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Outlook for the Future

ABDUR ROB KHAN

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THE ASSAM TANGLE : OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Assam crisis, entering into the 5th year of its existence in 1984, presents a case of interesting, and at the same time, a difficult piece of analysis to political scientists for a number of reasons. In the first place, there is scope of looking at the problem in a broader perspective of the North-East syndrome, geopolitically important not only to India but to the region as a whole. Assam borders on the troubled Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya on the one hand and stands in close proximity to China on the other, with whom India's relations have been sore since 1962, recent normalisation attempts notwithstanding. Moreover, all access to the region from the mainland runs through Assam, a narrow corridor at that. Secondly, at the micro-level, the Assam body politic had so long stood on a precarious balance of diverse ethnic as well as socio-economic interest groups so that structural changes in some of the major components of the equation due to a host of historical, social and political factors have resulted in ethnic and civil violences of unprecedented magnitude in Assam's history. Thirdly, what apparently started as protests against existence of illegal voters in the Assam electoral rolls in 1979, organized by a combine of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and subsequently formed All Assam *Gana Sangram Parishad* (AAGSP), soon snowballed into broader conflicts among the mainstream Assamese, the Bengali *bahiragatas* (outsiders) and the tribal Assamese, one pitted against the other, culminating into the Guhapur and Nellie massacre in February 1983 which left over 3,000 dead and 300,000 homeless.[1] Assam now presents a multifaceted tangled crisis in which the Assamese have been fighting a three-pronged battle against

1. See Sanjoy Hazarika, "In Assam the killings abate but fears linger", *The New York Times*, 28 March 1983, p. A2.

the Centre and the state government, the *bahiragatas* and a section of the tribal people. The Centre faces the dilemma of tackling a group of rather obstinate agitators as well as meeting the demands of other minority groups like the tribals and the Bengalis. Part of the confused tribal people are opposed to the agitators and others to the *bahiragatas* or 'aliens'; and the *bahiragata* Bengalis are facing the hostile Assamese, the tribals and an ambivalent Centre. Fourthly and more importantly, the Assam agitation over the 'illegal foreigners' or 'aliens' issue have so far defied any predicted course of events. What was initially perceived to be a simple law and order problem created by a group of young students, most of whom "are not even 21 and do not have voting rights"[2] now has turned into a political crisis with wider implications. The February 1983 carnage was followed by a lull in the phased agitation, as was also in the decision of the AASU and AAGSP leadership for the time being,[3] although sporadic bombings, arson and killings continued at times. The Saikia government that came to power amidst the bloody violence also could take some of the wind out of the agitationists' sail through projecting itself as a die hard Assamese regime[4] and initiating a number of tangible administrative and developmental programmes. These two factors led many including of course, Mr. Saikia himself, to talk with optimism about the future of the 4-year old agitation.[5] But in August 1983, AASU

2. *India Today*, 15 August 1983, p. 35
3. The *Guardian*, 29 March 1983, p. 7
4. Mr. Saikia's oft-repeated saying has been : "protecting my Assamese nation". See *India Today*, op. cit.
5. Said Mr. Hiteswar Saikia in September 1983 : "I have controlled the situation. People said there will be killings during monsoon. There were none. People said there will be violence on Independence Day. There were none. I will manage the winter also, I am confident." See *India Today*, 15 September 1983, pp 36-38. Saikia is also quoted as saying: "What is the agitation about ? They wanted that border should be secured, that is being done. They wanted the post-1961 entrants to be deported and that is being done. The only problem is relocation of 1961-71 entrants. Is that enough for the agitation?' See *ibid.* Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha, a former Chief Minister of Assam and a Left and Democratic Alliance leader also remarked that the agitation was over. See *ibid*.

declared that phased agitation was to resume. Rajiv Gandhi's visit in late August 1983 was marked by violence and bomb blasts. And so was Mrs. Gandhi's visit in November last. Thus optimism over Assam agitation soon proved to be deceptive. Even intelligence sources were surprised at the stamina of the agitation.

In the meantime, certain qualitative changes have been introduced in Assam politics. In the first place, the dormant extremist elements who first manifested themselves in an organized manner in February 1983 seemed to have made the line of demarcation between the moderates and themselves sharper. Along side it, there was also a division in the ranks of the agitation leadership along communal lines.[6] Such chasms are forcing the moderates in the leadership to continually search for new strategies including its latest overtures toward forming a regional party or at least, uniting the existing regional parties some of which even uphold separatist stand.[7] Secondly, the views and interests of the marginal groups including the plains tribes have also been polarised. Recently there was a decision to form a new party, namely, the "United Tribal Nationalists' Liberation Front" by the plains tribes upholding the cause of a separate state for the tribes of Assam.[8] Thirdly, there are continued reports of the establishment of linkages between Assamese terrorists and extremists on the one hand and insurgents in the neighbouring areas including the Naga and the Burmese rebels on the other. Fourthly, unlike the pre-February 1983 situation, the state government of Assam, which has been dismissed by the agitationists as an illegal regime "of the foreigners, by the foreigners and for the foreigners" has emerged as a party to be reckoned with in any future negotiation. Finally, the Centre seems to have changed its stand radically on the so-called illegal infiltration issue by saying of late that there had been continued infiltration across the Assam-Bangladesh borders and by announcing its plan to construct a barbed-wire fence all along the Indo-Bangladesh borders. Incidentally,

6. See *India Today*, 15 August 1983.
7. See *India Today*, 15 January 1984, pp 50-51.
8. See *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 May 1984.

the construction work has already been started in late March 1984 giving rise to border violences and creating tensions in Indo-Bangladesh relations. On the other hand, the AASU-AAGSP leadership still remains suspicious about the Centre's intention, particularly about the tribunals for detection and deportation of foreigners. All these developments seem to have made the protracted crisis a tangled one and led policy makers and observers wonder as to what shape the Assam problem may take in future.

It is at this stage and against this backdrop that a dispassionate examination of a wide range of issues is needed. For example:

— Is the movement on the part of the Assamese, both tribals and nontribals, aimed at attaining greater share in political and economic activities and hence directed against all *bahiragatas*[9] who are predominantly Bengalis including Bengali Hindus or, is it a movement predominantly communal in character directed against only the Muslims?

— Is it a movement for larger autonomy of the state as a whole and for greater control of the natural resources of Assam? In other words, is it a movement directed against the Centre to redress the grievances arising from historical deprivation of the native Assamese of their legitimate share in the management of the political and economic affairs of the state?

— Is it a movement rooted in conflicts among various interest groups regardless of their ethnic and ideological differences or, is it a class struggle for capturing political and economic power of the state?

— Is the movement a subterfuge to entrench the elite groups who are non-tribal Assamese natives ?

— Finally, is the movement, in any way secessionist in character ? If so, is this also a part of a wider movement linked with

9. The *bahiragatas* include Bengali Hiudus and Muslims from the then East Bengal, Nepalese from Nepal, Marwaris and Muslims from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, plantation workers from Orissa and Bihar. See Annexure 1.

the other neighbouring states which are ethnically and culturally different from their western neighbours?

These basic questions may be rephrased into a set of operative questions as under:

— What are the historical forces that led to the perceived demographic imbalance and relative backwardness of the state of Assam?

— What are the forces that led to the polarisation of the various interest groups in Assam?

— How do the different interest groups including the Centre, the state government, the native Assamese both tribal non-tribal, the leadership of AASU and AAGSP, the so-called Bengali immigrants, both Hindus and Muslims, view the present crisis?

The present paper is an attempt at answering some of these pertinent questions. The paper first looks into the historical developments in which clues to some of the issues raised above may be found. Then, on the basis of a review of the course of events and viewpoints of the interest groups some tentative deductions have been made as to what shape the Assam agitation might take in future.

GENESIS OF THE CRISIS

Assam since remote past has undergone a series of transformation in territory, administrative status, demography and the state of balance of the socio-political forces. The economic grievances of the Assamese, alleged ethnic imbalance which is the focus of the turmoil, and the balance of socio-political forces that greatly shaped the trend of the movement all may be traced, to a great extent, to these transformations. This paper argues that the real reason behind the crisis was the historical deprivation of the Assamese people resulting from frequent territorial adjustments and changes in the administrative status of Assam and lack of break-through

in the development of the economy, particularly development of infrastructure and exploitation of resources for local development. And the dynamics of the movement seems to have been provided by the state of balance of the various socio-political forces. The perceived demographic imbalance resulting from the demographic transformation, which again is a historical reality, provided the vehicle of outlet of the grievances. In what follows, a brief review of the various transformations has been made.

Politico-administrative Transformation

Present Assam, one of the smaller states of the Republic of India, stands on an area of 78,523 sq.km. with a population of 19.1 million as of 1981.[10] The state is bounded by the Indian states of West Bengal (Bengali speaking) Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura (Bengali speaking) as well as by Bangladesh (Bengali speaking) and Bhutan. Assam thus borders on a region with more than 145 million Bengalis, the third largest linguistic group in Asia after the Chinese and the Hindi speaking people.[11] The state comprised of 9 districts upto July 1983 when the present Saikia government carved out six more districts. The Brahmaputra valley consists of Goalpara, Nowgong, North Lakhimpur, Kamrup, Sibsagar and Dibrugarh. The capital earlier was located at Shillong (now in Meghalaya) but it was shifted to a tea godown in Dispur, a suburb of Gauhati, after Meghalaya had been separated from Assam in 1972.

