the non-cleric learned men of high caste origin, benefited immensely from the land allotted to them by the state; the land, that the members of the ruling classes received from the state developed into large private feudal estates (Hussain; 1993 : 33). Like the exploitative characteristics of other feudalistic societies the feudal estates of Ahom Assam also exploited the toiling classes of the society as stated earlier. It is also to be noted here that the state also played a role as coercive instrument.

During the Ahom rule in Assam the mode of production was not at all a developed one. Hence the ruling classes depended upon the labour of the various clans and indigenous tribes for their survival and they subjugated them from the very beginning of their settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. In course of time, when the territory of the Ahoms was increasing day by day, the prevailing process of exploitation failed to give the protection to the interests of the ruling classes. Thus, for their own survival, it was essential on the part of the ruling classes to organise the people of the Brahmaputra Valley even splitting the various tribes. Finding no other alternative for earning surplus exploitation the ruling classes had to introduce the "Paik" and "Khel" system (Prasanna Pujari; 1989).

Though the Paik system neither falls under the classical slavery pattern nor under the classical system of feudalism yet it cannot be denied that this Paik and Khel system was much more developed than the classical slavery system. Hussain (1993 : 34) called this system as a developed stage of classical slavery in an underdeveloped feudal social structure. Hiren Gohain called this system "Bureaucratic Feudal" and Guha (1991) called this system feudalism based on tribalism. We cannot deny the tribal basis of the feudalistic society of the Ahom state. The rulers of the Ahom state tried its level best to breakup the tribal bondage of the Ahom state. At the same time,

we can also witness underdeveloped agricultural system. Both the tribal based social bondage and the underdeveloped agricultural system were the main challenge to the excess exploitation for which the ruling classes had to introduce a section of bureaucrats (Pujari; 1989 : 23). Thus, a section of officers was recruited in the name of Buragohain, Bargohain, Barpatra Gohain, Barbarua, Barphukan during the reign of Ahom rulers who were known as the highest advisors of the kings. In this connection it is also to be noted that the Paik and Khel system together with the bureaucratic officers were introduced for the benefit of the ruling classes. At the same time it is also to be mentioned here that the lower classes or toiling classes of the Ahom society also benefited because of this system. In place of jhuming cultivation which was an underdeveloped agricultural system, developed agricultural system was introduced for which the toiling classes were benefited. That was the main reason for the survival of Ahom rulers for a long period of about 600 years. Scholar like Guha; (1991 : 42) also observed that the Ahoms were expert on Sali (wet rice) cultivation. It might be called a semi-tribal and semi-feudal as well as the bureaucratic feudal system, but at the same time we should note one thing that the rate of exploitation and oppression was increasing in due course of time for which the toiling classes were compelled to organise themselves against the ruling classes and this was exposed through the Moamoria rebellion. Hussain; (1993 : 35) observed in the following way :

... the oppression of the Paiks and slaves and their attempt to liberate themselves from the institutional state oppression under a sectarian leadership and the conflict between the Vaishnavite clerics and the Ahom ruling classes were the two major internal contradictions which together with two other external contradictions – the Burmese and the British interventions led to the collapse of the 600 years old Ahom State.

It is worth mentioning here that Ahom Assam failed to develop the middle class. Even the entrepreneur class did not emerge during the Ahom rule. Though Asamiya as a nation or nationality did not emerge in the pre-colonial Assam, nevertheless Asamiya as a language did improve a lot.

## 1.2 Colonial Phase :

- (i) **Colonization** – we have already stated briefly the contradictions of the semi-tribal and semi-feudal Ahom society, which the ruling classes of Ahom Assam failed to manage and for which the neighbouring Burmese ruler took the opportunity in sending military into Assam. Although the Vaishnavite clerics led the Moamaria rebellion, but in course of time when the different tribes and clans started to rebel against the Ahom kings, then the rebellion transformed into a civil war. During this chronic prolonged civil war the barbaric attack of Burmese ruler again transformed the society of the Brahmaputra Valley into a state of total anarchy. “The Burmese unleashed a reign of terror – plunder, devastation, murder and desecration became the order of the day. The dreadful atrocities perpetrated on the helpless Assamese could better be imagined than described” (Barpujari; 1977 : 4). At this anarchical situation, the British rulers, who had by that time established themselves in other parts of Indian sub-continent, took the opportunities to colonize Assam entering into it in the name of protecting the Asamiyas from the hands of Mana’s attack. Hussain (1993 : 37) observed :

The British colonization in 1826 was so tacit that many Asamiyas could not even understand that they were being made dependent subjects of a British colony after the retreat of the Burmese from the Brahmaputra Valley. The realization of the colonial subjugation dawned only much later on the Asamiyas. by the time they realized their subjugated position, the Asamiyas were in no position to offer any significant resistance against the British colonialism.

Thus, the British colonized Assam after the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 and saved the Asamiyas from the brutalities of the invading Burmese soldiers when the Burmese were forced to surrender their claim over Assam. It is to be noted here that the colonization not only ended the isolation of Assam but also linked it with the colonial capitalist world economy as it became a part of British India (Ibid; 37). This is a significant event for Assam and the Asamiyas as like other parts of India

a new kind of social system based on capitalist mode of production along with feudal mode of production became prominent for the interest of the colonial British rulers.

From 1826 to 1874, Assam was administered by the colonial rulers, Assam was formed into a province by the British Raj in 1874. Besides five Assamese-speaking districts of the Brahmaputra Valley (Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur), the entire hill-areas of the North-East (Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and Naga Hills) were amalgamated with the new province. In order to make the province economically viable Goalpara district of the Brahmaputra Valley where the Bengali and the Assamese cultures overlapped and the two Bengali-speaking districts of the Surma Valley – Sylhet (region of East Bengal, now in Bangladesh) and Cachar were also included. As a result of this merger, Bengali-speaking population became majority in Assam (G. Biswas: 1992). In this connection. Guha; (1988 : 28) observed:

The province that emerged was an amalgam of four disparate elements : (i) the preliterate hill districts, speaking diverse tongues, (ii) the five Assamese-speaking districts of the Brahmaputra Valley together known as Assam proper, (iii) Goalpara of the same Valley where the Bengali and the Assamese cultures overlapped, and (iv) the two-Bengali speaking districts of the Surma Valley – Sylhet and Cachar.

## (ii) Economic Transformation :

It is important to note here that an economic transformation was made during British rule as the feudal economy was replaced by a more or less capitalist economy. Though the main objective of British rule in Assam was to exploit the resource of Assam and for the resource of Assam together with providing market for the sake of British manufactured products it cannot be denied that the foundation of modern economy in Assam was laid during the British period (Choudhury; 1989 : 30), A new agrarian system was adopted, nevertheless a few aspects of Ahom feudal mode of production were retained. It is worth mentioning here that this modern economy was based on Capitalist principles, thanks to the popularity of the plantation. Along with the measures taken for the development of tea plantation in Assam, the British colonial rulers were also very much interested in the exploration of oil and coal. Thus the rich

mineral deposits particularly oil and coal and the promising land wealth for tea industry caught the attention of the British for economic exploitation (Ibid : 30). Along with the introduction of modern industrial sector modern means of transport and communication were also introduced for the maximum possible economic drain to the home country of the British. In this way, the colonial rulers, from the beginning of its rule in Assam, took the initiative for the development of modern industrial sector (tea industries, petroleum industry, coal mining, plywood industries etc.) along with the building-up of modern transport and communication system with the gradual development of river, road, railway, postal and telegraph services. Agriculture which engaged about three-fourths of the people of Assam was more or less unaffected by the activities of the modern sector (Alam : 1987:2 and Dhar:1998:99). Thus Assam developed a dual economy comprising of modern sector together with a huge traditional subsistence sector. Guha (1988 : 26) has rightly pointed out:

Links between the plantation economy and the surrounding peasant economy – both labour short – remained tenuous and minimal. Except land, practically all other inputs of production for the expanding modern sector were brought from outside the province; capital and enterprise from the metropolis itself and labour from other Indian provinces. A dual economy, more precisely a multi-sectoral, plural economy, began functioning at different levels. In such an unenviable and complex situation – a situation where tribalism and elements of feudalism persistently co-existed alongside new-born capitalist relationships ....

Thus, it is clear that with the advent of the British rule the capitalist mode of production did penetrate into the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam where semi-tribal and semi-feudal mode of production was operating. So it is natural that both the feudal and capitalist mode of production had to operate, although the British colonial rulers, from the very beginning of its rule took various steps in transforming the economy of Assam particularly in regard to tea-plantations, oil and coal-mining along with the development of transport and communication system. We would like to discuss these aspects in a nutshell..

### Tea Plantations :

The most important gift that Assam received from the British colonial rule was the tea-plantation. Robert Bruce is credited with the discovery of tea plants in Assam as early as 1823 (Barpujari; 1980 : 242). Tea plantation was popularized by the colonial ruler. But the achievement of the local tribes in exploring indigenous tea-plants in Assam cannot be under-estimated. Almost all the scholars have neglected the role of the local tribes in exploring the tea-plants in Assam. But Bhattacharya (1998 : 157) has shown that it was Singpho Chief Bicha Guam who had informed explorer Robert Bruce about the existence of indigenous tea plants in north Assam. In 1833, the first tea garden was established by the colonial government in Assam. Very soon a large amount of British capital backed by their own colonial state apparatus was invested in the tea industry of Assam.

Within a very short period Assam was recognised as the most important tea producing part of the world. Because of the exploration of tea-plantation massive migration of labour force from outside the province started in Assam. Even the Bankers and Traders from other Indian provinces flocked to Assam and, in the absence of local business acumen, they provided the economy with the necessary, yet exploitative services of trading and banking (Guha; 1988 : 19). It may be noted here that the exploration of tea plantations served the interests of the British capital and not of the masses in colonial Assam (Guha; 1968 quoted from Hussain : 1993). We can also witness massive migration of labour to Assam from Jharkhand region because of the absence of strong local labour force. This massive migration not only transformed the demography of the Brahmaputra Valley but also played a very significant role in the politics of Assam even after independence of India. According to Gait (1992 : 342) the total number of immigrants to tea gardens and their descendents numbered about a million and a third (1.3 million), or one sixth of the total population of Assam. Of course, they were not only the oppressed social groups in colonial Assam but also they were treated like the slaves by their planters although slavery was abolished in 1843 (Hussain; 1993 : 44).

