



PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND ASSAM MOVEMENT: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Over the years illegal migration has been becoming one of the burning issues of Assam. Since the treaty of Yandabo, continuous migration has changed the demographic pattern of the state. Among the different waves of migration since the beginning of the 20th century a fresh immigration has started from the East Bengal, from which land hungry Muslim peasants had started to immigrate, which has continued even after the Independence. The indigenous people of the state have scared of due to this massive immigration considering as a threatening to their identity. In 1979 numerous complaints were registered challenging the authenticity of a large number of persons, whose names were published in the electoral roll published for the by election of Mangaldoi loksabha constituency. When the authority has not taken any action against the complaints then the AASU and AAGSP were launched historic Assam movement in 1979. After six years of agitation an accord has signed which is known as Assam Accord on 15 August of 1985. After that the leaders of the AASU and AAGSP formed a new political party known as AGP and formed the government in Assam.

Keywords: AASU, Assam Movement, Assam Accord, Immigration

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1. INTRODUCTION

Assam, a north eastern state of India surrounded by foreign countries and several Indian states, located at the transitional zone of South Asia and South-East-Asia. Since time immemorial the state has been receiving migrants from the all directions. Migration is a universal phenomenon which implies a process through which people move from a permanent place of residence to another more or less permanent place for a substantial period of time. People immigrate towards the place in which better livelihood opportunity has existed, in the place where people can fulfil their basic needs and requirements.

Various responsible causes are behind the large-scale immigration towards Assam. Richness in natural resources, fertile river valleys, climatic conditions, rich collection of aquatic fauna; such factors are attracting the people towards the state since pre-historic period. So the demography of Assam is composing with different groups of people, making Assamese society a diverse one. On February 24, 1826 the historic Yandabo treaty has signed which ended Anglo-Burmese war. As a result of the treaty Assam became part of British colonial empire. The colonial ruler introduced a new administrative system together with a new economic system in Assam. For which they were required of human resources to perform different functions under their administrative set up. So they encouraged immigration of people from the places like Bengal, Rajasthan, and North India. After the introduction of tea plantation in Assam requirement of labourers were increased. The demand for labour in the tea plantations was the first major reason to turn to immigrants.

Since the beginning of the 20th century another phase of immigration has started towards the province of Assam. Millions of land hungry Muslims peasants immigrated to the Assam within the fifty years from East Bengal. The immigration remained continued even after the eastern Bengal became East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) a new country formed after partition of India in 1947. These immigrants were attracted by the active flood plains of the Brahmaputra River which were known as char-chapori which were uninhabited during that period. The number of immigrants were increased unprecedentedly, which indicates that these new phase of immigration was different from the earlier phases of immigration.

Table 1 Assam 1911-1921: Population Growth by Migration and Natural Growth

Name of the Region	Total increase 1911-21	Gain/loss by migration	Increased by natural growth	% total migration	% increasing by natural growth
Assam	+929,725	+411,941	+517,784	+44.3	+55.7
Brahmaputra valley	+748,650	+416,350	+332,300	+55.6	+44.4
Surama Valley	+97,771	-14,216	+11,987	-14.5	+114.5
Hills	+83,304	+13,613	+69,691	+16.3	+83.7

Source: Census of India 1921, p.8

The superintendent of 1931 census report C.S.Mulan has stated that the abnormal growth of the population of the state were the most important event in the province in the last 25 years. Mulan also stated that immigration will permanently alter the demographic pattern of the Assam, its culture and civilization. He again said that in future only at Sibsagar district an Assamese will find himself at home.

Other hand in the postcolonial period together with economic immigrants the political immigrants who were Hindu Bengalis were immigrated to Assam leaving east Pakistan due to the political cause. These have terrified the indigenous people more than the previous immigration.

In 1979 the election commission of India has declared the date of by-poll together with publishing the electoral roll which was to be held for the Mangaldai Loksabha constituency. But the students organisation i.e.AASU [All Assam Students Union] claimed that in the electoral roll names of the illegal immigrants were included, so these names should be detect and deleted from the electoral roll. Denial of which by the election commission of India led to six years long Assam Movement.