Ancient Assam figures prominently in early Sanskrit works as Kamrupa.[12] Towards the end of the 13th century, Assam was conquered by the Ahoms, a tribe from Thailand, who crossed into upper Assam through Burma. They intermarried with local people,

10. See Myron Weiner, "The Political Demography of Assam's Anti-Immigrant Movement", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June) 1983.
11. *Ibid.*
12. See T.S. Murty, *Assam: the difficult years*, (New Delhi : Himalayan Books 1983) p. ix.

adopted the Assamese language, in time converted themselves from Buddhism to Hinduism and established the Ahom Kingdom.[13] The East India Company intervened in Assam politics in 1773 ending some four hundred years of independence under the Ahom reign. Assam was briefly under Burmese occupation at the beginning of the 19th century. The East India Company however, drove the Burmese out and after conclusion of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, it was incorporated in Company's territories.

The Company's economic interest in Assam increased greatly as Britain lost its tea trade with China in 1883 and Assam promised to be a prospective tea growing area. As local people were reluctant to undertake toilsome job in tea gardens, a new economic enterprise at that, the British imported tea garden labour from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc. They also dismantled the Ahom administrative structure unsuitable to their own bureaucracy and began to bring more Bengalis, in particular the Bengali Hindus. This was the first externally caused immigration that presaged the relegation of the Assamese to the periphery in bureaucracy and other professions. Bengali was declared as the official language of Assam.

Assam in the meantime was declared as a fully-fledged province of British India in 1874. Until then, Assam meant roughly the region known as the Brahmaputra valley and Goalpara district. The surrounding hills were annexed gradually. Cachar plains had earlier been annexed from the Cachari kingdom. Assam was placed under the control of a Chief Commissioner with its capital in Shillong. The province also included Sylhet district, a predominantly Bengali Muslim area, most of which is now in Bangladesh.

In 1905, the British partitioned the densely populated province of Bengal into a predominantly Bengali Hindu province in the west and a new province of "Eastern Bengal and Assam". Both the Bengali Hindus and the Assamese bitterly resented the partition. In 1911 the partition was annulled and Assam was reconstituted as a

13. *Ibid.*

separate province, one that included the predominantly Bengali Muslim district of Sylhet and predominantly Bengali Hindu district of Cachar. These boundaries remained in tact until 1947 when a major portion of Sylhet was transferred to the then East Pakistan. The Assamese people allege that the loss of Sylhet resulted in not only loss of physical territories but also of important mineral resources and industrial ventures.

Another series of physical transformation followed the 1962 linguistic convulsion. Nagaland was made a separate state in 1963. Meghalaya, Arunachal and Mizoram were made separate states in in 1972. Consequently, Assam's area shrank from 2,23,540 sq.km. to 78,523 sq. km. while its population continued to rise. One immediate consequence of this separation was the shrinkage in the size of the Assamese economy and the opportunities of employment in administrative and other sectors.

All these changes have to be seen in the context of Assamese social changes and stages of economic development. The emergence of the Assamese middle class accompanied by an increase in educated population and their rising expectation led to a clash of interests with the Bengal middle class Hindus. The mounting unemployment—educated unemployment in particular—intensified such conflicts. Despite plenty of natural resources a lack of break-through in the development of the state's economy and employment opportunities aggravated the situation. Communication, other infrastructural facilities and exploitation of the natural resources remained the most neglected areas. A tenuous railway line connects Assam and other North Eastern states with the rest of India but at one point the line passes through the narrow Siliguri corridor wedged between Chinese territories on the north and Bangladesh on the south. Other communication systems, are also deplorable : perennial floods and heavy rainfall frequently make rail, road and river communication hazardous. Only one bridge across the Brahmaputra connects the two sections of Assam. A broad-gauge line and more bridges across the Brahmaputra have been long standing demands of the

Assamese. For shipping of oil, tea, timber and jute, Assam has to depend on the Calcutta port located far away and in the process, ends up paying large sum of export earnings as taxes and handling charges. A dry port in Gauhati has been another long standing demand.

Need for a major break-through in development, particularly in communication did not come to the limelight until 1962 NEFA (North East Frontier Agengy) debacle that left the Assamese rudely shocked. As overall Indian economy worsened during the late 1960s, other developmental issues were sharpened. For example, in 1975 roughly 1.5 million labour force were estimated to be unemployed. In 1978, the figure shot up to 2 million (roughly one-tenth of the population).[14] Gradually strains have been felt in other sectors like transport, trade, and more importantly, agriculture, where incidentally 'non-locals' or 'non-Assamese' have been engaged since long. As long as land-man ratio was favourable, protests against the so-called aliens were mute. But as economic conditions were worsening, objections against non-locals sharing jobs and economic opportunities became louder. 'Illegal voters' coming of the 'aliens' therefore could be used as a handy political instrument. Existence of 'illegal voters' in the voter lists has been known since long. Many elections were held on the basis of such electoral rolls. But it was during the 1977 General Elections and 1978 Assembly elections that such grievances came to a boiling point over the electorate issue.

Demographic Transformation

The agitation leaders held that people from Bangladesh as well as from Nepal had entered Assam illegally mainly in the post-partition period. They also alleged that these people swelled in number, adopted Assamese language or, at least returned Assamese as their mother tongue in census reports and have been competing the Asssamese in political as well as in economic fields. And in the process, their

14. See V. I. K. Sarin, *India's North-East in Flame*, (New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1980).

Assamese identity was in jeopardy. These views may be passed through the test of facts vs. allegations.

Trend in population increase: Assam, standing on one of the biggest demographic fault lines of Asia, has been the fastest growing area in the Subcontinent. Its population has increased nearly six-fold since 1901 when it had a population of 3.3 million.[15] India's total population has increased less than three-fold over the period as may be seen at Table 1. The rate of growth of population in Assam during 1901-51 (137.80 percent) has been second highest in the world, exceeded only by Brazil (204.0 percent). In comparison with other states also, the rate of growth of population has been higher as may be seen at Table 2.

Two factors may be held responsible for population increase in Assam : natural increase and immigration or alleged infiltration, the latter being emphasised by the movement leaders and native Assamese. How can one explain this trend of population increase ? From Tables 1 and 2, we have seen that rate of increase of Assam's population has always been higher than that of the country as a whole or any other state. In the decade 1911-21 when India experienced a negative growth rate of population of 0.30 percent,[16] Assam experienced a growth rate of 20.47 percent, the lone instance of this kind. Secondly, Assam's population, as percentage of total population of India increased from 1.38 percent to 2.10 percent over the period 1901-41, whereas between 1941-71, the rate increased from 2.10 percent to 2.67 percent. Thus the apparently unusual growth rate of population in Assam over the decennial periods 1951-61 or 1961-71 is not at all unusual when seen in the context of the growth rate of total Indian population during those sub-periods when the second stage of demographic transition in India had already set in following launching of development planning. In fact, gap between decennial growth rates of both Assam and India started to decline since 1961. From Tables

15. See Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil : Migration and Ethnic Conflict in Assam* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 82.
16. See Weiner, *op. cit.*

Table 1 : Trend of Population in India and Assam, 1901-1981.

Year	India		Assam		
	No. (mn.)	Percentage variation	No. (mn.)		Percentage Variation
1901	238.30	—	3.29	(1.38)	
1911	252.00	5.37	3.85	(1.52)	16.99
1921	251.20	— 0.30	4.64	(1.85)	20.47
1931	278.90	11.00	5.60	(1.99)	19.92
1941	319.00	14.23	6.70	(2.10)	20.37
1951	361.00	13.31	8.03	(2.22)	19.94
1961	439.10	21.64	10.84	(2.47)	34.97
1971	547.60	24.80	14.60	(2.67)	34.95
1981	660.90	20.60	19.10	(2.89)	30.60

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages of India's population.

Source : Decennial Census and other official publications as cited in Susanta K. Dass, "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam, 1891-1981" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XV, No. 19 (May 10) 1980.

Table 2 : Percentage Increase in Population in India aad Provinces 1901-51.

	1901-51	1901-21	1921-51	1901-41	1941-51
India	51.50	7.70	43.80	31.10	13.40
Assam	137.80	67.90	69.90	117.90	19.10
Bihar	41.70	3.70	38.00	31.60	10.10
Bombay	69.50	7.70	61.80	46.30	23.20
Punjab	20.70	— 9.50	30.20	20.20	0.50
Bengal	56.70	5.40	51.30	43.10	13.60

Source : Census of India, Assam, Manipur and Tripura as quoted in Susanta K. Dass as in Table 1.

1 and 2, it is also evident that net variation rates for India as a whole and its individual states were higher during 1921-51 than during 1901-21, while for Assam, the variations were higher during 1901-41 than 1921-51. This means the major influx in Assam took place between 1901-41. This is not consistent with the agitation leaders' claim that the rate of growth of population in Assam since partition has been unusual because of immigration and 'infiltration.' In any case, since immigration and 'infiltration' are held responsible by the agitationists for the demographic imbalance of Assam, we look into the pattern of immigration in some more detail.