We can also witness a very few Asamiyas belonging to high castes Asamiya Hindus and Asamiya Muslims trying to start plantation business and succeeding at that although they did not receive equal treatment from the colonial rulers. These Asamiya tea-planters were significantly the first group of Asamiya capitalists though they were very weak and insignificant compared to their British counterparts (Ibid : 44). Almost all the tea gardens were owned and managed by British companies particularly in the early period of the exploration of tea plantation. A meagre percentage of area out of total area under tea in Assam was under Indian owned tea estates. The majority of the Indian owned tea estates were non-Asamiya. Thus, it was quite natural that out of the huge earnings of these tea industries in Assam, only a part of it was used for financing the expansion of area sown and the remaining major part of the earnings were remitted outside the state as dividends (Dhar; 1998 : 101; Alam; 1983 :4). It is important to note here that the exploration of tea-plantations barring a few middle class jobs did not benefit much the mass people of Assam. Rather the dividends from the tea industry went out of Assam.

#### **Petroleum and Coal :**

During the pre-Independence period, the colonial rulers gave lukewarm attention to the exploration of petrol and coal mines in Assam. Although oil was discovered in Assam in 1825, yet large scale production of petroleum was started in 1889. However, refinery was established only in 1901 at Digboi. Although Assam Oil Company was formed in 1899 under the patronage of the Assam Railway and Trading Company yet the company could not expand its activities due to the lack of adequate finance (Goswami; 1994 : 144). Thus, until 1921 the Burma Oil Company did not take over the management of the Assam Oil Company because the British capitalists were not very keen to invest in the petroleum industry as they had easy access to oil from neighbouring Burma in the South-East and from Iran in the West (Hussain; 1993 : 45). It should be noted here that during the pre-Independence period Assam was the monopoly producer of petroleum although the petroleum industry failed to contribute towards the development of Assam's economy because it was owned and managed by the foreign interests. Hence major portion of the profit went outside Assam. Although

coal was discovered in 1925, it received less attention from the colonial rulers until the development of railways in Assam. In this context it is said that the exploration and exploitation of coal had already been made in Bihar and Jharkhand region. Moreover, with its less popularity among the people more attention was not provided by the colonial rulers. Of course, in course of time, tea estates and steam engines became largely depended on the major portion of the coal which Assam produced. Thus, it is said that except for tea no other important industries were developed by the colonial rulers during the colonial rule. Rather the new market forces were responsible for weakening the small and cottage industries which prevailed in the pre-colonial Assam. It is also interesting to note here that although the colonial government and British sectors were running well, it : “failed to induce a commensurate growth of the indigenous private sector. What was developing with an amazing tempo was the British- owned and British managed part of the economy, with labour and middlemen services almost entirely recruited from other Indian provinces.” (Guha; 1988, p. 35).

#### **Communication :**

The colonial rulers tried to improve the communication system throughout the province in the interest of the development of tea industry, petroleum and coal mining industries. The network of communication was also improved for despatching tea to the markets through the Calcutta Port. So, the different types of transport – river, road and railway were developed during the colonial rule. Along with steamer and road transport, the construction of railways was started in 1881. By 1939, Assam had 1,300 miles of railway lines which was, indeed, very impressive. The network of communication was also needed for the exploration and exploitation of petroleum and coal mining industries. However, the colonial rulers had to give more attention for improving the communication system surrounding the tea-producing districts and areas of Assam.

Because of the transformation of colonial economy the huge amount of people migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam from the various regions of British India, namely, fro Jharkhand region, Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar, Bengal etc. the fur-

reaching consequences of which can be witnessed even after the independence of India.

(iii) **Colonial Administration :**

As stated earlier, before the occupation of Assam by the British in 1826, the major part of the Brahmaputra Valley was ruled by the Ahom rulers since the arrival of the Ahoms in 1228. Naturally, when Assam was annexed in 1826 by the British, a new kind of administration, which was known as British-Mughal System of Administration started in Assam. Of course, in the initial years of its rule, the colonial rulers gave more attention to the pre-colonial Asamiya aristocracy for the perpetual existence of their colonial rule. It is important to note here that within three years of the establishment of British rule in Assam (i.e. 1828) discontent against alien rule had manifested by the old aristocracies. The Khasis, the Singphos and the Khamtis also started rebellious activities against the alien rule during the 1830's. Even the great national upheaval of 1857 also did not leave Assam untouched (Guha; 1988 : 4) where men like Maniram Dewan and Peali Barua took leading role. Thus, from 1828 to 1857 revolts were organized against the British colonial rule in several times although these attempts were suppressed by the colonial rulers. So after the annexation of Assam, colonial rulers tried to satisfy the pre-colonial aristocracy just to perpetuate the colonial rule. At the same time, the colonial rulers were responsible for declining the pre-British aristocracy. According to Hussain, the British colonizers had no intention of educating the Asamiyas immediately in order to ensure their continuity in the new colonial set up which was very much essential as a pre-condition for entry into jobs in the new colonial administration (Hussain : 1993 : 38). This was the main reason for declining the pre-British Asamiya aristocracy. It also delayed the process of formation of the middle class among the Asamiyas (Ibid.). As new system of colonial administration required educated people based on western education so the colonizers decided to import the "Baboos" from neighbouring Bengal for running the administration of Assam. Of course, these "Baboos" imported from Bengal were engaged in the lower level positions of administration. Guha; (1988: 58) observed: "The provincial administration was not prepared to build up an appropriate educational

infrastructure for the simple reason that it could recruit Bengal's surplus educated personnel to staff its offices at the minimum cost ...”

It should be important to note here that the middle class educated people who were drawn from Bengal belonged to Bengali Hindus mainly from the high castes like Brahmins, Kayasthas and the Vaidyas. Therefore, in absence of an Asamiya middle class in the initial period of colonial rule in Assam, almost all the important jobs were occupied by the Bengali Hindu middle class imported from Bengal Presidency whose important role in running the colonial administration can never be neglected. According to Hussain, many more Bengalis came to Assam as lawyers, teachers, private doctors, small traders, shop-keepers, jewelers and tailors (Hussain; 1993 : 39). Thus, it is clear that the Bengalis, mainly the upper caste Bengali Hindus together with small traders, shop-keepers etc. were very conspicuous in the colonial administration in Assam which also helped in building up urban centres in Assam.

The discussion on colonial administration would be incomplete without analysing revenue administration. So we would like to present here the colonial land revenue system in a nutshell. As stated earlier, before the British rule in Assam, Paik system prevailed in Assam. Accordingly the “Paik” was allowed a piece of land after offering service to the state (i.e., he had to pay his land revenue in exchange of offering physical labour). But the colonial state introduced qualitatively different land revenue system which was known as riotwary system in all the districts of Brahmaputra Valley excluding the Goalpara district where Zamindary system prevailed. Under this system the land user used to pay the land revenue in the form of money. Thus the land revenue system was monetized. According to Bhattacharya, under the riotwary system landlord class also emerged and semi-feudalistic exploitation continued and like the Zaminder class this “new” landlords also became the supporters of British raj (Bhattacharya; 1998 : 184). The colonial state had to collect a huge amount in the form of cash revenue. The colonial state increased the land revenue by dividing the land in different categories, namely, (a) Basti; (b) Rupit; (c) Baotali and (d) Faringati, meaning homestead land, summer paddy land, winter paddy land and high crop lands respectively. The rate of land revenue was more than doubled by the colonial state.

Bhattacharya (Ibid : 185) has shown that during 1832-33, total amount of revenue of Darrang was Rs. 41, 504/- which was increased to Rs. 7,44, 709/- during 1862-63. Thus the Ahom aristocracy declined and their position deteriorated under the colonial system. At the same time, the position of the clerics of Shaktism, that is, the Brahmin priests and that of the Gossain-Mahanta clerics of Vaisnavism did not decline because of the continuity of state care from the colonial rulers. Their privileges over large tracts of land not only continued but they also continued appropriate to labour of their followers along with revenue-free land. In addition to the Gossain-Mahantas, the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Ganaks and a section of the Kalitas and the Asamiya Muslims because of their literate background and of feudal privileges, formed the larger chunk of Asamiya middle class which emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Assam. Guha (1988 : 341-43) has mentioned 23 leading personalities of the Asamiya middle class of the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century of which 2 were Asamiya Muslims and 2 were Ahoms and the remaining were the personalities belonging to Asamiya high castes. Other social groups and castes were not able to emerge into the middle class in the colonial situation. It should be noted here that almost the same social composition of the Asamiya middle class continued till the end of colonial rule in Assam.

It may be interesting to point out that the imposition of heavy tax and the enhancement of land revenue was not accepted by the peasants. Rather we can witness several peasant uprisings against the enhancement of land revenue first in 1861 and then in 1891. Although these upsurges had not become successful yet their anguish against the colonial rulers for the enhancement of land revenue cannot be underestimated.

#### (iv) Social Change :

We would like to analyse the social change during the colonial rule in Assam highlighting the issues like Asamiya language and identity as well as massive migration. These issues not only transformed the society, demography, economy and

politics in colonial Assam but were also responsible for the emergence of 'politics of tensions' even during the post-colonial Assam along with the dismemberment of composite Assam in the post-colonial period.

The relationship between the Asamiyas and the Bengalis in Assam always has remained controversial, ever since the arrival of the Bengali "baboo" in the wake of the British colonial rule in Assam in 1826 although both Assam and Bengal were connected in the contexts of social, cultural, economic, diplomatic and political matters since immemorial time. One of the important factors for this controversial relationship between the two was language. We have already noted that since 1826 when the British took over the administration of Assam, it was placed under the Bengal Presidency. As Assam was included in the Bengal Presidency Bengali was enforced as the official language and medium of instruction in Assam for the purposes of economy and convenience (see for details Barpujari; 77 : 62-63) although Asamiya was the dominant language even in pre-British Assam. It would be important to recollect the observations of Guha in this context: "Assamese had lost its rightful place to Bengali in local schools and courts in 1837 on the false ground that it was a dialect of the latter language" (Guha; 1988 : 22). Naturally, a voice of protest was raised against the introduction of Bengali in place of Assamese in the schools and courts in Assam and the leading role was taken by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan along with some other members of newly educated Asamiyas.