Table 2 Assam 1901-1991: Percent Increase of Population

Year	Growth rate (Assam)	Growth rate all India	Variation
1901-11	16.99	5.73	11.26
1911-21	20.48	-0.31	20.78
1921-31	19.91	11.0	8.91
1931-41	20.40	14.22	6.17
1941-51	19.93	13.31	6.62
1951-61	34.98	21.51	13.34
1961-71	34.95	24.80	10.15
1971-91*	52.44	48.24	4.2

No census was held in Assam in 1981

Source: 1901-71, census of India, 1971, p.59; 1971-91 calculated based on census of India, 1991a

Aim & Objectives:

The study aims to analyse the issue of immigration, the Assam movement and the Assam Accord.

Methodology:

The study is entirely based on descriptive and analytical method. Secondary sources of data are used in the study, which is obtained from various books, journals, newspaper, report of the government etc.

2. DISCUSSION

Assam Movement:

The Assam movement could be considered as an epoch-making, significant event in the political history of the state of Assam in the post-colonial period. It is marked as the most stringent mass movement in contemporary Assam. In 1978 due to the demise of the Lok Sabha member Hiralal Patowary of Mangaldoi constituency, the election commission has scheduled the date of by-poll and published the electoral roll. But numerous complaints were registered challenging the authenticity of citizenship of large number of persons. This made the people of Assam increasingly apprehensive about the issue of foreign nationals. The AASU has demanded the postponement of election till the names of foreign nationals were deleted from the electoral roll. Soon, this issue has spread to the other parts of the state. Widespread protest has started across the state regarding the issue. But the election commission of India denied to take any action regarding the demand made by the AASU. So the organisation declared a twelve hour general strike known as Assam bandh on June 8, 1979 in demand of the detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of the foreigners, which was marked as the beginning of the Assam Movement. At the same time a few socio-political organisations came forward and form Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) to mobilise the people of Assam on the issue of illegal immigration. The leaders of the movement have claimed that there are almost 5 million foreigners in Assam; however debates are still going on, regarding the actual numbers of foreigners.

When the government has not taken action to remove the name of the doubtful foreign nationals, i.e. Bangladeshi from the electoral roll ultimately led to the beginning of six years long Assam movement. The movement was started under the joint leadership of the AASU, AAGSP, Purbanchalia Lok Parishad (PLP) and Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJO). In November 1979, thousands of people from different parts of the state including the capital city of Guwahati courted arrest when the people have launched civil-disobedience. The AASU and AAGSP together called for the closure of the educational institutions and urged the people to engage in picketing in front of the state and central government offices. In December, 1979 the leaders of the movement has called to refrain the people from the Loksabha election till the names of the foreigners will not be removed. On December 10, 1979 a student leader Khageshar Talukdar was died in gunfire of the police who became the first martyr of the movement, out of the 860 martyr. Due to which the aggressive protesters started economic blocked, stopped the flow of crude oil from Assam to the rest of the country. Clashes between the protesters and the police and paramilitary forces became common. The people of the state irrespective of the religion, caste actively took participated in the movement. In 1983 the election commission was declared the poll schedule for the Assam state legislative Assembly which was to be held due to the constitutional compulsion as in 1980 the president rule was impose in Assam which led to dissolution of the state assembly. The leaders of AASU and AAGSP were adamant in their demand and urged the people to boycott the election. However, the election was held only in the tea garden and in areas in which the doubtful illegal immigrants were resided. As the protesters boycotted the election and started picketing, the government forces oppressed the protesters and dominated the movement through iron hand. Several protesters were killed due to the clash against police. Again, clashes were occurred in between the supporters of the movement and those who opposed it.

Among the different rounds of discussion with the government of India; in 1980 the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi urged the protesters to enter into a negotiation and to accept the base year of 1966 to detect and deport the illegal immigrants. However, the AASU and AAGSP leaders rejected the proposal and insisted that 1951 must be the base year. So, the discussion became vain.