Pattern of immigration : The region to which present Assam belongs has long been exposed to several waves of immigration from the south, north and west. A major portion of the population in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley is ascribed to the Ahoms as we have seen earlier. Before that Assam was inhabited by the native Assamese, an Indo-Aryan people living in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley, and groups of tribal people living in the surrounding hills. The former were the Assamese upper caste Hindus, known the *Brahmins* and the *Kalitas*, who are believed to have migrated from the western parts of India. They are the hardcore Assamese, speaking the language of Assam. The tribals are believed to be of Mongoloid and proto-Australoid admixture. Also there are a small number of wealthy Muslims in the Brahmaputra valley who have come from Northern India since the late Ahom period. A distinct feature of immigration in Assam, it should be mentioned here, is that most of the immigrants over time have assimilated themselves in language and culture with the Assamese society.

A number of pull and push factors contributed to the process of immigration into Assam. The immense economic potentials, reluctance of the indigeneous people to undertake hard labour in agriculture, and absence of local capital and entrepreneurship gave impetus to immigration of different classes of people from different directions. Nearly a dozen types of immigrants have been identified (Annexure 1). The first significant wave of immigration began shortly before the middle of the 19th century when the British failed to pursuade the

Assamese cultivators to work in tea gardens. They therefore, brought labour force from Bihar, Orissa, Madras and Madhya Pradesh.[17] The largest influx of immigrants including also the Bengali Muslims took place between 1901-41. Assam was then more sparsely populated than East Bengal. The Bengali Muslims reclaimed thousands of acres of fallow lands, cleared vast tracts of dense jungle along the south bank of the Brahmaputra and occupied flooded low land all along the river.[18]

Subsequently other migrants moved into Assam as traders, merchants, bankers, moneylenders and small industrialists. The Marwaris, for example, from Rajasthan entered Assam and while not large in number, were particularly visible in the larger towns.[19]

It may be mentioned here that the pull factors played relatively dominant role in immigration to Assam. These pull factors include ample economic opportunities in agriculture and other sectors as well as patronage and migration sponsorship by people in power structure. For example, it was the East India Company and the subseqent British Government who induced the tea plantation labour, Bengali Hindu (and also Muslim) clerical and administrative staff and Nepalese security guards to migrate to Assam. Similarly, Muslim peasants from East Bengal were encouraged by the Assamese Government in the thirties to settle in Assam and contribute to the "Grow More Food" campaign. For the landed peasantry hardy labourers were an unsolicited boon. Besides the *ryotwary* system of land tenure which held prospects of peasant proprietorship lured many to migrate to Assam. Among the push factors, communal disturbances, growing pressure of population on land and lack of gainful employment at home forced many to look for fortune elsewhere including Assam.

In passing, it may be mentioned that the impact made by these immigrants on Assam's economy has been noteworthy. The tea

17. See Susanta K. Dass, "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam, 1891-1981", *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XV, No. 19 (10 May) 1980.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

industry in which the South Indian labourers are engaged contribute about 20 percent of Assam's GDP. The Bengali Muslim peasants have made Nowgong the granary of Assam and helped raise jute production to 20 percent of India's total jute output. Other manual workers similarly have integrated themselves with the economic system of Assam and have been contributing significantly to economic growth and development process. The Bengalis, mainly the educated Bengali Hindus have been manning the administrative structure and other middle class professions of Assam. Commerce and industrial enterprises have been run by enterprising and wealthy Marwaris. However, a distinction of migration status has to be made here between those who are economically as well as socially absorbed in Assam on the one hand and those who have extra-Assamese economic linkages on the other. The Marwaris who monopolised commerce and industry of Assam run mainly from outside, the Biharis who monopolised manual jobs like vending, portery and transport works in the Brahmaputra valley, and part of the Nepalese fall in the latter category.

From the above, it will appear that immigration into Assam is a historical reality. What is more, most of the immigrants from different parts of the region have been absorbed in the Assamese society, occupationally, socially and culturally. Such assimilation involved substantial amount of Assamisation in language as well.

Linguistic transformation and 'Muslim infiltration' : While linguistic transformation is indistinguishable from the immigration process, the allegation that Bengali Muslims from the then East Pakistan entered Assam, adopted Assamese language, or returned it as their mother tongue in census reports is not borne out by facts. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the rise in the number and percentage of people speaking in Assamese between 1911-31 and corresponding decline in Bengali speaking people confirm the fact that during that period Assamese language swelled at the cost of Bengali. The major influx before 1941 is also explained by the same factor. However, positive variation of all the three languages—Bengali, Assamese and Hindi

—during 1951-71 shows that there was no cognizable adoption of Assamese by people belonging to other language groups. The highest growth rate of Hindi, followed by Bengali and Assamese indicates that during this period the inflow of the Hindi speaking people into Assam was highest followed by Bengali (Hindu refugees mainly were conferred Indian citizenship by the Nehru Liaquat Pact of 1950 and Indira-Mujib agreement of 1972) and the Assamese (natural increase).

If we go by religion, as shown in Table 5, it may be observed that Muslim population of Assam varied almost at par with its Hindu counterpart between 1951-71. On the other hand, it declined by 0.74 percent of the total population of the state and the link relative rate of increase was lower than that for the Hindus and the Christians. This, along with the slow natural rate of increase of the Assamese speaking population shows that the apprehension of infiltration of Bengali Muslim between 1951-71 is not statistically valid.[20] Other than between 1911-41, the increase in Muslim population was never higher than that of its Hindu counterpart.

The upshot of the above discourse on demographic transformation is that there had been immigration and there had been Assamisation for different reasons at different points of time mainly before the partition. And what the Assamese society is today is the resultant of these historical processes. Thus there is little scope of looking at the problem in a truncated time frame. Moreover, viewed in this perspective the movement may be said to have almost dissipitated what the Assamese society had achieved through centuries.

Table 3 : Linguistic Distiribution of Population in Assam

Language	Speaking Population in million			% Variation in 1961 over 1951	% Variation in 1971 over 1961
	1951	1961	1971		
Hindi	0.30	0.51	0.79	+ 67.43	+ 54.09
Bengali	1.32	2.01	2.88	+ 51.62	+ 43.45
Assamese	4.55	6.76	8.90	+ 48.46	+ 31.77

Source : As in Table 1.

20. *Ibid.*

Table 4 : Linguistic Transformation of Assam 1911-71

Sub-period	Language	1911 % of total	1931 % of total	Variation of percentage
1911-31	Hindi	6.10	7.62	+ 1.52
	Bengali	45.67	26.79	— 18.88
	Assamese	21.68	31.42	+ 9.74
	Others	26.82	34.17	+ 7.35
		1931	*1951*	
1931-51	Hindi	7.62	3.82	— 3.80
	Bengali	26.79	16.50	— 10.29
	Assamese	31.42	56.69	+ 25.27
	Others	34.17	22.99	— 11.18
		1951	*1971*	
1951-71	Hindi	3.82	5.42	+ 1.60
	Bengali	16.50	19.71	+ 3.21
	Assamese	56.69	60.89	+ 4.20
	Others	22.99	13.98	— 9.01
		1961	*1971*	
1961-71	Hindi	4.74	5.42	+ 0.68
	Bengali	18.54	19.71	+ 1.27
	Assamese	62.36	60.89	— 1.47
	Others	14.36	13.98	— 0.38

Source : As of Table 1.

Table 5 : Changes in Population of Assam by Religion

(Figures in percentages)

Sub-period	Religion	1911	1931	Variation in % of total between 1911-31
1911-31	Hindu	54.17	57.18	+ 3.01
	Muslim	28.11	31.95	+ 3.84
	Christian	0.99	2.36	+ 1.37
	Others	16.73	8.51	— 8.22
		1931	*1951*	
1931-51	Hindu	57.18	65.20	+ 8.02
	Muslim	31.95	22.06	— 9.86
	Christian	2.36	6.50	+ 4.14
	Others	8.51	6.21	— 2.30
		1951	*1971*	
1951-71	Hindu	65.20	72.51	+ 7.31
	Muslim	22.06	24.56	+ 2.47
	Christian	6.50	2.61	— 3.89
	Others	6.21	0.32	— 5.89
		1961	*1971*	
1961-71	Hindu	71.33	72.51	+ 1.18
	Muslim	25.30	24.56	— 0.74
	Christian	2.43	2.61	+ 0.18
	Others	0.94	0.32	— 0.62

Source : As of Table 1.