The battle for due recognition of Assamese as distinct and separate language was carried on through Dhekial Phukan's long-drawn efforts, alongside those of the American Baptist Missionaries. As a result of the agitation, Assamese was finally recognized for use in courts and schools of Assam proper several years after his death under The Bengal Government Order of 19 April, 1873. Bengali of course, co-existed side by side (Ibid : 22).

It is worthwhile to mention here that among the traditional outsiders in Assam, namely the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, the Black Tribals, Marwaris and the Nepalese etc, the Asamiya identity clashed more sharply with that of the Bengalees. The earliest case of confrontation followed the replacement of Persian as the medium

of instruction at the school level and as the court language by Bengali in 1831 in the Bengal Presidency of which Assam was a part at that time. The conflict arose because the Asamiya language was not given the same status in Assam, at least, in Assam proper, that is, in the Brahmaputra Valley. But this resentment was a part of a more complicated process of Asamiya nationality formation which had pronounced chauvinistic aspects at least during the post-colonial phase when APHLC came out with the official language policy of the Govt. of Assam in 1960. It is also important to observe here that a large number of Asamiya scholars, journalists, politicians and even the social scientists of both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century opine that Asamiya language did not get legitimate right and recognition from the colonial rulers due to the conspiratory role played by the Bengalis/Bengali Baboos as they became successful in persuading the British colonial rulers to accept Bengali as the official language of Assam which led to the suppression of the Asamiya language between 1837 – 1873. But it is amazing that the supporters and propagators of conspiratory theory unfortunately failed to analyse the powerful role of the colonial rulers under whom the Bengalis/Bengali Baboos were supposed to carry the decisions as subordinated subjects. In this context we would like to place here the observations of Hussain (1993 : 233):

There is no tangible historicity about the successful Bengali conspiracy against the Asamiya language. The colonial rulers made several surveys prior to and after colonizing Assam in 1826. Therefore, it would be very highly simplistic to assume that the British had no knowledge about the existence and popularity of the Asamiya language. Even then, the Colonial rulers had gone in for non-indigenous Bengali language in Assam.

The main reason behind introducing Bengali in the schools and in the govt. offices together with the courts of justice was the administrative convenience for the interests of the British colonizers. Gohain has rightly pointed out the reason behind such move :

... the colonial rulers had introduced Bengali in 1837 not out of their interest in any language dispute but for administrative convenience only. Assam was being ruled as part of Bengal administration and the British were introducing new land laws, law courts and official procedures in Assam. Bengali had already been in use in Bengal for

these purposes and it was more economical to use that readymade instrument and pupils trained in its use than flounder about with Assamese which lacked such terminology (Gohain; 1980 : 14 quoted from Hussain; 1993 : 233).

The colonial rulers, very systematically introducing Bengali in the schools and govt. offices of Assam and became successful in diverting the attention of the emerging new educated middle class of Asamiya people who in the initial years of colonial rule was the loyalist collaborators of colonialism. Because of their class position in a particular colonial situation and their loyalist nature, this Asamiya middle class failed to comprehend adequately the language policy of the colonial rulers and found the scapegoat in Bengali baboos (Hussain; 1993 : 234). Thus, the colonial rulers became successful in antagonizing one subject nationality against another and perpetuated their rule. The British colonial rule was also held responsible for articulating the identity of the Asamiyas along with the language which even helped the sponsors of the Assam Movement during 1979 – 1985 in the post-colonial situation.

Another important issue which shook the society of the Brahmaputra Valley during the colonial period was the process of migration from different regions of colonial India. Although the process of migration was started into the Brahmaputra Valley even before the colonial rule in Assam yet the massive migration took place during the colonial rule under the colonial aegis. And this massive migration not only changed the society, demography, economy and politics of colonial Assam but this issue also had far-reaching consequences during the post-colonial Assam with respect to Asamiya identity. The politics of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam even today oscillates over the issue of migration.

As far as the immigration is concerned it can be said that it was the British colonial economy which opened the floodgates of migration to Assam – particularly to the Brahmaputra Valley. As stated earlier, during the initial period of the British colonial rule after the annexation of Assam, tea plantation was explored which required a strong labour force. Even at the time of exploration of tea plantation, the Assam Company imported some 70 Chinese workers (Guha; 1988 : 15) in 1840. This

was the period in which Asamiyas were not at all interested to work as plantation workers as they had to depend on cultivation for their survival and the relationship between the Asamiyas and the 'Boga Bongal' (the white foreigners) was also not good (Hussain ; 1993 : 182). So, the Asamiyas did not respond to the labour requirements in the plantation system barring some local tribals like the 'Bodos' and the 'Kacharis' who were engaged as labourers in the plantations (Ibid : 182).

It would be important to note here that the local labour (Kachari Tribe) did not bow down to the white planters who engaged the workers on inhuman terms and conditions together with imposing punishment. Even the labour of the Assam Company struck work in 1848 and gheraoed the Superintendants' office to realise three month's arrears of their wages (Guha; 1988 : 15 and Bhattacharya; 1998 : 157). Again in 1859, the Company's Kachari labour struck work for a wage increase and leader of the strike, Modhuram Koch was sent to jail after the strike was over. This was another disturbing factor for the British planters for which they had to look for alternatives for bringing "labour force"<sup>I</sup> from outside Assam even spending more many in connection with the recruitment of labour force from outside Assam.

Although the first import of labour started in 1853 (Gait; 1992 : 341) yet large-scale labour recruitment from outside had started from the early-sixties (Guha; 1991 : 193). And this large-scale migration totally transformed the Asamiya society. It cannot be denied that due to the exploration of tea-plantations massive migration took place into the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam as a result of which static demographic structure of Assam had been altered. We can also witness that the black-tribals had emerged as a significantly distinct group of migrants in Assam by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In this context, Hussain has rightly observed :

The colonial state had to build new roads, bridges, rails and steamer services in order to help the growth of colonial economy. Besides the black tribals, in the absence of local enterprise, traders, bankers, agents and money lenders moved to Assam as an ally of the colonial state. Within a short span of time the social composition of the Assamese society transformed very significantly and paved the way for further changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Hussain; 1993 : 186 – 188).

## 2.2 Annual Migration of Labour Including Their Children into Assam Plantations.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1902-03	26,644	1919-20	1,02,089
1903-04	22,162	1920-21	25,472
1904-05	24,209	1924-25	33,727
1905-06	31,830	1925-26	33,009
1906-07	25,617	1926-27	45,694
1907-08	84,824	1927-28	42,845
1908-09	60,773	1928-29	68,900
1909-10	39,332	1929-30	59,796
1910-11	43,657	1930-31	53,519
1911-12	58,646	1931-32	50,997
1912-13	59,873	1932-33	39,901
1913-14	58,646	1933-34	47,960
1914-15	63,638	1934-35	19,968
1915-16	1,10,376	1935-36	23,876
1916-17	48,130	1936-37	27,842
1917-18	19,407	1937-38	32,335
1918-19	2,22,171	-	-

Source : Guha, 1988 : 350 and S. Das; N.D. 28

Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Reports of 1906 and 1921-22; Reports on Immigrant Labour in the Surma Valley and Hills Division as well as the Assam Valley Division for the year ending the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1929; Annual Reports on the Working of the Tea Districts Emigration Labour Act (XXII of 1932). Also, relevant Reports of the Land Revenue Administration, Govt. of Assam.

Indentured labourers had to be continually brought from outside the province to compensate for inadequacy of local recruitment, deaths, discharge, desertions and loss by way of repatriation under the relevant Emigrant Labour Acts. After 1937-38, all leakages taken together, exceeded what was added to the plantation labour force by way of immigration. But until then, a positive trend of increase in labour population through immigration was continuously there. The land settlement figures also indicate the pressure of this trend. Owned land holdings of ex-coolies of plantations in the Brahmaputra Valley increased from 1,36,216 acres in 1908-9 to 2,27,362 acres in 1920-21 and 3,79,325 acres in 1940-41.

The Table 2.2 has shown in detail the year-wise migration of black-tribals including their children into Assam's plantations for which Davis was bound to observe that the migration to plantations "caused Assam to be the fastest growing province in India" during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Davis; 1951 : 115 quoted from Hussain; 1993 : 188) although high mortality rate was to be witnessed among the imported black-tribals.

Now, we would like to turn our attention to immigrant Muslims who had migrated from Eastern Bengal as settlers on agricultural land of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during the British rule. Before going to analytical study regarding the immigrant Muslims who had migrated during the British rule it would be important to note here that the Muslims entered into Assam even before the arrival of the Ahoms i.e. before 1228 A.D. In this context Kar (1990 : 2) has observed :

The earliest Muslims attempted to enter Assam forcibly was their invasion of 1205 led by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji from Bengal as depicted in the North Gauhati inscription of 1127 Saka Era. It is on record that before the first Ahom appearance in 1228, several Muslim invasions had already taken place and affected the district of Kamrup and adjoining territories. Some of the captive mercenaries and others decided to settle in those places. Therefore, the camp followers of military commanders must be regarded as the pioneers of Muslim settlers in Assam.

They became an inseparable component of the medieval Assamese society and polity along with the Muslim prisoners. It may noted here that the Mughal Emperors of India attacked Assam several times although the Ahom Kings successfully resisted all the invasions and because of these invasions many Muslim soldiers were taken into prison, although they were rehabilitated in the subsequent years into the different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley who, in course of time, assimilated into the Assamese society. Hussain; (1993 : 197) has rightly categorised the Muslims of Assam into four groups, namely, (i) Asamiya Muslims, (ii) Na-Asamiya Muslims, (iii) Muslims of the Barak Valley and (iv) North Indian Muslims living in Assam.

Out of the four groups of the Muslims of Assam, we would like to confine our analysis only to the Na-Asamiya Muslims because this is the group of the Muslims which migrated on a large scale during the colonial period and had to transform the Assamese society of the Brahmaputra Valley to a large extent. Even during the post-colonial period this group of the Muslims, as alleged by some scholars, posed a serious threat to the Asamiya culture along with its demography. It should be mentioned here that almost all the groups of the Muslims had migrated to Assam from one place to another namely, the first category of Muslims migrated and settled even before the Ahom rule in Assam i.e. in 1228 as stated earlier. The third category of Muslims migrated during the pre-colonial and colonial period. Their language is Bengali, The North Indian Muslims (fourth group) migrated during the later part of the colonial rule whose language is Urdu. Even major portion of this group migrated after Independence. Their number is very small, they are numbered only 6,254 in 1971 (Statistical Handbook. of Assam; 1986 : 27). In Brahmaputra Valley, they are only 6,008 in 1971 along with Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills districts (Ibid : 27). So their number is very insignificant.