ASSAM ACCORD-The Memorandum of Settlement:

The Assam Accord has signed on August 15, 1985 between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the leaders of AASU-AAGSP. The Accord marked the end of six years of ethnic conflict and political instability in the state. Through the accord all of the parties were agreed to resolve the illegal immigrant issue. The Accord incorporated significant concessions by the Government of India to the movement's demands. The accord includes various measures some of which are mention below-

1. Government have all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The AASU and the AAGSP have also expressed their keenness to find such a solution.
2. The AASU through their memorandum dated 2nd February 1980 presented to the late PM Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals into Assam and the fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, culture and economic life of the state.
3. 3. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the people of Assam, the then Prime Minister initiated the dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP. Subsequently, talks were held at the Prime Minister's and Home Minister's level during the period 1980-83. Several rounds of informal talks were held during 1984. Formal discussions were resumed in March, 1985.

4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal provisions, international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian considerations, it has been decided to proceed as follows:
5. Foreigners Issue:
 - 5.1 For purposes of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base data and year.
 - 5.2 All persons who come to Assam prior to 1.1.1966, including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections shall be regularised.
 - 5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and up to 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.
 - 5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939.
 - 5.5 For this purpose, Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the government machinery.
 - 5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored.
 - 5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since re entered illegally into Assam shall be expelled.
 - 5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected; deleted and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.
 - 5.9 The Government will give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

Safeguards and economic development:

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

Other hand the leaders of the movement agreed to called off the movement and assured the government that they would be helped to maintain normalcy, to co-operate the government in every aspect.

3. CONCLUSION

Through the Assam accord the historic Assam movement has ended. But instead of the base year 1951 which was demanded by the AASU and AAGSP, the Accord determined the base date and year 1-1-1966 to detect and deport the illegal migrants, so it is clear that the leaders of the movement were unable to get the base year of 1951 for which 860 people martyr'd. It implies that Assam has forced to take the burden of millions of illegal migrants. Even debates are going on in Assam regarding the base year, Assam Sanmilito Mahasangha, an organisation even approached in the Supreme Court challenging the base year provided by the Assam Accord. Now the case is pending in the Supreme Court. After 35 years of the signing of the accord, the clause 6 of the accord has not implemented, which is to be provided the various safeguards to the indigenous people.

But in 2019 the central home ministry has formed a high-level committee to provide suggestions regarding the implementation of the clause 6 of Assam accord and the committee have submitted the report on 24th February 2020. Again, the construction of fencing wall of Assam-Bangladesh border is remained to be complete. One of the other mistakes committed by the leaders of the movement was they accepted the IMDT act which was enacted to safeguard the illegal infiltrators, although the act was declared as illegal by the Supreme Court in 2005. Besides this the electoral roll published including the names of the illegal infiltrators was not repealed in 1985 after the end of the movement.

However as mention in the accord an oil refinery has set-up in Numaligarh of Golaghat district, an IIT has set up in Guwahati, Sankardev kalakhetra has constructed in Guwahati which is a socio-cultural centre; two bridges have constructed over the river Brahmaputra, Brahmaputra crackers and polymer limited has established in Dibrugarh district as per the accord.

After signing of the accord, the leaders of the AASU and AAGSP formed a regional political party known as AGP [Axom Gana Parishad] in 1985. This new political party was able to form the government twice in Assam.

However, the AGP government was unable to resolve the most burning issue of illegal infiltration. Till 2012 only 2442 Bangladeshi national were detected and deported from Assam. This indicates that the administrative machinery has failed to detect the illegal infiltrators.

In 2019 the NRC (national register of citizenship) has published which has provided the total data of the illegal infiltrators in Assam. Accordingly, 19 lakh people have left out of the NRC among which names of 7 lakh Muslims have left out. So from this data it's clear that the either the data provided by the AASU leader was wrong or the NRC process is wrong which unable to detect the infiltrators. Even the figure provided by the NRC even raises a question regarding the relevance of Assam movement.

So from the above discussion it implies that due to the lack of apathy by the successive government, the Assam accord is yet to be executed fully and indigenious people of the state has been living with much apprehension that the identity of these people are in grave danger and they will be minority in their homeland.

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