Note : Heavy decline in Muslim population between 1931-51 is purely due to partition of Sylhet, a Muslim majority district. Heavy decline of Christian population in 1951-71 is due to separation of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

Socio-Political Transformation—Rise of Middle Class Assamese and Shifting Coalition

A third contemporary historical force in Assam was the rise of middle class in the power structure accompanied by shifting coalitions and *entente* with other interest groups like the ruling regime in New Delhi, the Bengali Muslims and the tribals, at different periods of time. In the 1930s when electoral politics was first introduced in Assam, as elsewhere in India, the Muslims shared the control over the state power in coalition with the Assamese middle class whose gradual emergence had earlier been contributed to by the British through spread of education. Thus the Assamese were coming in increasing competition with the Bengali Hindus who have traditionally been dominating in administrative and other professional positions. In the meantime, the region was caught in a tribal upsurge that jolted the post-War South-East Asia in general. Following the Naga revolution under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo who had earlier come in contact with the Indian National Army, tribals and semi-tribals in Assam also rose in an unprecedented upsurge which left the middle class Assamese caste Hindus shocked and breathless. The Assamese who already had been aspiring for their own hegemony thus perceived two-pronged threats—from the Bengali Hindus and the tribes. The Assamese developed an attitude of submission and supplication toward the Centre which was readily reciprocated by New Delhi. Following partition in 1947 the Assamese tasted state power for the first time in 150 years. They came to be considered as watchdog of Indian interest in the North East.[21] The Muslims, both immigrants and those from UP and the Marwaris enjoyed protection[22] as well as spoils in return for their significant contribution to economic activities and support to the Assamese on issues like Assamese language movement. The tea plantation workers

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21. See Hiren Gohain, "Labyrinth of Chauvinism" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16-23 April, 1983.
22. Specially after the passing of the Immigration Expulsion (from Assam) Act by the Indian Parliament in 1950.

also supported the Assamese. Thus an informal alliance also came into being between the Assamese and other non-Hindu minorities including the Muslims. In the mid-1960s, the Assamese turned against the businessmen for not providing employment to local Assamese. There was a major anti-Bengali movement in 1972 throughout the Brahmaputra valley but the clash was confined between the Assamese and the Hindu Bengalis. The Centre, in the meantime, has been able to establish their independent linkage with the immigrant Muslims as its vote bank.

The most affected group out of these tripartite alliance was the tribes who were looked upon with disdain. The Assamese were mortified if people from the rest of India confused them with the tribes. Both Assamese writings and Government publications emphasised the Indian character of the Assamese.[23] Reports also suggest that the Assamese connived with the Centre in policing the restive tribes. Until the seventies, no minister from the tribes and backward communities was given cabinet rank in the state government.

The ruling class-Assamese-middle-class honey-moon came to an end following the Chinese invasion in the North East that left the region shocked and doubtful as to the capability of the Centre to protect them. The worsening economic conditions in India in the 1960s helped expose the lack of development of the region. In particular, the educated unemployed class became restive. The ruling class in such a situation found it economic to shower patronage on the minorities who would be satisfied with little without having to make substantive investment on the part of the government in development programmes.[24] The alignment configuration changed : the upper caste Hindus had to swallow their pride and explore the possibilities of alliance with the tribals who (mainly the Bodo section) rallied under the leadership Bodo-middle class organization, Plains Tribals' Council of Assam (PTCA), as they perceived the Bengali immigrant Muslims

23. See Gohain, *op. cit.*
24. *Ibid.*

to be threat to their agricultural land. Both of these parties tended to find the Bengali Muslims a threat to their own interest. The middle class Assamese found the Muslims as the source of two types of troubles: first, numerical superiority through which the Assamese would be demographically and culturally swamped, and second, the Muslims, serving as vote bank to the ruling power. This put the political survival of the Assamese middle class at stake in view of their estranged relations with the Congress (I). The consequence was the breakdown of the informal Assamese-Bengali-Muslim coalition toward the end of 1977 when Janata party, a coalition of rightist parties trounced Congress (I) both at the Centre and at the state.

The existence of huge number of illegal voters on their electoral rolls was taken as the handy political issue to rally against the Centre and the 'aliens' or 'foreign nationals' whose number, according to different estimates of the movement leaders themselves, varied between 3.5 million to 5 million. The leaders defined the problem as under:

> In 1962, the Chinese attacked us with arms.
> These foreigners have attacked us without arms. There has been a silent invasion.[25]

COURSE OF EVENTS—AGITATION AND TALKS BREAK INTO STALEMATE

Without going into the details of the 'Agitation Movement' as the movement leaders called it, may be said that since July 1978 when the AASU leadership first met formally at Jorhat to prepare a 16-point charter of demands, agitation and negotiations in different forms and levels went on side by side. But what it stands today is a stalemate, at best an uneasy calm.

The agitators followed a phased movement : public meeting, *bandh*, *rasta roke* or *satyagraha* and *janata* curfew, punctuated by

25. P. K. Mohanta, President of the AASU, quoted in *the Statesman*, 3 March, 1980.

violence both on the part of the agitators and the law enforcing agencies. The agitators consistently demanded that all entrants since 1951 should be detected, deleted from the electoral rolls and eventually deported from Assam. When a series of negotiations started, first in September 1979 with the state government and then directly with the Centre, sometimes with intermediaries, the central point of discord appeared to be the cut-off point for detection, deletion and eventual deportation. The Centre insisted that 25 March 1971 be the cut-off year but it fell far short of the demand of the agitators. Held Mr. Zail Singh, the then Home Minister:

> People who have been given sanctuary in terms of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and Agreement between Sheikh Mujib and Indira could not be regarded as foreigners ... ... Nor are the Assamese entitled to object to Bengalis and Nepalese who have lived in the state for years.[26]

October 1980 witnessed some changes when the Government shifted its position by saying that 1971 need not be the base year but a starting year and the 1961-71 entrants may be identified and deported. The beginning of 1981 saw the formation of Congress Ministry of Mrs. Anowara Taimur. But her government was soon voted out of power. Throughout 1982, there was no significant shift of position with respect to negotiation. However, both sides agreed to expand the scope of talks by incorporating the Opposition in it. Those parties that agreed to join were Janata, Congress (U) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), CPI (M) and CPI. On 18 January 1982 the tripartite talks resulted in a joint and agreed statement:

> All foreigners should be detected on the basis of the Constitution of India and relevant laws as existing including the Citizenship Act of 1955, Foreigners' Act of 1946 and the Passport Act of 1967. In doing so, all relevant documents including National Register of Citizens, 1951, electoral rolls including those of 1952 and land records maintained under

26. *The Statesman*, 8 February 1980.

Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act shall be made use of.[27]

But, on resumption of talks in February 1982, it was discovered that differences existed as to the method of identification and detection in particular, with respect to the draft questionnaire that was prepared for detection of the foreigners. No break-through was achieved in the meantime until December 1982 when the Government raised the question of impending election following the expiry of the third round of President's rule in March 1983. The agitation leaders demanded that the tribunals agreed to be set up by both parties would just detect and de-enfranchise the illegal voters while the deportation may take place at a later date. The Government, however, argued that in the voter list there were many who were eligible for citizenship and they could not be deprived of voting rights in the impending elections; therefore, one of the objectives of the tribunal would be to determine the eligibility for citizenship. Neither of the sides budged and the talks broke down. In the meantime, agitation turned violent with a communal overtone culminating in the bloody massacre at Guhapur and Nellie.

In the face of stiff opposition and violent resistance, election could be held in 110 seats. The Congress (I) of Mrs. Gandhi won 90 out of 108 declared seats. Mr. Hiteswar Saikia was elected the Chief Minister by the Assembly.

The initial prediction about Saikia government was one of marked pessimism. The new Congress government announced its intention to set up 126 tribunals, one for each constituency, to identify immigrants who came to Assam illegally after 1971. To date however, only few tribunals could be set, the reason for the delay being lack of availability of judges. Even regarding these tribunals the AASU leaders have expressed scepticism that any illegal immigrants would be deported out of Assam.[28]

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27. See Murty, *op. cit.*
28. See *India Today*, 15 September 1983.

On the negotiation front, little progress has been achieved. Till February 1983, when the talks broke down, more than 40 sessions of negotiation took place between the agitation leadership and the government at different levels.[29] But as things stand today, resumption of talks, about which feelers have been thrown from government side, are beset with a number of hurdles. First, the Centre, now in a stronger position, puts the precondition that the state government must be a party to the talk, but such precondition is totally unacceptable to the agitationists. Secondly, the AASU-AAGSP leadership is not the same now qualitatively and quantitatively as it was earlier. There have been divisions along religious and moderate-extremist lines. Thirdly, other interest groups, who were initially at the periphery of the problem have been able to make their voices felt in the meantime on the Assam body politic. Such polarised viewpoints betray the apparent calm in Assam politics and seem to complicate the scenario to make any futuristic judgement on Assam all the more difficult.

INTEREST GROUPS AND VIEWPOINTS

The Agitators

Though the Assam movement has been spearheaded by a combine of the AASU-AAGSP, it is the AASU that provided much of the dynamism to the movement. AASU has a proven record of leadership in similar national issues like the 1962 language movement, the 1966 food movement and the 1970 second refinery issue. AASU's charter of demands also includes resolution of a number of outstanding problems like flood control, employment opportunities in Central Government administration and proper implementation of the Assam Language Act of 1960.

The vast majority of the school and college students are the members of the AASU. The leadership is provided by persons like

29. See Murty, pp 266-67,

Profulla K. Mohanta and Bhrigu Pukhan who by social background represent the upper-middle class. At one time, the leadership also included Muslim students like Afzul Nagori, Nurul Hassan who represent the Assamese landed aristocracy. Then there are relatively young leaders like Joy N. Sharma, brother of B.N. Sharma, convenor of AAGSP. Mr. Sharma, aged about 21, leads the militant wing of the AASU, namely *Swechchasevak Bahini* (volunteer force) known as underground cell of the agitation consisting of a force of 6000 armed volunteers aged between 20-30 years. In addition to its hardlining and militant posture, the *Swechchasevak Bahini* is allegedly imbibed with RSS ideals. It is believed that P. K. Mohanta and Bhrigu Pukhan represent the moderate section of the AASU who are favourably disposed to an eventual settlement with the Centre, However, recent incidents indicate that the agitation leadership has passed on to extreme elements and hardliners who had so long been dormant. They feel that negotiations are exercises in futility. In the process, however the Muslim leaders apparently have been disgruntled and relegated to the background.