The second category of Muslims in Assam is known as the Na-Asamiya Musalman meaning neo-Asamiya Muslims and the major portion of this category of Muslims migrated into the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during the colonial period particularly at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Sometimes they are known as "Pamua Musalman" (the farming Muslims), Charua Musalman (the Muslims of river islands or banks seasonally submerged into river waters), Mian Musalman, Mymensinghia Musalman (Muslims from Mymensingh district of erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh), Immigrant Muslims and Bengali Muslims (see for details Hussain; 1993 : 200). At the present juncture they should be designated as Na-Asamiya Musalman (Neo-Asamiya Muslims) as almost all of them adopted Assamese language and assimilated to Asamiya society by 1951 and had to sacrifice their original mother tongue Bengali.

The migration took place from Eastern Part of Bengal since 1891 August (Das; 1983 : 34) in a very small scale. It was the Census Report of 1911 which for the first

time mentioned the movement of immigrants from East Bengal to Assam's waste lands. The Census Report of 1911 was the first document on the extra-ordinary influx of farmers to the "Chars" of Goalpara from Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur (Kar; 1990 : 11). In 1911, the total Muslim immigrants numbered 2,58,000 in the Brahmaputra Valley and 6000 in the Hills (Davis: quoted from Kar: 1990 : 11). In the initial years, immigrants were trying to settle in the Goalpara and Nowgong districts along with the Barpeta Sub-Division of Kamrup district, but in the subsequent years, the immigrants were interested to settle in the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts; Kar (1990 : 12) has thus observed :

"This advent of thousands of farmer migrants was a slow but steady process covering the Brahmaputra Valley where there was no end of waste lands awaiting the cultivator's plough." The main cause behind the inflow of migration from East Bengal was the excessive pressure of population on land in the different parts of East Bengal. The large-scale migration to the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam generated strong apprehensions among the Asamiya Hindus (Hussain; 1993 : 204) although some positive results are to be witnessed because of the influx of these immigrant settlers. Thus, Goswami (1994 : 25) observed about the positive result of the influx of these immigrant settlers in the following manner :

One welcome result of the influx of these farm settlers is the improvement of the farming practices in the province. The new settlers developed, the whole agricultural system in Assam, helped to improve the health of the countryside by clearing the jungles and marshes, and also converted the areas into prosperous agricultural regions. The introduction of jute, vegetables etc. as commercial crops in Assam has largely been due to the immigrants.

Though the inflow of immigrants had some positive results, nevertheless the conflict between the immigrant settlers and the local people (the tribals) could not be prevented because of the possession of land. Friction between the immigrants settlers and the tribals became the order of the day. In the meantime the different organizations along with the Congress started to mobilise the public opinion against the inflow of immigration into Assam. The resentment against the Muslim farmers popularized

among the Asamiya Hindus for which the colonial rulers compelled to introduce a new device which is known as "Line System"<sup>2</sup> in 1920 just to appease the Asamiya Hindus.

Although the Line System was introduced to protect the indigenous Assamese and to prevent the frictions between the settlers (immigrants of East Bengal) and the local tribal people, nevertheless, the arrangements under the line system did not work well particularly in the Mixed Line Areas. In these areas the immigrant farmers could get lands either by purchase from local people or by encroachment on lands belonging to the Government or the indigenous people (Goswami; 1994 : 25), At the same time it can also be said that because of the introduction of Line System the Muslim poor peasants were compelled to alienate from the Asamiyas both physically and psychologically for which assimilation process to the Asamiya society could not start during this period. It is also interesting to note here that one section of the Asamiya society was not opposed to the peasant migrants because many Asamiya money-lenders/mahajans together with local Marwari traders even financed the migrants so that the former could reclaim land and expand the cultivation of jute, ahu rice, pulses and vegetables (Guha; 1988 : 206). Guha further has shown that an Asamiya gentleman Jagannath Bujar-Barua told the Assam Banking Enquiry Committee that immigration had led to all-round prosperity in Barpeta area. Many Assamese had turned into land speculators. They sold off their lands to immigrants at a lower price; then they cleared new plots (pam) on waste lands and sold them again. The immigrants were financed by their own headman (Matabbar) as well as Assamese (Barpetia) money-lenders. Even the hati (indigenous co-operative bank) funds of Barpeta were involved in this financing, to a small extent (Assam Banking Enquiry Committee Report, 1929/30, Vol. 2, pp. 508-17).

As stated earlier, the line system could not stop the process of migration so the colonial rulers introduced another device in 1928 which was known as Colonization Scheme.<sup>3</sup> For the first time this scheme was introduced in Nowgong district in 1928 and thereafter followed by one each in Barpeta Sub-Division of Kamrup district and the Mongaldoi Sub-Division of Darrang district. Under the Scheme a small family was to be provided with about 20 bighas of land on payment of premium. The colonization

scheme not only helped the inflow of migration but also helped in raising the agricultural productivity which ultimately led to the utilisation of waste land resources of Brahmaputra Valley. At the same time this scheme also helped the British colonial rulers to increase their land revenue. In this context it would be important to recollect the observation of Hussain (1993 : 206) :

“The British colonialism created a contradictory situation wherein they forced the push factor in one region and the pull factor in another region. If contingency demanded, they would also surprisingly impose restrictions in the interest of maintaining colonial hegemony.”

#### **Movement of Nepali Immigrants :**

Ever since the British occupation, there has been a continuous flow of the Nepali population into Assam (Thapa; 1993 : 7). Of course, before the British colonisation of Assam a very limited number of the Nepali migrants migrated into Assam. This migration was natural as these were matrimonial connections between the medieval ruling families of Assam and Nepal (Hussain; 1993 : 254). During the colonial period the inflow of Nepali migration took place which was initiated by the colonial rulers. The colonial rulers as an integral part of the British colonial expansion and consolidation encouraged the Nepali labourers and loyal people for their army and other establishments. Thapa observed in the following manner :

Nepal is economically a backward country for which the poor hilly Nepalese have been migrating to India in general and Assam in particular seeking means of livelihood. Many of these Nepalese in course of time, settled permanently in the forest lands as the graziers and cultivators. Similarly, the British too facilitated the process of Nepali migration as they needed laborious people to work in their army and other establishments. As such, the martial/tribes of the Nepalese were recruited in the military forces and many of them, after retirement, settled in different parts of the country, including Assam (Thapa : 1993 : 7).

The colonial rulers also encouraged the Nepali immigrants for raising the Government's exchequer. Although, the inflow of migration from Nepal took place at the initiative of the colonial rulers together with the searching of livelihood, yet this

was not treated as a serious threat to the Asamiya society particularly during the colonial period.

#### **Migration of Bengali Hindus into Assam :**

We have already analysed Asamiya-Bengali relationship in the earlier discussion in connection with language and identity issues. Now we would like to confine our analysis in regard to the migration of Bengali Hindus into Assam during the colonial period. It cannot be denied that a small section of Bengali Hindus belonging to high castes had migrated to Brahmaputra Valley even before the British colonial rule in Assam. It is also important to note here that some important Hindu Bengali priests migrated to Assam under the royal patronage during the medieval period . Of course, the Bengali Hindus who migrated to Assam during the pre-British period, were assimilated and integrated with the Asamiya society.

During the colonial period, the British brought clerks and officers from Bengal in order to run the company administration. In this context Phukan (1995 : 10) observed :

“In order to run the company administration, the British had further thrown open the doors of Assam for free flow of people from the rest of India and neighbouring countries. Perhaps the British did not find the elite of aboriginal groups of Assam suitable for colonial administrative and take them into confidence. Therefore, the British brought clerks and officers from Bengal...”

Thus, it can safely be stated that at the initiative of the colonial rulers, the Bengali Hindus mainly drawn from high castes came to Assam to run the colonial administration. Thus, it was natural that the inflow of migration took place because of the initiative taken by the British colonial rulers for their own interests together with the administrative arrangement and recognition of Bengali language. At the same time, it should also be noted here that the migration of Bengali Hindus into Assam should be viewed as internal migration.

### The Marwaris :

Among the outsiders, the Marwaris are the most conspicuous and economically dominant community in Assam (Hussain; 1993 : 264). Even before the colonial rule in Assam the Marwari traders arrived in Assam. It can be said that the Marwari traders were among the very early group of migrants to colonial Assam (Ibid. 264). In 1841, a British Officer wrote in his report on Assam – “At present, almost the whole of commerce of Assam is engrossed by Kaiah, a very enterprising class of men, resident in the principal towns. They are emigrant from Marwar and seem to have been induced to settle in Assam for the sake of trading merely (Robinson; 1841 : 245 quoted from Hussain; 1993 : 265). Within a very short span of colonial period, in the trade and commerce of Assam, the Marwaris proved themselves very strong emerging groups. The Marwaris also became successful in controlling the colonial market in Assam along with the British colonial master. Barpujari stated that the Marwaris acted as money-lenders, bankers, mouzadars and agents of tea garden management (Barpujari; 1996 : 4 January). Guha also made observations on the role of the Marwaris as money lenders in regard to the rural economy:

The fact that the market sector of the peasant economy was completely in the grip of the well-entrenched Marwari trading capital ever since the advent of the British rule is beyond dispute. Peasants used to receive cash advances from the Marwari traders against pledged crops, to a considerable extent.. These traders and their agents were mostly put in the census under the category of petty shopkeepers, rather than as money lenders. The numerous shops provided a network for the filtration of credit into the rural areas (Guha; 1988 : 49).

We have already shown in earlier discussion that the Marwaris, as money lenders, also helped the East Bengal peasants to settle down in Barpetta Sub-Division of Kamrup district along with the Barpetia Mahajans. Although their numbers were small yet their influence in the trade and commerce of Assam was next to the British colonial rulers. Even they were also engaged in occupying certain influential jobs like the Mouzadar together with the Bengali Hindus. The Marwaris, can also be termed as

internal migrants like the Bengal, Hindus, Jharkhandis, Biharis etc. The Marwari migrants in no way threatened the demographic status of the Asamiyas in Assam.

(v) **Freedom Movement :**

Now we would like to analyse the role of Assam in freedom movement of India which generally covers a long period of 90 years from 1857 till the midnight of August 15, 1947. As stated earlier, the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam came under the British rule in 1826 after the conclusion of Treaty of Yandaboo. It should also be noted here that the British province which was known as Assam took shape more or less by 1873. We have already shown that the British colonial rulers were not able to consolidate the colonial rule in North East India within a very short period. Rather, the consolidation of colonial rule in North East India took a long time. During the initial years of colonial rule in Assam, we can also witness some kind of resistance made by the indigenous people. The old aristocracy that had lost its offices of profit was the first to react violently to the alien rule (Guha; 1988 : 3). The rebellions of Gomdhar Konwar and Rupchand Konwar in 1828 and 1829 respectively were instances of rebellious activities, though these were quickly suppressed by the colonial rulers. The Singphos, during the year 1830-31 and the Khasis, during the years 1829-33 also had to raise the banner of revolt and warfare against the British Colonial rulers. Of course, these resistance were suppressed by the colonizers.

Now we would like to turn our attention to the National Revolt of 1857 against the British rule. Whether the revolt of 1857 may be considered as the First War of Independence or not, it cannot be denied that this revolt shook the colonial rulers. The share of Assam in the historic mutiny of 1857 cannot be ignored. Guha observed thus :The great national upheaval of 1857 also did not leave Assam untouched. Wild rumours that the end of the British rule in India was imminent spread all over the province (Ibid : 4).

In this connection it would be important to recollect that during the Company Rule the aristocratic class did not get much opportunities which were provided during

the Ahom rule which we have already shown in the earlier discussion. Guha further observed in the following way :

The Hindustani Sepoys stationed at Dibrugarh and Gauhati as well as some members of the deposed local aristocracy became restive towards the close of July, 1857. Contacts were established between soldiers' barracks and the followers of the Charing Raja who aspired for restoration. This was done through the efforts of Moniram Barua (Dewan) (1806 – 58), then camping in Calcutta and his associate Madhu Mullick, a Bengali Mukhtear. A plan was agreed upon, preparation for the uprising went on secretly (Ibid : 4).

Unfortunately, the plan of Maniram and his co-patriots failed and as a result, he and Piyali Barua (one of his close associates) were found guilty of treason and hanged publicly on February 26, 1858 in Jorhat after a so-called trial held by a British Captain (Kakati; in an article published in *The Assam Tribune*, 15 August, 1997). Other associates who helped Maniram Dewan in this patriotic task were also found guilty and were sentenced to transportation for life or long jail terms. Although the bias of the leaders of the revolt was undoubtedly pro-feudal yet it was not altogether without a popular support (Guha; 1988 : 4).

We can also witness peasant upsurges in colonial Assam against the enhancement of land revenue, first in 1861 and then again in 1893-94. The peasants of various districts and Sub-Divisions of Brahmaputra Valley ventilated their grievances against the enhancement of land revenue organising "Raj Mel"<sup>4</sup> (peoples' assembly) frequently since 1861. About the role of the "Assam ryots" the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* observed in its editorial that "in the Deccan the fury of the ryots was directed against money-lenders, in Bengal against indigo-planters in 1860, in Pabna against Zaminders in 1872, but in Assam at this movement, it is open rebellion against the Government", (quoted from Barpujari; 1977 : 102). Although the local authority became successful in suppressing the popular outbursts yet it can be stated that the British administration was highly disturbed due to these peasant upsurges. About the role of the "mels" through which the peasants of the different parts of Brahmaputra Valley were organized, although in a scattered manner, Dutt observed :

The Mels in Assam played an important role in making the people conscious of the utter helplessness in which they lived under the alien rulers. They also gave an indication of what the mass people could do to shake the foundations of the imperial power when properly roused from the state of neglect in which they lived, (36), and guided in their activities as they were when the fight for freedom began under the banner of the Congress (Dutt, 1993:36)

In this connection it would be important to note here that Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and the first session of Indian National Congress was held in August, 1885 in Bombay under the presidentship of W.C. Banerjee. Although the policy of Indian National Congress in the initial years of its existence was one of prayer and petition yet it cannot be denied that this great organisation took the leading role in achieving independence.

The second session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in 1886 where four Assamese delegates were present. They were Kalikanta Barkakati – represented the Shillong Association, Devicharan Barua (Dibrugarh) and Gopinath Bordoloi (Dibrugarh), both represented the upper Assam Association and Satyanath Bora represented the Nowgong Ryot Association. In the Madras Congress session of 1887, Radhanath Changkakoti represented the Upper Assam Associations and Lakshmi Kanta Barkakati the Tezpur Ryot Sabha (Guha; 1988 : 64). Some of the important personalities from the Brahmaputra Valley attending the Congress sessions during the years 1888 – 1921 were Ghanashyam Barua, H. Singha Choudhury, Manik Chandra Boroah, Meghnath Banerjee, Hariprasad Das, Chandra Kamal Bezbarua, Bhabani Kanta Das, Lakshminath Bezbarua, T.R. Phukan, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Bachalal Borah, Umesh Chandra Das etc. (see for details : Guha; 1988 : 345). It is to be noted here that almost all the delegates attending Congress Sessions were from the middle class family of Assam. Thus, Guha (1988 : 67) observed about the role of the middle class within the National Congress.

... the founding of the National Congress in 1885 was not a mere handiwork of a few British and Indian gentlemen at the top. Evidently, it was a response of the Indian middle classes to the new national awakening. Assamese middle classes were no exception as they reacted similarly. Progressive Indianization of the Civil Services, abolition of European racial practices, further

democratization of the Legislative Councils and their extension to new areas, repeal of the repugnant penal provisions of the indentured Labour Acts, - all these demands and an unflinching faith in the growing unity of India echoed and re-echoed. Equality with Europeans under a potentially benevolent British rule was what the articulate Indian middle classes aspired for, for many years to come.

In this connection it would be proper to mention here that before the emergence of the Assam Provincial Congress in 1921 "Assam Association"<sup>5</sup> had played a very important role in the political advancement of the province. The first session of the Association was held at Dibrugarh in 1905 under the presidentship of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua of Gouripur. During the period from 1905 to 1916, the Assam Association was "one man's show" - of its General Secretary Manik Chandra Barua (Barpujari; 1977 : 172). Nevertheless, in the subsequent years, with the help of leading members like Manik Chandra Barua, Ghanashyam Baruah, Phanidhar Chaliha, Tarun Ram Phookan, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, the Association became successful in presenting to the authorities the needs and grievances, hopes and aspirations of the people of Assam. At the same time, the Association adopted the constitutional method - prayers and petitions - in connection with the fulfilment of the grievances of the people of Assam. In this context, it is to be pointed out that although the Association raised the vital problems concerning the people of Assam, it was not at all alienated from Indian politics. Some of its members even attended Congress Sessions at Calcutta and Nagpur to have a first hand knowledge of the national problem (Ibid : 174). Thus, under the changed situation the Association, at its Tezpur Annual Session in 1920 adopted the programme of non-cooperation which was outlined by the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress. Even the Association decided to merge itself in the newly formed Assam Provincial Congress which was affiliated to the Indian National Congress (Ibid : 175).

A session of Indian National Congress was held at Pandu near Gauhati in 1926 under the presidentship of Srinivas Iyengar. It meant that the Congress also wanted to include the people of Assam, for the cause of independence. Mahatma Gandhi along with some other leaders attended the Pandu session. Tarun Ram Phookan, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Chandranath Sarma and some other associates not only actively

participated the session of the Congress but also collected a huge amount of fund for the success of the session. The Gauhati session was a great success and it registered the full faith of the people of Assam in the cause of independence (Kakati; August 15, 1997 in an article published in the Assam Tribune).

It should be mentioned here that Jalianwalla Bagh incident of April 13, 1919 totally changed the political scene of India in which a large number of innocent people were killed and many people were injured in the firing by the British officers. It cannot be denied that this incident brought Gandhiji to lead the country against the British colonial government. This incident of Punjab created a bitter feeling against the colonial rule. After the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi, within the Congress, the freedom struggle took a new perspective which resulted in the attainment of Independence on August 15, 1947. In the year 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress at its Nagpur session passed the resolution of launching Non-Cooperation Movement throughout the country. As a follow-up action Gandhiji gave a call for Non-Cooperation Movement and the response from the people of the country was tremendous.

It is important to note here that some Assamese students led by Chandranath Sarma attended the All India Students' Conference which was held at Nagpur in 1920. The students' conference supported the Non-Cooperation decision of the Nagpur session of Congress. The Students' Conference also called for the immediate and unconditional boycott of government and government aided colleges and advised the college students of India to respond to it (Bhuyan & De; 1978 : 17). The students community of Assam under the leadership of Chandranath Sarma left their studies and joined the movement launched by Gandhiji. Guha observed that the student community of Brahmaputra Valley found in Chandranath Sarma a new leader of a different type (Guha; 1988 : 120) for whose effort the student community of Brahmaputra Valley got mobilised.

The Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Mahatma assumed the character of a national movement within a very short period, although because of occurrence of

some violent incidents in a few places, particularly at Chauri-Choura, he had to suspend the Movement. The second phase of the movement took place under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi during 1930-32. This period of national movement is known as the Civil Disobedience Movement. The people of Assam along with the students community had taken part. In fact, the Civil Disobedience Movement gained momentum in the different parts of Brahmaputra Valley because of active participation of the students' community which assisted the Indian National Congress. Though Individual Satyagraha was launched in 1940 yet it is said that final phase of the freedom struggle started from August 9, 1942 which is popularly known as Quit India Movement culminating in the attainment of independence, of course, five year later. During the mass Quit India Movement, Assam too performed its own duty by sacrificing a large number of people along with women folk, It should be mentioned here that along with the students community the women folk of Assam played a very significant role in the freedom movement. In almost all the phases of freedom movement since the period of Non-Cooperation Movement until Quit India Movement through the phase of Civil Dis-obedience Movement the heroic role played by the women folk of Assam is praiseworthy. In fact, Assam produced a large number of women leaders whose participation and contributions to freedom struggle were in no way insignificant. Names of Kanaklata, Bhogeswari, Phukanani, Chandra Prava Saikiani, Swarnalata Barua, Basantalata Hazarika, Gueneswari Devi, Mangri or Malati and many others bear the testimony to the fact.