The All Assam *Gana Sangram Parishad* appears to be sheltering more diverse interest than the AASU. In general, the leadership consists of non-students and relatively old people. Most of the influential members like Nibaron Bora, Rabindra Deka, Atul Bora of the AAGSP belong to the constituent organization of *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* (PLP). However, it also includes leaders like D.P. Barooah who was an acknowledged leader of the CPI(M) until 1979 and now staunchly against the communists.

Given the nature of demands and the class interest of agitators, it may be observed that the movement leaders have high stakes in the Assam crisis and they are well-entrenched in it. Though meticulously kept behind scene, the donations and patronage of the wealthy Assamese and even by the Rajasthani Marwaris are well-known facts. While nationalistic fervour is certainly to be found in the current movement, one also finds elements of chauvinism in it. The movement is paradoxically targetting the Bengali Muslim immigrants who are well integrated in the social and economic fabric of Assam

with no extra-Assam linkages. The leadership on the other hand has been turning a blind eye toward those who are otherwise competing the Assamese for economic opportunities and draining out Assam's resources.

The Tribals

Total tribal population in Assam today is about 23 million (roughly 10 percent of the total population) and almost 40 percent of them are Bodos who dominate Karbi Anglong district, the Kokrajhar subdivision of Goalpara district, the Gauhati subdivision of Kamrup district, the Mongaldai subdivision of Darrang district and Dhemaji subdivision of Lakhimpur district. The other tribes are the Rabhas, the Lulungs, the Dimachas, the Jukris, the Garos, Hmars and the Mechs.

Over the years, the tribals have suffered serious shrinkages in their land-holdings and since most of them depend on the *jhum* or slash-and-burn system of cultivation, dwindling land productivity has added to their economic problems. They also preceive increased 'Indianisation' as a threat to their cultural and ethinic identity. Tribal unrest has been articulated mostly by the Bodos who attacked anti-election Assamese villagers, near Guhapur in Darrang district. The Bodos owe allegiance to the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam (PTCA) which has been clamouring for a separate tribal state, *Udayachal* - an area which would take in Karbi Anglong district and the northern portions of Kamrup, Darrang and Lakhimpur.

Agitation leaders in AASU on the other hand, pursuaded the Karbi Anglong People's Conference to join hands with the movement. The Conference even participated in the last session of the *Assam Shahitya Shava* at Dhipu in January 1983. The Lulung tribes living further down are also supporters of the agitation movement. They are aggrieved by alleged grabbing of their agricultural lands by the Bengali Muslims. In mid-February 1983 they reportedly embarked on

30. See *India Today*, 15 September 1983.

a systematic slaughter of immigrant Bengali villagers living along the south bank of the Brahmaputra at Nellie in Nowgong.

The PTCA on the other hand has been successfully harping on suppression of tribal demands even by the Assamese. A.K. Mushari, President of All Assam Tribal Youth League declared in 1980 that the AASU and the AAGSP were anti-tribal.[31] Mr. Ratan Kachari, a tribal leader from the Bodo Kachari Plains Tribal said :

> The Assamese have not bothered about the preservation of our identity and they in turn have tried to impose their identity on us. This has been happening for years. We also want our people to rule this State.[32]

An added factor is the promise given by the Congress (I) during no-confidence motion against Taimur ministry, that if the PTCA MLAs support the government, their demands would receive favourable consideration. The PTCA MLAs did support the government and were expecting dividend on their demand. Mrs. Gandhi also acknowledged in the first half of 1983 that tribal leaders had been meeting her recently. This indicates that the tribal had been depending mainly on the Centre for realising their demands.

However, certain disquiting developments in this respect, have taken place early May this year. The plains tribals of Assam, apparently disappointed by the Centre, have formed "United Tribal Nationalists' Liberation Front".[33] Chairman of the Front, Mr. Binai Basumatarai, himself an MLA, said :

> We will first prepare the list of how many of our people are prepared to die.[34]

An explicit objective of the Front is to create a separate state for the plains tribals of Assam and conduct a "political movement

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31. See Murty. *op. cit.*
32. See *Sunday*, 6-12 March 1983.
33. See *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 May 1983.
34. *Ibid.*

for it.[35] Recent bombing incidents and violence in other forms suggest Assam will witness a fresh wave of agitation in the near future adding a new dimension to the existing turmoil.

Other Interest Groups

Apart from the mainstream agitators and the tribals, there are the representative bodies of the minorities like the Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) and Citizens' Rights Protection Committee both of which are opposed to the agitation. They are in favour of 25 March 1971 as the cut-off period for detection and deportation and they demand that functioning of the tribunals set up so far be suspended till normalcy in the state is restored.

The Assamese Muslims, both Bengali and those from northern India have been equally critical of "harrassment of minority community in the name of deportation of Pakistani infiltrators".[36]

From the above discussion it seems that the interest groups on the agitation side have different, even opposing stakes. This may be summed up in the words of a commentator :

> The plains tribals are demanding a tribal state of Udayachal, there is talk separating the Bengali speaking Cachar district, and yet a not-a-very articulate demand that the immigrant Muslims must have a separately administered area for themselves, separate, that is, from Assam.[37]

Evidences in support of the last demand are however, scant as also admitted by the commentator. But the fact is that division of Assam, though not on the table the moment, remains an option for the Centre. To what extent that would remove the ethnic animosity and would be acceptable to the Assamere is, however, not clear. Let us see how the Government has been viewing the problem and what measures it has been taking in the face of these demands and stand by different groups.

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35. *Ibid.*
36. See Sarin *op. cit*
37. See Panna Lal Das Gupta, "Stakes in Assam", *Mainstream*, 14 May 1983, p 6.

Role of the Government in the Crisis

The Centre from the beginning appeared to be ill-informed about the complexity of the problem. It did not have any well-conceived overall policy and strategy for the crisis either.[38] The Centre took the agitation in terms of law and order situation and continued repressive measures making use of all legal and security means at its disposal, including the Assam Special Powers Act, 1960 the Disturbed Areas Act and Arms Services Special Powers Act etc. Such measures side by with negotiations eroded the Government's image in terms of its sincerity and appreciation of the Assamese problem. The point of view of the agitation leaders was that they resorted to agitation, blockade and non-cooperation only to make their grievances felt on the Centre. The Government also appears to have miscalculated the strength and longivity of the movement as mentioned earlier.

Such approaches to the problem only aggravated it, given the intransigence of the agitators. There was no doubt that the Centre's manoeveribility was extremely limited because of secular state principles, two international agreements on the same issue, constitutional provision of one critizenship and the right of every citizen to settle anywhere within India.

Since the induction of the Saikia ministry in February 1983 the Government seems to have changed the strategy, the repressive measures continuing nevertheless. The strategy was to take certain pre-emptive measures and show to the Assamese people, that "desire to improve the lot of the people living in the state was not the exclusive right of AASU".[39] The Government, for example, undertook a number of development projects and took some concrete measures toward detection, deportation and stemming of the so-called infiltrators from across the border. The measures and their likely implications for the overall movement have been outlined below.

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38. See Sarin, *op. cit.*
39. *Sunday*, 27 November-3 December 1983, pp 46-47

Development projects : The government of Assam on sanction from the Central Government has initiated a number of development projects apparently in fulfilment of some of the major demands of the Assamese people in general and the agitation leaders in particular :

Firstly, the state government submitted a proposal for, and the Centre approved, a $ 100 million project of shifting the capital of Assam from present Dispur to Chandrapur, some 25 km from Gauhati. This is expected to compensate the loss of Shillong as capital, satisfy the bureaucrats who extended support to the agitation leaders, particularly at the critical period of February elections in not conducting the polls. The workload expected to be generated by the project will also neutralise to a great extent the contractors and businessmen who supported the agitation. It is also expected to generate new employment opportunities to local wokers.

Secondly, the Centre agreed to raise oil royalty to the state of Assam and establish a dry port at Gauhati. The dry port is expected to save the entry tax and handling charges that Assam has to pay to Calcutta port for its tea exports.

Thirdly, Mrs. Gandhi laid the foundation of two more bridges over the Brahmaputra river linking east and west banks.

Fourthly, the state government has carved out six more districts in July 1983 and 12 new subdivisons as part of its promised administrative reforms.

Fifthly, the broad gauge rail lines will be extended upto Gauhati.

Sixthly, the government announced its plan to establish one fertilizer factory and one naptha based petro-chemical industry in Assam.

Finally, the government also has undertaken a number of programmes for the youths, like fund for stipends, credit schemes for providing employment opportunities to the unemployed youths.

The immediate impact of these projects, when implemented is that the Assam economy will get a boost in terms of more investment, more work and employment. This is expected to neutralise the mainstream Assamese, some of the agitators and the businessmen. At one point, the businessmen reportedly notified the agitators that "it was almost impossible to go on sufferring loss like this."[40] Sarat Chandra Sinha, a former Chief Minister of Assam cynically remarked :

> Even the well-known members of the agitators flock the corridors of Dispur to seek favour from ministers.....Look at the way the tone of the *Assam Tribune* and other newspapers which built up the agitation has changed.[41]

Also in the inaugural ceremony of the employment schemes for the educated unemployed, some of the known faces of agitarors were reportedly found receiving government funds from Mr Saikia.

But the question remains to what extent these development projects are going to placate the agitators and the general mass and in the process establish legitimacy of the Saikia government for reopening the stalled talks. The government of Mr. Saikia remains still an "illegal government" in the eye of the agitators. And once Mrs. Gandhi intends to reopen negotiation she may have to look for an alternative to Mr. Saikia who has no links with the agitators but some of his legislator and cabinet colleagues have. Already there is a crisis in the state Congress leadership with Mrs. Anowra Taimur's joining the Hiren Talukder's faction opposed to Mr. Saikia. Incidentally, Mrs. Taimur was on the Foreign Nationals' Committee set up by the state government. Secondly, one has to put some discount value to the extent of actual developement that these projects will bring forth. All these projects are yet to go beyond announcement, foundation-laying or preparation-of-bill stages. And if the past is any indicator—the Gauhati broad gauge lines being stalled for a decade by the Centre itself—any backing out or dilly-dallying with the projects may further frustrate the Assamese, making negotiated settlement all

40. *India Today*, 15 September 1983.
41. Ibid.

the more difficult. Thirdly, these programmes are at the moment aimed at the Assamese middle class. Nothing is being contemplated in particular for the tribals who have also a lot of economic issues demanding attention.

Tribunals for detection and deportation of illegal immigrants: Centre's stand on detection and deportation of 'aliens' for obvious reason of course, has althroughout been ambivalent. During polls compaign in Assam in Febuary 1983, Mrs. Gandhi said in one of the meetings :

> Even deportation of those who had come to Assam recently was a complicated question. The humanitarian aspects of the problem could not be overlooked.[42]

In some meetings, as alleged by agitation leaders and the Opposition, assurances like 'no one would be deported', 'only her party can look after the interest of the minorities' were given by the Congress (I) leaders.[43] The Opposition also alleged that such remarks to a great extent contributed to the communal violence that ensued. The Centre is indeed facing a dilemma, even if the 'vote bank' consideration is kept apart. First is the existence of two international agreements according to which all entrants in India including Assam before 25 March 1971 are to be given Indian citizenship. Secondly and more importantly, what would happen, for example, when the tribunals go into operation and detect the so-called foreigners? Who will take them under the oft-discussed relocation programme ? This is perhaps the reason why there has been virtually little progress in establishment of the 126 tribunals which are to function in accordance with the recently passed 1983 Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act. Incidentally the Act envisages that those who entered in Assam between 1961-71 would be given Indian citizenship.[44] Perhaps the Central government is buying time and concentrating on other areas to mitigate the Assamese grievances on the issue. On the

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42. See *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 February 1983, p 282.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *The Statesman*, 2 January 1984.

other hand, tribunals for detection and deportation of the 'illegal' entrants remain the central demand of the Assamese.

Barbed-wire fencing and watch-towers : It was the agitators who first demanded *walling* up of Assam-Bangladesh border in order to check continued infiltration. But the Government did not take if seriously until the February carnage. The first announcement of Centre's intention to construct a *barbed-wire fence* and watch towers was made in August 1983. In explaining the reason behind construction of barbed wire fence Mr. Saikia held that border guards posted at one mile intervals were not sufficient to stem infiltration. Among other reasons the government stated, check of smuggling and perhaps also, of undesired elements across border were important. Before we turn to the feasibility aspects and implications of the fencing, the point that should be made is the change in Centre's stand on infiltration. In negotiations with the agitators, the Centre has always been maintaining that there had been no infiltration from Bangladesh or there were no foreign nationals in India. In an interview with an Australian daily, in May 1983, Mrs. Gandhi was quoted as saying that India had no dispute with Bangladesh on foreign nationals' issue.[45] The position of the Government however began to change as the plan on barbed wire fencing was announced. For example, in late August 1983 Assam Chief Minister Mr. Saikia said :

> The so-called infiltration across the border was on the wane but construction of barbed wire fencing would begin immediately.[46]

Since then Indian leaders and officials have been quoting different figures of infiltration across the border. It may be pointed out here that infiltration, if at all, could not have started all of a sudden in 1983, certainly not seeing the bloody violence of February. Then the only explanation of this changed stand may be the changed domestic scenario, specially the sudden reawakening in the leadership

45. See *Dainik Ittefaq* (Bengali), 7 May 1983.
46. See *Bangladesh Observer*, 27 August 1983.

catalysd by the intensity of violence that nobody could imagine before hand.

Initial proposal was to just fence the 165 km (152 km. by some estimate) land border between Bangladesh and Assam. In late 1983, the plan was expanded to fence the whole of Indo-Bangladesh border. The estimated cost of fencing has been variously put between $500m[47] and $ 3.5bn.[48]

As of now, a number of watch towers and pillars for putting up barbed-wire have been erected and construction materials have been brought and piled up near the border at a number of points. Although construction work since few days before and at the time of writing the paper has remained suspended following protests from Bangladesh and subsequent meeting between the Director Generals of BDR and BSF respectively, all indications by Indian leaders suggest that there would be "no yielding to Bangladesh"[49] and there is no question of discontinuing the construction of barbed wire fencing.[50]

A few observations may be made on the practicability of the barbed wire fencing. First is the question of terrain and topography[51] In Assam sector, 115 km out of 270 km are marshy lands on which no fence can be erected. Then there are valleys, uneven lands, bushes, shrubs all along the border. Somewhere, the border passes through habitation as put by a BSF official :

> Where would you put the fence? It can not be put right on the border line[52] without Bangladesh's cooperation. The West Bengal-Bangladesh border passes through thickly populated area on both sides with not an inch of no-man's land. If you put the fence a few yards inside the Indian territory,

47. See *Time*, 7 May 1984.
48. See *Asia Week*, 11 May 1984.
49. Former Indian Home Minister, Mr. P.C. Sethi. See *Time*, 7 May 1984.
50. Mr. Narashima Rao. See the *Dainik Ittefaq*, 11 May 1984.
51. It seems that the Indian authority is making piece-meal on the spot survey of alignment while constructing pillars for the fence.
52. which India seems to be doing.

> you give that much land to Bangladesh.[53] Besides, in places the border passes right through houses.[54]

Then there is the question of utility of the fences for the purpose they are erected. Frowned an AASU leader on annonncement of the barbed wire fencing :

> The Centre is going back on its old promise to construct wall along the border by now talking in terms of barbed wire fence which will be of no use.[52]

An Indian General argues that such a fence could keep away the animals, not human beings from entering if they wanted to unless a large number of forces was deployed.[56] And if a large number of forces is to be deployed to protect the fence, the fence itself becomes a costly and redundant proposition.

The cost factor has been brought out very rigorously by a retired Indian General.[57] For Assam sector alone, General (Retd.) E.A. Vas estimates that the initial cost would be Rs. 2,000 million with a recurrent monthly cost of Rs. 5 million whereas *the project proposal for walling the Assam-Bangladesh border put forward by the state government envisaged a cost of Rs. 570 million only.*[58] General Vas also brings out a host of variables that seem to have been overlooked in the calculation. According to his estimate, 3 battalion troops would be required to protect and patrol the Assam-Bangladesh sector of the fence alone.

Cost and feasibility aspects apart, what is important but apparently deliberately overlooked by the Indian authority, is the international

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53. The Indian position is that the fence is being erected 9 inches inside the international border so that the 'working boundary' fences out about one sq. km. of Indian land.
54. See *the Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 December 1983.
55. See *India Today*, 15 September, 1983, p. 37.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Lt. Gen. (Retd.) E.A. Vas in *Sunday*, 13-19 November 1983.
58. *The Guardian*, 9. July 1983.

aspects of the border fencing. Construction of border fence, even if not on the zero line as claimed by the Indian authority, is a gross violation of the 1975 *Joint Indo-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities* which prohibits either party to construct defensive structures within 150 yards of the international border line on either side. The Indian Government holds that the barbed-wire fence is 'preventive not defensive'. But for all practical purposes this is a matter of finer distinction and not of substantive argument. Secondly, a permanent structure between two countries cannot but be a permanent obstacle to friendship and good neighbourliness as also admitted by one Indian legislator : "fencing and friendship do not go hand in hand".[59] It is not Bangladesh alone with whom India has this ethnic problem. Similar problems also exist with Nepal and Pakistan. Similar measures, carrying the argument one step further, would result in isolating the countries of South Asia from one another, physical isolotion at that, at a time when they have embarked on the South Asian Regional Cooperation to promote mutually beneficial cooperation.

From a comparative review of the measures undertaken by the Government, it seems that tangible and appropriate developmental measures aimed at benefitting all sections of the Assamese people have the potential of mitigating the grievances of the Assamese people without upsetting what Assamese society is today or creating new problems of far wider implications.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

In this section we shall try to indicate the likely course of the movement in future. We intend to concentrate on two areas—secessionist trend and communal overtone of the crisis—in which the Union of India has a great stake in terms of territorial integrity and secular democracy. It is very difficult to frame any simple null hypothesis and test it in such cases. In fact, no clear-cut judgement on such complex

59. See *Asiaweek*, 11 May 1984, p. 20

issues is possible other than bringing out the various aspects of the issues.