Now we would like to analyse the role of the 'Left Nationalism' (Guha, 1988) along with the role played by the militant revolutionaries in the freedom movement. In this connection it is to be noted here that during the Partition and Swadeshi and Boycott Movement (Andolan) in between 1905 and 1910, a large number of youngmen of Bengal and Punjab joined the militant movement. In Assam too, many youngmen were inspired to participate in those militant, revolutionary and patriotic groups. According to Dutt for the popularity of anti-partition and the Swadeshi movement some Bengal anarchists came to Assam also and tried to secure a hold over its youths and Ambika Roy Chowdhury, Bishnuram Medhi, Triguna Barua, Raktim Bora and

some other youngmen then seem to have come under the spell of anarchism for sometime (Dutt; 1993 : 48). Though protest meetings were held at Dhubri, Gouripur, Goalpara, Gauhati and Dibrugarh responding to call of the Bengal leaders for Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education, nevertheless, it can safely be said that the anti-Partition movement was confined to urban areas, where Bengali elements in the population predominated so far as the Assam Valley was concerned (Barpujari; 1977 : 190). It is felt that the cult of terrorism failed to attract the attention of large number of youngmen in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. At the same time it is also undeniable that for the cause of the country a few Assamese patriotic youths like Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, Triguna Barua, Raktim Bora etc. did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives as far as extremist activities were concerned.

During the 1930s revolutionaries were very active in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Dibrugarh Sub-Division of Brahmaputra Valley. The Anusilan Samity and the Yugantar group of Bengal had their activists busy in organizing terrorist hide-outs in these places (Bhuyan and De; 1978 : 272). Even a branch of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army was also operating in the different parts of Assam. A series of gun-thefts were also organized by the revolutionaries to equip themselves with lethal weapons for political decoity (Ibid : 273). Thus it can be said that the militants revolutionaries and the patriots were also preparing themselves for the cause of independence. The later part of 1930s and the first part of 1940s were very significant in the history of freedom movement of Assam. During this period several left parties – the Congress Socialist Party, Communist Party, Communist League and Forward Block – emerged on the soil of Assam. All these left parties made their appearance simultaneously in the Brahmaputra Valley after 1937 (Guha; 1988 : 250).

Along with these left parties the students and also the youths were also organized on the left ideology. The Assam Chhatra Sammilan, the platform of a united student movement since 1916 was affiliated to All India Students' Federation which founded in 1936. Amiya Dasgupta, the AISF leader, helped radicalization of the Students' Federation and formation of Marxist study circles in several towns of the Brahmaputra Valley (Guha; 1988 : 257). Even a Marxist Youth Study Club which was

known as "Progressive Union" had emerged at Gauhati about 1939. Even the youths were organized under the left ideology. As a result, the All Assam Progressive Youth Association was formed in 1939. It may be noted here that because of the initiative of the leaders like Somnath Lahiri, Biswanath Mukherjee, Amiya Dasgupta, Soumendranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Humayun Kabir the left and socialist ideology became popular in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Thus, we can witness that a large number of leaders of Brahmaputra Valley had emerged along with the students and youths who were imbued with left and socialist ideology. Among them Jadunath Saikia, Dharendra Chandra Dutta, Binoy Bhusan Chakraborty, Nilmoni Barthakur, Pabitra Ray, Sreeman Profulla Goswami, Bishnu Bora, Gouri Sankar Bhattacharyya, Dadhi Mahanta, Debendranath Sarma, Khagen Barbarua, Upendranath Sarma, Haridas Deka, Haren Kalita etc. were prominent. It would be proper to mention here that peasant agitation was also organised in some parts of Brahmaputra Valley by the underground Communist League, as a result of which, the Assam Peasant and Labour Party was formed in 1940. All these parties and platforms were advocating anti-war message to the people of Assam. Although these organizations and platforms were watched by the people with some degree of suspicion yet those organizations and platforms became successful, though in a limited manner, in inculcating a spirit of struggle amongst the students, peasants, youths and other working classes of the province and thereby make their existing organizations thoroughly anti-British in character (Bhuyan and De; Vol. III, 1980 : 137).

From the above discussion we can safely conclude that the role played by Assam during the freedom movement is noteworthy although the leadership was in the hands of the emerging middle class. Even the peasantry which provided the backbone of the anti-British struggle of the Congress in Assam was mobilized through the educated elite (Baruah; 1991 : 93). As stated earlier, the institution of "Raj Mels" which became popular during the 1860s-1890s for the cause of peasant uprisings during this period were also controlled by the emerging middle class. Even the leadership of the Assam Association, Indian National Congress (Assam Wing) which played a very crucial role for the cause of freedom movement was controlled by the

educated elite of the Asamiya Society. The dominating role of the middle class in the different organizations and groups even during the post-independence Assam is not new.

## **2 Post Colonial Phase :**

India attained Independence in the mid-night of August 15, 1947. But the colonial rulers became successful in dividing the people and the country. Thus India became divided into India and Pakistan. At the time of Independence and partition Pakistan had separated into two – East Pakistan and West Pakistan. As a result of Independence and Partition Assam lost the Muslim and Bengali dominated district of Sylhet to East Pakistan along with losing a substantial portion of its territory. Now we would like to analyse the topography and political boundary of Assam during the post-colonial phase.

### **2.1 Topography and Political Boundary :**

Before independence, Assam comprised almost the whole of North-East India, except the states of Manipur and Tripura. The geographical area of British Assam was about 2,55,000 sq.km. At present, the geographical area of Assam is 78,438 Sq.Km (Economic Survey, Assam : 1996-97 : p. 5). Thus, it is said that during the colonial and post colonial period around 1,76,562 Sq.Km. has been sliced off from Assam. Even at the time of independence, Assam lost a large number Sq.Km,. In this connection the observation of Hazarika is noteworthy who said that the geographical extent of Assam what the Britishers had gained was much smaller than what they left at the time of India's independence in 1947. So it is very difficult to present the topography of Assam as the area of this region is not at all static. As stated earlier Assam has been not been the only state of Indian Union which has witnessed most frequent changes in territorial boundaries since Indian independence. Neither did it have any clear sense of political boundary during the colonial period as its area was in constant fluctuations. According to Dasgupta, Assam's boundaries have frequently

changed, first as a result of colonial administrative designs and after independence, as a result of new domains of autonomy carved out and granted to various hill areas by the federal authority (Dasgupta; 1991 : 156). According to Myron Weiner British colonial control of Assam from 1826 gradually expanded by incorporating new areas, including it in the province of Bengal, separating it from Bengal in 1874, redesigning it as a part of separate Muslim Bengali province in 1905, and then reconstituting it in 1912; in 1947 it lost the district of Sylhet to Pakistan and then the formation of units like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal and Mizoram has substantially altered the map of the state (for details see Myron Weiner; 1978 : 84-87). It is clear from the above observation that the geographical area of Assam had started to change even before independence and during the post-independence period four states have emerged out of Assam along with losing the district of Sylhet to Pakistan and "some 60 sq. miles of areas contiguous to Bhutan and claimed to be inhabited predominantly by Bhutanese, had to be ceded (from Assam) at the instance of the Government of India" (Saikia; 1976 : 68 quoted from Hazarika).

Assam is situated at the North-East corner of India. The state is bounded by independent states in almost all sides. The state has a strategic position with more than 400 kms. of international boundary with Bangladesh and with important roads leading to the areas bordering Burma and China (Choudhury; 1989 : 1). To the north of Assam are Tibet, Bhutan and China, to the east lies Burma and China, to the south and west – Bangladesh. Internally the state is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh on the North, Manipur, Nagaland and a part of Arunachal Pradesh on the East and Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya on the South. The Western part of the state is bounded by West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura. About the topography of Assam Choudhury (1989 : 1) has rightly observed : The topography of Assam being T-shaped, the western part of the state is bordered not only by West Bengal but also Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Tripura.

As mentioned earlier, the total area of the state is 78,438 sq. kms, which accounts for about 2.4% of the country's total land area. In terms of area Assam ranks 14<sup>th</sup> among the states of India. The state has two distinct natural regions, viz., the

Brahmaputra Valley comprising 18 districts of plain areas and two districts of hill areas with a total area of 71,516 sq.kms, and the Barak Valley comprising three districts with an area of 6,922 sq.kms. For administrative and revenue purposes the 23 districts are divided into 48 sub-divisions with 149 revenue circles (Economic Survey, Assam : 1996-97, p. 5).

Though four political units came into existence out of composite Assam during the 1960's and 1970's yet the existing Assam is not free from boundary disputes. Several round of talks were held to settle the boundary disputes between the representatives of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, between the representatives of Assam and Nagaland, between the representatives of Assam and Meghalaya since the creation of these states emerging out of Assam. Even the Mizoram government has been demanding that all the areas inhabited by the Mizos now lying in different states- Assam and Manipur should be integrated to it. But the dispute has not yet been finally settled (for details see Rao; 1989 : 1-14). Even today different organizations have been demanding for the creation of separate homeland outside of Assam although different autonomous councils came into existence, during early years of 1990s. The historic Bodo Accord was signed in February, 1993 and as a result of which an interim Bodoland Autonomous Council was constituted; but this Accord had failed to deliver the goods as the leadership of the Bodo state movement alleged. So the ABSU (All Bodo Students' Union) and the BPAC (Bodoland Peoples' Action Committee) have been demanding a separate state of Bodoland covering an area of 25,471.1 sq.kms (Choudhury; 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1998 in an article in The Assam Tribune). The leadership of Autonomous Councils of North Cachar Hill District and Karbi Anglong which came into existence in 1995 also turned down, the Memorandum of Understanding signed with Assam government by terming it as "unworkable", reviving the demand for creation of an Autonomous state comprising North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong (The Assam Tribune : 19<sup>th</sup> June : 1998). The proposed area of autonomous state comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills as demanded in a memorandum submitted by the Autonomous State Demand Committee and the Karbi Students Association is 15,237 sq.kms (A memorandum to the Prime Minister of India by

ASDC and KSA on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1987, quoted from Datta; 1993 : 65). The Barak Valley did also witness regional demands but now it is somewhat subdued in comparison to those of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam although at the present juncture separate Barakland is gaining momentum. All these demands may require a territorial re-adjustment of the political boundaries of the present state of Assam in the remote future.