Possibility of Secessionist Turn

In any secessionist or insurgency movement, linkages are developed with the immediate neighbourhood for support, base, training and escape route. More so in the case of the North-East India which has long been plagued by insurgency movements, though in the recent years they have been dormant. It is therefore presumed that in any likely secessionist turn of the existing movement, or of any new initiative, the established infrastructures and linkages of insurgency would be utilized. The validity of such a presumption is reinforced by the extent of expressed as well as under-current regional identity that exists, particularly at Assam end. There are a number of political parties and organizations, following constitutional as well as non-constitutional approaches to politics, that advocate regional causes and regional identity. Mr. Rabindra Deka of the *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad*, which incidentally is a constituent party of the AAGSP, says :

> We have seven stars on our party flags, because the seven states and Union Territories in the North-East are like seven sisters. We must come together and fight for our rights.[60]

What important common causes are there to facilitate the formation of such a *Purbanchaliya* identity on one platform ? The prime factor remains the perceived general neglect and lack of development in all the seven states. Secondly, the North Eastern people, overwhelmingly tribal in character, consider 'enforced Indianisation' as a serious threat to their ethnic and cultural identity to which they are instinctively sensitive. Thirdly, the 'foreigners' or 'aliens' issue seem to be existent in most of the North East Indian states, In

60. See Sarin, *op. cit.*

Meghalaya the slogan is "Meghalaya for Meghalayan tribals; Go back *Dkhars* (outsiders)." In Manipur a similar anti-outsider clamour is "Down with Mayangs (outsiders)."[61] In Mizoram, Brigadier Sailo, Chief Minister until recently, asked the Prime Minister to remove outsiders from the state, otherwise, he threatenend, extremist activities would be stepped up.[62]

It is against this backdrop that the late 1983 regional meeting of "like-minded parties on issues such as influx of foreigners, the need for promoting economic, social political linkages of the North-East and the need for a political personality"[63] convened by the *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* in Gauhati has to be evaluated. S. D. Khongwir, representing the Hill State People's Democratic Party of Meghalaya said.

> We in the North East are a separate identity and it is essential that we have closer uuderstanding among ourselves which will help us meet our common problem.[64]

Mr. Chalie Kevichussa of Naitonal Democratic Party said:

> We find this conference an opportunity to learn from our Assamese friends exactly what magnitude the problem may assume and the ways in which we can unitedly resist it.[65]

Although no united front could be formally launched, it is significant that the individual parties of different North-Eastern states are coming together to forge a regional *entente* on different issues for a number of reasons. Even if these parties are avowedly constitutional, the mainstream national political parties have hardly any link with them, a fact that was painfully felt in the Assam crisis in which the young agitators rendered national political leaders almost irrelevant. A regional patch-up simply reinforces that tendency, given

61. *Ibid.*
62. *India Today*, 30 September 1983, pp 25-26.
63. *India Today*, 15 December 1983, pp 39-40.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*

the fact that link between constitutional and underground forces in the region is ubiquitous and sometimes there is hardly any line of demarcation between the two.

One may argue that an important hurdle in the way of any expedient relationship among the people of different states of the region is the linguistic as well as ethnic differences. Arunachal, for example, speaks in no less than 50 different dialects. The Ao Nagas cannot follow the language of their next door neighbours, Angami Nagas ; the Khashis cannot follow what the Garos say. But the fact remains that the over-arching unity is their nomadic Mongoloid character that make them belong roughly to the Burmese-Chinese family which makes them distinct from the rest of India, ethnically and culturally.

On the Assam front, there have been reports and allegations from the government side from the very beginning of 'foreign hands' behind the violences that accompanied the agitation, and of secessionsts working amongst the agitators. The External Affairs Ministry in its white paper entitled "Assam Events in Perspective" published in April 1983 says;

> .... it is distressing that some sections amongst the agitators in state appear to be determined to sustain the violence. Recently an organization called "Assam People's Liberation Army" came to notice for circulating highly provocative and inflammatory pamphlets. Some of these leaders were arrested and arms and ammunition have been recovered from them. A few provocative pamphlets have been issued in the name of another organization entitled "National Guards". This is a matter of concern.[66]

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66. External Publicity Division, External Affairs Ministry, "Assam Events in Perspective" MEA No. 124/XPD/4/83, New Delhi, quoted in Amera Saeed Hamid, "Assam Agitation: Crisis in Indian Democracy" *Regional Studies* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Autumn) 1983, pp 25-41.

Such reports linking the terrorists and underground forces in Assam with the other terrorists in neighbouring areas including those in Burma increased in late 1983[67] as organized bombings, arsons and killings also increased. In particular, officials suspect that the bomb blasts in connection with visit of both Rajiv Gandhi in August 1983 and Mrs. Gandhi in November 1983 were the work of terrorists working for secession and that the Assam extremists had the support of such small but determined groups as *Maitri Mukti Bahini*, *Jatiya Aikya Bahini* and Assam People's Liberation Army. Said a police official in this connection :

> In the last few years these groups have been able to raise bomb making to the stature of a cottage industry in Assam and the explosives made today are the best in the country.[68]

Then there are other reports which, pieced together, tend to suggest that the Assam extremists are being trained in Burmese hideouts by the Nagas.[69] A small group of 15 reportedly were back to Assam waiting in the coal town of Margheria in Upper Assam and more were believed to be stalking the jungles of Arunachal.[70]

This brief run-down of reports and suggestions, however, raises more questions than answering them. Who are these terrorists, for example ? Which class or ethnic and religions interests do they represent ? There are different directions one may approach these questions from. From the very beginning AASU leadership has been careful to disclaim any links with any secessionist groups. The mainstream leaders of AASU are well known for their moderate postures. Of late, they are said to have became more moderate. Their calling of the "National Convention on Assam" on 10-11 January 1984 sparked speculation that they were planning to give a populist

67. Shillong based Mr. Chandra Sekhar writes to *India Today* (30 September in 1983) that both the intelligence agencies and middle ground sources confirm such linkages.
68. *India Today*, 15 December 1983.
69. *India Today*, 15 September 1983.
70. *Ibid.*

image to their movement through sponsoring a regional party, although Brigu Pukhan, the General Secretary of the AASU made a qualified denial:

> AASU cannot at the moment participate in politics. But as people want a strong regional force, something has to be done.[71]

This means that if it wants to join politics to find a 'political solution' to the problem it will be necessary to change the charter of AASU or the leadership of the proposed political movement is to came from outside. The link, however, between this convention and the preceding one convened by PLP is not known. Assuming that AASU leaders join constitutional politics, the question that may be raised is how would the leadership define its relations with the underground *Secchasevak Bahini*, a volunteer corps led by J.N. Sharma, and for that matter, other underground forces ? Bhrigu Pukhan reportedly went to Nagaland in November 1983 to seek release of Mr. Sharma who was arrested there in connection with a bombing incident.[72] Knowing fully well that the only national party that had some influence over AASU during the peak of agitation was the right-wing BJP and that the *Secchasevak Bahini* reportedly are imbued with RSS ideals, it may be argued that AASU still has some links with right-wing and communal terrorists. That raises a question of arithmatic: Are these communal terrorists all or there are others as well upholding different radical ideologies ? If so, how can one explain the regional linkages that have been indicated earlier ? Answer to the second question needs more investigation than was possible for the present paper.

The first question however, leads us to explore the role of the left movement in the agitation and links, if any, between the two. It is a well known fact that almost all left political parties and alliances like the CPI, CPI (M), SUC forming the Left and Democratic alliance in Assam were avowedly against the movement.

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71. *India Today*, 15 January 1984.
72. *India Today*, 15 January 1984.

Leftists activities were concentrated in the immigrant areas where poverty was so stark and class division so clear cut.[73] They even participated in the controvertial February 1983 polls. What they achieved is altogether a different question. But the fact to which even independent observers would point finger is that they did not protest the atrocities that the law enforcing agencies had let loose on the common people since the beginning of the crisis. However, AASU received support from a small number of left movements, mostly underground or non-parliamentary in approach. For example, Indian People's Front, *Jana Sangskritik Parishad* led by the celebrated singer, Bhupen Hazarika, Vinode Misra faction of CPI (M-L) supported the movement. Vinode Misra incidentally leads the Assam People's Liberation Army. But in most cases, AASU has been allergic to hobnobbing of their members with these left organizations.

Finally, lack of information on clear-cut ethnic identification of the underground forces makes it difficult to infer as to what proportions of the Assamese terrorists and insurgents are from the tribal populations. Then, there is the question of their receiving support from the non-tribal Assamese, because they by themselves constitute only 10 percent of the population. The possibility of a marriage of convenience between the middle class caste Hindus with their own taboos and the PTCA representing the middle class *Bodos* with their tribal mores is very small. Also till recently, they were favourably disposed toward obtaining a concession from the Centre in return for their not supporting the agitation cause. But as they are being disappointed and have launched a united front as we have seen earlier, things may turn in a different direction. The chances of getting moral, material and organizational support from their fellow tribal insurgents the neighbouring states are higher compared to the hardcore Hindu Assamese. Thus, in the near future, both political movement and tribal insurgency for the *Udayaahal* state are expected to be stronger complicating to scenario

73. See Gohain, *op. cit.*

but opening perforece, another option to the Centre—division of Assam along ethnic lines.

Another possiblity, distant though, is the alliance across ethnic barriers between the lower caste Assamese and the poor landless tribals under any covert or underground leftist umbrella. Evidence to this hypothesis is scant but such a movement has the greatest likelihood of receiving all out support and cooperation in the region, given the overall left ideological undercurrents. That would, however, again further complicate the tangled scene given the rift in the movement and both communalists and other extremists gaining prominence.

Future Communal Overtone of the Assam Movement

If anything, the Assam movement has shown with relative clarity a communal bias specially since February 1983. Since the beginning of the crisis, AASU leadership has been maintaining :

> The movement is not directed against any particular linguistic or religious group. It is not against Indian citizens. It is not secessionist.[74]

But there are a number of reasons for which communal factor seems to be in prominence. In the first place, the wrath of the Assamese falls primarily on the Bengali Muslims for the fact that they did not forget the thirties when the Muslim League Government openly encouraged Muslim immigration for agricultural development. And one of the main grievances of the present movement leaders is that these (Muslim) 'foreigners' have grabbed their fertile agricultural lands. Secondly, there has been an electoral division along the religious line—the Bengali Hindus voting for the CPI (M) and the Bengali Muslims voting for Congress (I). Therefore, the Assamese consider the Bengali Muslim immigrants and the Central Government of Congress (I) as the common enemy. Thirdly, there are clear indications that communal forces had considerable influence over the

74. See Murty, *op. cit.*

happenings in Assam during the past 2 years. The role of the RSS and its various fronts in the Assam events is considered to be an important factor.

The RSS is believed to have followed a three-pronged strategy in playing its game in Assam : *catalysing clashes between different groups through agents, penetrating agitation leadership and thus creating vested interest in the leadership*, and finally, *organizing directly acts of communal violence.* It seems that in all these three approaches the AASU was either surprised or did not have control over the situation. As the pre-election violences were mounting day by day, AASU perhaps became aware of the phenomenon that, it was the act of "agents provocateurs" which created sporadic violence to keep the security forces at tenterhooks so that they developed the tendency to over-react and thus alienate the public.[75] Perhaps their helplessness was exploited fully as the talks failed in the first week of February 1983 and the moderate leaders were taken into custody. Mr. J. N. Sharma of the AASU volunteer corps was seen to be most active during this period. The rift between the moderate and the extermists, as well as, between the Hindus and the Muslims was never so visible as this time. When the Guhapur and Nellie massacre took place, the AASU leaders were surprised and shocked, for they had planned only controlled urban violence to force the Government to accept their demands.[76] Nurul Hassan, the Acting President of AASU and an Assemese wealthy Muslim youth resigned from his position alleging that "AASU was dominated by Hindu communalists who wanted to kill all Muslims in Assam".[77]

As the massacre was over, most of the newspapers opined that the attacks made by organized mobs on helpless, villagers in the interior rural areas could not be spontaneous and they were part of a cold-bloodedly worked design. Even there are evidences that senior RSS activists were seen in the villages of Nowgong near

75. See *The Statesman*, 12 February 1983.
76. *The Guardian*. 29 March 1983. p 7.
77. *Ibid*

Nellie where only the Muslim villages were attacked and Hindus villages spared.[78]

What was disconcerting was the persistence of communal violence for quite sometime even after the February carnage. Communal links may be traced in the latest major incident in which 20 immigrants were kidnapped and 9 of them killed in Western Assam January 1984.[79] Given such level of RSS involvement in Assam, it is feared that communal terrorism and violences and likely to continue for quite some time.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

We have tried to argue that the present Assam imbroglio was basically contributed to by rising Assam expectations vis-a-vis years of neglect toward the legitimate needs of the Assamese. On the other hand, immigration in Assam is indistinguishable from other historical processes making the Assamese society what it is today. But as the crisis unfolded other interest groups have emerged with quite high stakes. Moderates are keeping a low profile in the movement and terrorists and communal extremists have entered the stage with ulterior motives. But the fact remains that the interests of the Assamese middle class, the tribal middle class as well as the immigrants, are so entrenched that they cannot be considered as a function of the level of agitation only at any point of time. This is where a possible trap lies for the Indian leadership. Initiating developmental programmes only for political purposes and taking law and order approach and for that matter, counter-insurgency measures, would simply drive the moderates as well as other marginal groups to extremism and alienate the general mass. In such an exigency any kind of expedient relationship may come into being as indicated earlier. Sub-national aspirations, secessionist or terrorist activities become active only when the normal channels and mechanism are blockaded.

78. *Ibid.*

79. See *the Bangladesh Observer*, 1 April 1984.

A very interesting phenomenon was observed as the negotiations were going on in New Delhi—and that was a wide perception gap, perhaps also, a generation gap. On one side of the table were the veteran political leaders and experieneed bureaucrats conversant with legal and constitutional issues and on the other side were young desperate leaders caring only for what they wanted. Both parties talked in different wave-length and there was little accommodation as is the pre-requisite of any negotiated or political settlement. The Government miserably failed to bring the Opposition to play a meaningful and constructive role. Equally perhaps was the failure to tap the pockets that provided AASU with moral and muscle power. Consequently there was little leverage that the Centre could pull in the bargain. As other groups have entered the stage with even louder voices, the changed circumstances call for a cautious approach, and more importantly statesmanship, in harmonizing the legitimate interests of the Assamese with those of the other interest groups consistently with larger national objectives and commitments.

Annexure 1 : Types of Immigration and the Characteristics of the Immigrants, 1872-1981.

Features \ Types	Tea Garden Labourers	Bengali Muslims	Nepalese	W. War II Evacuees	Hindu Refugees	Nationals from other parts of India		
						Marwaris	Biharis	Others
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Period of immigration	1872-1951	1891 1947	Since 1891	1942-45	Since 1947	Since 1931	Since 1951	Since 1951
Place of origin	W. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madras, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh	East Bengal (Mymensingh, Rangpur, Pabna, Noakhali, Bogra)	Nepal	India	E. Pakistan	Rajsthan	Bihar	All over India
Cause	Reluctance of local people and Bengali Immigrants to take up the job	-Excessive pressure on land in E. Bengal; -Encouragement from Assamese land lord; -High agri-	-Open Indo-Nepalese border -Religious affinity -Habit of living in high altitude	Fall of Burma during W.W. II	Partition and communal disturbance	-Economic opportunity -Drive for fortune	-Poor econ. condition in Bihar ; -Readiness to work hard and Muslim sponsorship	Govt & semi Govt construction works, cooking and priestly job

Annexure contd.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		cultural; Potential Khash land.						
Type of Migration	Permanent	Permanent	Migratory, Semi-permanent & permanent	Permanent	Permanent	Migratory	Migratory	Temporary
Where settled	Dibrugarh, North Lakhimpur, Sibsagor, Darrang & Kachar	Goalpara Kamrup Nowgong, Darrang & Lakhimpur	Mostly in Hilly areas	Mainly Kachar, Kamrup and Dibrugarh	Cachar, Kamrup, Nowgong, Goalpara	Mainly Dibrugarh Kamrup	Brahmaputra Valley	Mainly in Kamrup Dibrugarh Sibsagr.
Economic Sector	Tea Industry	Agriculture	-Assam Rifles, Security jobs -Wood cutting	Govt. Service small business and contractor	Govt. Service Business, contractor and industry	Big industry trade and commerce	-Laborious job like brick building saw milling	No permanent economic interest

Annexure contd.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Economic Impact	Backbone of Tea Industry contributing 20% of Assam's GDP (1978-79)	-Backbone of Agril. -Nowgong made granary of Assam -Jute prodn. raised to 20% of the country	Faithful & good soldiers	-Increased pressure in service sides -Sponsoring sector of labour/ immigration 5000-8000 each contractor)	Increased pressure on service sector	Monopolised major industries trade & commerce	Help trade, commerce transport work and construction work	Variously help economic development, service sector
Approx No. in 1979	16 Lakhs (8.66%)	27.09 Lakhs (15% of total or 60% of Assam's Muslim)	2 Lakhs (1.4%)	86 thousand (0.47%)	5 Lakhs (1971) (3.3%)	11.40 Lakhs (1979) projected		2 Lakhs (1.4%)
Original Mother Tongue	Hindi, Mundari Santhali, Oroan,	Bengali	Nepalese	Hindi, Bengali	Bengali	Rajasthon (Hindi)	Hindi	All 15 recognized Languages except Hindi,

Annexuse contd.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Oria, Thado, Tamil, Telegu							Bengali, Assamese and Sanskrit.
Adoption of Assamese Language	Many but slowed down since 1951	Almost total adoption complete by 1951	Some adopted	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Religion	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Mostly Hindu	Hindu	Join	Hindu	Hindu and some Christians
Remarks	Bonafide dependents 600 855 on Dec. 31 1974 no fresh inflow	Resistant to flood, famine earth quake epidemic Kala-Ajar malaria	Likely to be useful in Assam Rifle	Assimi-lated with similar linguistic group	Impact more following truncatting Sylhet slowed down since 1951	Drainage of huge capital out of Assam		Floating people, number 1.50 lakh in 1971 (Orissa)

Source : Susanta K. Dass