## 2.2 Demographic Change :

Before embarking on the discussion of demographic change during the post-colonial phase it may be mentioned here that different races of mankind – Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan had migrated into the region – particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley since the ancient time which made Assam a multi-racial region. Although migration took place from time to time it is important to note here that rapid demographic transformation of Assam – particularly the Brahmaputra Valley was made during the colonial rule under the colonial aegis.. Demographer Dass (1980) has observed that Assam's rate of population growth during 1901-1951 has been the second highest (137.80%) in the World, exceeded only by Brazil (204.00%). During the post-colonial phase this trend did not stop, rather a similar trend continued. Hussain has observed that after independence ... over the years, Assam has been transformed from a land abundant and thinly populated state to a land scarce and thickly populated state (Hussain; 1993 : 60).

Following Table No. 2.3 projects the trend of population growth of Assam as compared to the all India level. From the table it is also clear that Assam's rate of growth of population has been always higher than that of India's average since the colonial period. It is important to note here that in the decade 1911-21, when India experienced a negative rate of population growth of - 0.30 percent, Assam had experienced a higher growth rate, that is, 20.47%. And the gap of growth between India and Assam was as high as 20.77%. It is also noted here that Assam's population constituted only 1.38% of India's total population in 1901, but by 1971 the share of Assam to the population of India nearly doubled (2.67%). Thus it is found that the

trend of population growth in Assam has been always increasing as compared to All-India level. Mention may be made here that we have shown the population trend in Assam as compared to all India level since 1901 to 1971 because the leadership of Assam Movement along with the reputed scholars argued that Assam's population increased only because of the influx of foreigners from Bangladesh and Nepal (Hussain; 1993 : 60)

During the post-colonial period also we can witness the increasing trend of population of Assam – particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley and in Hill areas of Assam. The leadership of the Assam Movement held the view that the demographic transportation was made only due to the influx of foreign nationals. Even the scholars during the Assam Movement went to the extent of saying that about 45 lakhs foreign nationals were living illegally in Assam. That is, almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total population of Assam were illegal foreign nationals which ultimately changed the demography of Assam. In this connection it is important to note the observation of demographer Dass (1980) about the high rate of growth of population of Assam according to whom (1) heavy immigration, (2) high natural rate of growth since 1921 and (3) relative absence of mobility of the indigenous people of Assam were the three causes for the high rate of growth of the population of Assam. In addition of these causes, we would like to emphasize that the poverty-ridden agrarian society of Assam should be held responsible for the higher growth rate of population (Hussain (1993 : 63) has observed :

... unless one succeeds in bringing down the number of people living below the poverty line substantially, Assam would continue to record a higher population growth.

The high growth rate of population in Assam during the decade 1961- 71 is attributable to the migration, high birth rate and declining in death rates (Economic Survey : Government of Assam : 1978 – 1979 : 3)

### 2.3 Trend of Population Growth : India and Assam 1901 – 1971

Year		India		Assam			
No. in Lakh	Variation Lakh	Variation of P.C	No. in Lakh	Variation Lakh	Variation of P.C	Difference excess over India	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1901	2383	-	-	32.90 (1.38)	-	-	-
1911	2520	137	5.73	38.49 (1.52)	5.59	16.99	11.26
1921	2512	-8	-0.30	46.37(1.85)	7.88	20.47	20.77
1931	2789	277	11.00	55.61(1.99)	9.24	19.22	8.92
1941	3185	396	14.23	66.94(2.10)	11.33	20.37	6.14
1951	3610	425	13.31	80.29(2.22)	13.35	19.84	6.63
1961	4391	781	21.64	108.37(2.47)	28.08	34.97	13.33
1971	5479	1088	24.80	146.25(2.67)	37.88	34.95	10.15

Figures in brackets are percentage to India's population.

- Source :
1. Census of India 1971, Assam Part II A and earlier decennial Census of relevant years
  2. Economic Survey, Assam 1974-75, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam

It should be important to note here that along with the higher rate of population of Assam the population of entire North-Eastern Region has been increasingly rapidly as compared to all India average, the decadal growth rate of North-Eastern Region except Mizoram has been much higher. The growth of population in the North-Eastern states during 1961-71 can be seen from the following Table :

## 2.4 Density and Decennial Growth of Population in North-Eastern State

(Thousand Persons)

State/Union Territory	Area (sq.km)	Population (Persons)	Density (Persons)	Decimal Growth (1961-71) Percentage
1	2	3	4	5
Arunachal Pradesh	83,578	468	6	38.91
Assam	78,523	14,625	186	34.95
Manipur	22,356	1,073	48	37.53
Meghalaya	22,489	1,012	45	31.50
Mizoram	21,987	332	16	24.92
Nagaland	16,527	516	31	39.88
Tripura	10,477	1,556	149	36.28
Total	2,55,037	19,582	74	35.03
All India	3,280,483	5,47,949	167	24.80

- Sources :
1. NEC – Basic Statistics of N.E. Region, 1992.
  2. Economic Survey, Assam, 1974-75 and 1980-81, Government of Assam.

From the table it is apparent that except Mizoram which witnessed a political disturbance since the mid-sixties until the completion of Census operation of 1971 which affected the growth of population, all the other north-eastern states witnessed a higher growth rate of population during 1961-71. Even Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland were no exception where “inner-line permit system” has been in operation. Decennial growth rate

of population of these two states were 38.91% and 39.88% respectively. The growth of population in the North-East has been a part of developmental process initiated by the Central Government since the sixties for which many outsiders and not necessarily

foreigners came to these small states (Hussain; 1993 : 66). At the same time it should be mentioned here that the demographic transformation of Assam was made because of the large-scale migrants which was held responsible for social, economic and political crisis in the eighties.

### 2.3 Social Identities :

Before explaining the social identities of the Asamiyas during the post-colonial phase it would be important to mention here that Asamiya language has been the most important symbol of the Asamiya nationality and became more so after prolonged agitation for its due recognition. As stated earlier the traditional outsiders in Assam have been the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, the Black Tribals, the Nepalis and the Marwaris. Among these the Asamiya identity clashed more sharply with that of the Bengalis. The earliest case of confrontation followed the replacement of Persian as the medium of instruction at the school level and as the court language by Bengali in 1831 in the Bengal Presidency of which Assam was a part at that time. The conflict arose because the Asamiya language was not given the same status in Assam. Instead of giving this status to Asamiya language, this status was given to Bengali language in Assam in 1837 and this status of Bengali language continued in Assam till 1873. Oommen has observed thus :The Assamese fear and anxiety about losing their cultural autonomy dates back to 1837, when Bengali was introduced as the medium of instruction and administration in Assam. They also feared the possibility of converting Assam into a Muslim majority state as the Muslim League mobilization began (Oommen; 1990 : 80).

Even the Assamese middle class, during the colonial period became apprehensive about the inflow of Bengali immigrants. Barooah has observed thus :

Large-scale immigration coupled with the incorporation of sylhet a populous Bengali speaking district into Assam in 1874 threatened to reduce the Assamese speaking people into a minority in their own homeland. The emerging Assamese middle class viewed this as a threat to their linguistic and cultural identity, so much so, that by the nineteen thirties an influential section of the Assamese middle class favoured secession from India so as to save the Assamese race from extinction (Barooah; 1991 : 26-27) although this

emerging middle class, in the subsequent years, gave up the demand of extreme step of seceding from India.

In the post-independence period we can witness a series of popular movements in Assam. These movements were launched over the issues like the recognition of Assamese as the official language and its introduction as the medium of instruction at the college level, establishment of oil refineries in Assam. In each one of these movements issues connected with Assamese nationality and its protection were raised again and again (Ibid : 32). The leadership of the anti-Bahiragato and anti-foreigner movement in Assam during 1979 – 1985 also expressed serious concern about the danger arising out of the influx of outsiders and foreigners into Assam which caused a threat to the social, political and economic entity of the Assamese people. Even the well-wishers of the leadership of the Assam movement feared that firstly, Assam might be converted into a Bengali-speaking state and secondly, it might be converted into a Muslim majority state.

It is important to note here that the claim of the Assamese leaders of being dominated by foreigners (mainly Bengali Muslims) did not tally with the empirical reality. The various censuses since partition quite clearly show that there has been no increase in the percentage of Muslim population in Assam (since partition to 1971 census). Demographer Dass (1980) has shown that other than between 1911 – 31, the increase of the Muslim population was never higher than that of its Hindu counterpart. According to Rao ( 1983 : 258) “since 1951, the Muslim population increased by 26.9 percent. This is comparable to the All India rate. So there is no danger for Assam becoming a part of Bangladesh. The Hindu population constitutes 75 percent of the total population. The Hindus occupy all the key positions in politics, administration, industry and economics”. Excluding the predominantly Bengali speaking Barak Valley the Asamiya, as per the last census report, constituted an overwhelming 72% of the total population of Brahmaputra Valley. Over the last sixty years, the Asamiyas have increased their percentage from 49% in 1911 to 72% in 1971. On the contrary the Bengalis have decreased from 21% in 1911 to 11% in 1971 (Hussain; 1993 : 239). “In regard to the total population of Assam the percentage of Assamese speaking

population has increased from 56.20% to 60.85% from 1951 to 1971. But the Bengali speaking population is more or less stationary. It was 19.45% in 1951 and 19.71% in 1971. Therefore the fear that Assam is likely to lose its identity if Bengali speaking population increases is an unfounded fear. The Assamese will not surrender their language, their culture and their customs to any one. They are hugging to them just as a child hugs to the breast of its mother” (Rao & Hazarika; 1983 : 258).

Thus it is clear that the identity crisis of the Asamiya nationality is not based on facts. Neither the Bengali Muslims nor the Bengali Hindus had threatened the Asamiya language, culture along with the Asamiya nationality itself. The resentment and conflict between the Asamiyas and the Bengalis which was created during the colonial period by giving official status to the Bengali language in Assam in 1837 was a part of more complicated process of Asamiya nationality formation which had pronounced chauvinistic aspects. This became clear when Assamese was made the official language in 1960 much to the resentment of the Hill Tribal population of Assam which could not be considered Bahiragatos by any standard. The APHLC came out with the demand for a hill state against this official language policy. These are but instances of how the legacy of Assam Movement contributed towards minoritization of different communities in Assam. The Assam Accord was a logical development of this process.

#### 2.4 Economic Situation :

The nature of Indian economy which was chosen by the Indian state immediately after independence is basically capitalist in nature. Though India has a large public sector and a nationalized banking system yet it cannot be denied that much more importance has been given to private capitalists. They have been given the decisive role in developing and modernizing the post-colonial economy. And this capitalist path of development which the Indian state had to choose after its independence is responsible for the uneven development of other parts of Indian state. It has also generated regional disparities. Being the part of Indian state, Assam along with other North-Eastern states has been suffering from this and this region has been transferred into a much more depressed region. Even the political leadership in the

post-colonial Assam is to be blamed as they have not become successful in paving the way for sluggish economic situation. It should be important to note here that Assam's economy is primarily agrarian. Since independence, in this sector, no development has been done. Agricultural production remained stagnant during the seventies. Assam is rich in natural resources, but no progress has been made in the industrial sector. In the post-colonial period Assam had got petroleum (oil) industry and plywood industry yet Assam is deprived of her legitimate share and benefits from these industries. Transport and communication of Assam has not been satisfactory although some initiatives were taken for the development of transport and communication. Employment situation was not far from satisfactory on the eve of the Assam Movement. Thus its economy remained stagnant and backward until the seventies, infrastructural facilities were underdeveloped, but at the same time its population was alarmingly increasing. Choudhury (1989) has pointed out some of the important factors for which the economy of Assam has remained poor inspite of her natural resources. According to him unscientific agriculture, poor irrigation, recurrence of floods, poor land reforms, under-utilization of resources, poor industrialization, weak transport and communication base, distant market, inadequate capital, poor entrepreneurship, inadequate power, poor literacy and education, low level of technology, low quality of labour, excessive pressure of population etc. are the main reasons because of which the economy of Assam has remained poor inspite of her rich natural resources.

## 2.5 Political Situation (upto Assam Accord – 1985) :

If we look into the political situation of Assam during the post-colonial period then we will be able to see that the people of Assam, barring a very few were trying to prepare themselves to accept the new political order. It is found that the democratic and secular electoral politics during the initial years of post-independence period changed the Assam's politics qualitatively. Some sections of people were trying to mobilize politically on the basis of language, tribe, caste, ethnicity and class. Of course, virus of communalism and factionalism were also found in Assam's politics. For instance, a large number of people (about 7 lakhs) from a particular community fled away to East Pakistan in panic particularly from the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup,

Darrang, Nowgong and Lakhimpur, although some of them came back to Assam after the 1951 Census. Then we can witness that a large number of refugees from East Pakistan came to Assam. We can also witness that some of the people belonging to Naga Hill districts began to start violent agitation whose ultimate objective was independent Nagaland. Even after the creation of Nagaland within India in 1963 the tension in the region has been prevailing. Thus the first act of dismemberment of the state of composite Assam was effected in 1963. In 1960, Assam Language Act was passed. The language policy of the Govt. of Assam had enraged the people of the hills; particularly the Khasis, Jaintias, Garos etc. including the people of the Barak Valley. Because of this language policy we can also witness the conflict between the Asamiyas and the Bengalis which ultimately led to Asamiya Bengali riots in Assam. The present Mizoram, which was known as the Lushai Hills, was also a part of Assam.

The Mizos under MNF launched secessionist activities from the year 1966 and to stop the insurgency, the Govt. of India decided to create a Union Territory in 1972. Thus, Assam was again dismembered in 1972. During the same time because of the combined movement of the Garos, Jaintias and Khasis another separate "autonomous state" which was known as Meghalaya came into existence in 1970 which ultimately transformed into full-fledged state in 1972 by the Govt. of India. In this way, Assam was further dismembered. Another important part of Assam was North East Frontier Agency (NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh) which also separated from Assam during 1970's and converted into a Union Territory and was named as Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, composite Assam was disintegrated into several states for which Assam became territorially much smaller in the early 1972. During this period India was engaged in two important events. Both the events directly or indirectly had to hurt the Asamiya nationality. The first event occurred in 1962 when Indo-China War took place. In 1962, in the wake of the event ( the North East Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A. now Arunachal Pradesh) Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru admitted to the people of Assam his helplessness over which perniciously inflicted injury on the psyche of the entire Asamiya nationality (Hussain; 1993 : 89). Another event took place in 1971. During the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971 a large number of refugees took shelter

in Assam which was a part of India. Nobody knows precisely as to how many Bangladeshi nationals went back to their country after liberation and how many stayed back in Assam illegally (Ibid : 89). The large number of Bangladeshi nationals as alleged by the agitationists of the Assam Movement during 1979-85 changed the demography of Assam along with threatening of Asamiya identity and nationality. In regard to the electoral politics of Assam we can witness that since independence till 1972, the Indian National Congress was the only national party which won majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections. In other words, from 1952 till 1972 the Congress formed Government in Assam. But it is important to note here that after the 1972 elections to the State Legislature, the influence of high castes within the Congress Party was shattered particularly in the leadership of the Assembly. Thus the leadership and the power went to the backward caste leaders within the Congress in the year 1972 when the Government was formed by Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha.

In 1972, Assam witnessed again Asamiya-Bengali conflict in connection with the issue of medium of instruction. Although the Asamiyas became successful by 1972 in establishing dominance over the legislature, the state government and the universities (In 1972, Asamiya was made the only medium of instruction other than English at the College level after the agitation launched by All Assam Students' Union was over) yet it is said that the minorities were also organizing themselves for the protection of their rights at this time. Over the language issue in August 1972, an Assam Linguistic Minorities' Rights Committee was formed at the initiative of the Bengalees but with the Chairman of the North Cachar District Council, Sonaram Thousen (a Congressite), as President and Charan Narzary (Secretary of the Assam Plains Tribals Councils Organization, of the non-Congress Bodo-Kacharies) became its Vice-President (Chaucer; 1973 : 221). Thus, the ethnic groups and minorities came close together over the language issue; even in course of time we can see that a long struggle gained momentum against the hegemonic role of Asamiya ruling class over the recognition of Bodo language. Mishing and Karbi tribals also tried to organize themselves for the development of their own dialect/language. In regard to the recognition and development of the Bodo language, dialect/language of the Mishings,

it must be admitted that the Asamiya ruling class never supported them. Rather, dealt with the movements of these tribal people with strong hand. Thus, it can be said that Asamiya language and literature further developed during the post-colonial period although other indigenous dialects/languages of the various tribal groups in Assam except the Bodo language, did not develop much (Hussain; 1993 : 90). In this connection we would like to point out that when the different groups of people had to fight for the protection of their rights along with the recognition of their language/dialect etc. a section of the progressive and democratic Asamiya intellectuals along with democratic and secular organisations had to support these movements.

As stated earlier, since independence till 1972 Assam's electoral politics revolved round the Indian National Congress. Of course, a small break was to be found during February, 1978 to November, 1979 when Janata Party formed the government, together with the Plain Tribal Councils of Assam. Even during the Assam Agitation (1979-85) in 1983 Assembly Election, Congress (I) came to capture the political power in Assam. Thus, it is apparently clear that politically Assam has always been dominated by the Congress Party, as since independence till 1985 except a very brief period Congress Party was able to capture the political power of Assam. It is worth mentioning here that since 1972 the dominant role of the high castes within the Congress Party collapsed which changed the political situation of Assam although they continued to dominate the burcaucrazy in Assam, the cducational sectors, the business sectors, the Press and other state institutions It cannot be denied that because of this politically frustrated high caste Congressmen were solidly behind the students' movement of 1972 in regard to the medium of instruction. Again these politically frustrated Congressmen helped in launching Assam Movement during 1979-85. These we will explore in the next chapter.

## Notes

1. Labour force who migrated to Assam from the different areas/regions of India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were as follows :

- (i) Bengal – Bahrapur, Purulia.
- (ii) Bihar – Ranchi, Gurokhpur, Hazaribagh.
- (iii) Uttar Pradesh – Daltonganj.
- (iv) Orissa – Bilaspur, Chaibasa, Domoka, Jagadapur, Sambalpur.
- (v) Madhya Pradesh – Raipur, Rampurhat, Jabbalpur, Joshpur.
- (vi) Maharastra – Nasik.
- (vii) Andhra Pradesh – Telengana.
- (viii) Tamilnadu – Vigianagram.

2. “Line System” – an idea which was first mooted in 1916 was adopted by the Colonial Government in 1920 which imposed restrictions on settlement in certain areas.

According to this system, certain specified areas of the province were divided into three classes or lines :

- (a) Immigrants’ Line – Within this ‘line’ land could be allotted to immigrants only.
- (b) Mixed Line – Both immigrants and indigenous people could obtain settlements here.
- (c) Assamese Line – Only the indigenous people could take up land here. (Goswami : 1994:25).

3. Colonisation Scheme - The first colonisation scheme was introduced in Nowgong District in 1928, and thereafter introduced in Barpeta and Mangaldoi Sub-division. Under the colonisation scheme the government took the responsibility to settle immigrants in a planned way in selected places. Though

the scheme was better than allowing immigrants to settle anywhere they liked, it could not restrict the settlement only in the approved areas. (Goswami : 1994:24).

4. Raij-Mels or Mels – Raij-mels or mels were assemblies of the common people under the leadership of local leaders like Gossains, Dolois, or influential land owners, being held in different parts of the country to ventilate popular grievances and voice popular opinion on matters concerning the people, mainly in the social and economic spheres (Dutt 1993:28).
5. Assam Association – Though it is not certain yet it is believed that an Association of the same name existed in upper Assam as early as 1882. However, it was in 1903 that the Assam Association was found afresh on a firm and really wider basis, with Manik Chandra Barooah as its Secretary, Raja Prabhatchandra Barua of Gouripur as its President and Jagannath Barooah as its vice-President (Barpujari, 1977: 172 and Guha, 1988:63).
6. Inner-Line Permit System - Inner Line Regulation was introduced during the Colonial Rule in the hill-tribal areas. Even after independence, the system is continued and according to the system the non-Nagas and the non-Arunachalis need to take permission to enter the state concerned.