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The Editor, JONER

Department of Political Science, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar
P.O. - Rangilakhata (783370) Dist. - Kokrajhar (BTC) Assam, India
E mail.: jonerbu@gmail.com,

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Muslim Immigration into Assam: In Retrospect

Dr. Hima Hazarika Das

Assistant Professor
Tinsukia College, Tinsukia (Assam)

Introduction:

The process of immigration, particularly of the Muslims, into the state of Assam is a historical one. It has been a continuous process ever since the 13th century when the Muslim invaders started invading Assam. Besides, during the period of Ahom rule, a number of Muslim personnel came into Assam with different purposes. But, it was only after the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 that the door of Assam was further thrown open to the Muslim immigrants, particularly from East Bengal. It appears that during the colonial period, Britishers, for their administrative convenience, made frequent changes of its boundary which obviously increased the numerical strength of the Muslim population in the province. Although the Muslim immigrants were initially encouraged to come into the state of Assam from the economic point of view, later on the issue of immigration had become more political than apolitical one. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Saadulla Ministry encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants into the state of Assam in the name of "Grow More Food" programme mainly for the sake of its political interest. Even the partition of the country could not prevent the flow of influx into the state. The subsequent creation of Bangladesh in 1971, too, could not prevent the illegal flow of Muslim immigrants into Assam. This process of free flow of immigration to this resourceful area has not yet been stopped in spite of adopting different measures to check the problem. In other words, the process of Muslim immigration is still going on into the state of Assam from across the border, particularly from Bangladesh. Therefore, it may be said that this process of free flow of Muslim immigration is not a new phenomenon; rather it is a perennial problem which could be best understood from the point of its historical legacy.

Objective:

The main objective of this paper is to examine the historical legacy of the process of Muslim immigration into Assam. Along with it an attempt has also been made to highlight the apprehensions of the Assamese people which developed due to the growth of Muslim population in the state and to put forward some recommendations to check this perennial problem.

Sources of Materials and Methodology:

The paper is based on both primary as well as secondary sources. The paper is mainly based on historical method.

Muslim immigration into Assam during the Mughal period:

The process of Muslim immigration into Assam has a long historical background. The earliest Muslim attempt to enter Assam forcibly was their invasion of 1205 led by Muhammad

Bakhtiyar Khalji from Bengal.¹ It was claimed by the historians that Bakhtiyar, who was the leader of Muslim invasion, pillaged and burned down villages and captured Kamarupa. But due to strong resistance from the local people, his invasion did not last long. A few years later, Assam was again invaded by the Governor of Bengal, Ghiyasuddin, but he was also beaten back and forced to withdraw. Again, by 1257 A.D. Ikhtiyaruddin Khan invaded Assam but with temporary success.² In 1337, Mohammad Shah sent a huge army to Assam to renew Muslim invasion but could not make much headway. The Muslim invaders first settled only by the end of the 15th century when Hussein Shah, the then ruler of Bengal (Gaur) attacked Assam and took over the Makata Kingdom near Cooch Bihar.³ According to an eminent historian, H. K. Barpujari, Muslim settlements might have commenced in the western Assam long before the 16th century, but their movement into upper Assam cannot be traced prior to the invasion of Nawab Mirjumla in 1662.⁴ His invasion in 1662 was the last serious and well organized effort of the Mughals to conquer Assam.⁵ It is interesting to observe that those places of the Brahmaputra valley which were subdued and controlled by the Muslims between 1603 and 1682 ultimately became the important centers of Muslim population and their preponderance.⁶ It needs mention here that although Mughals invaded Assam seventeen times between 13th and 17th centuries, the people of Assam could successfully resist the incorporation of Assam with Mughal Empire in its total form. It is alleged that with every successive attack on Assam during the reign of the Mughals, the number of Muslims got sharply increased in the province, though their exact number could not be determined.

During the Ahom period:

Besides the Muslim invaders, the Ahom kings who ruled Assam for a period of six hundred years, too, encouraged a number of Muslim personnel from other parts of the country to settle in Assam. Many Muslims were appointed by the Ahom kings in the several departments of the state for deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, carving inscriptions on copper plates and other metals, minting of coins, embroidery work, painting, carpentry, sword and gun making, manufacture of gun powder, tailoring and weaving.⁷ The Ahom king Rudro Singha (1697-1747) had also imported skilled Muslim personnel in certain trades including blacksmithy, architecture, Persian translation, tailoring, painting, drum beating etc.⁸ Some of them had also acquired the confidence of Ahom Kings and were given titles of officials such as 'Phukan', 'Barua', 'Saikia', 'Bora', 'Hazarika', 'Khonikar' etc. One such military official known as Ismail Siddique Hazarika alias 'Bag Hazarika' distinguished himself in the Saraighat battle against the Mughals under the leadership of legendary Ahom figure Lachit Barphukan.⁹ It is believed that Ahom kings even allowed the Muslims to follow their own faith. Some of the Muslim religious leaders known as Dewans were granted revenue free lands generally called *pirpal* lands to settle on.¹⁰ It is to be noted that the Muslim religious saint popularly known as Azan Fakir came from Bagdad to Assam approximately in 1635 A. D. and acquired a legendary status in Assamese society.¹¹ Whatever the case may be, the history of the seventeenth century was marked as the history of Ahom - Mughal conflict. In course of conflict, the district of Kamarupa and Goalpara came under the control of Mughals in direct contact with the Ahom kings who ruled central and eastern Assam across the Brahmaputra valley.¹² Thus, it was seen that long before the beginning of the modern history of Assam or in other words, even prior to the British annexation of Assam, a number of Muslim personnel came to Assam and settled permanently in different parts of the province, though their number cannot be determined.

Immigration during the Colonial Period:

Assam became a part of British India after the signing of the historic Yandaboo Treaty on the 24th of February, 1826. It is more significant to note that since the British annexation of the province, the flow of Muslim immigration into Assam became a continuous process from the neighboring province of Bengal in general and from the district of Mymensingh in particular. More importantly, the British government, after annexation of this region, made frequent changes of its boundary, perhaps to fulfill their own interest. For example, the Britisher's incorporated Assam with Bengal presidency in the early part of the 19th century and again divided the same province into two parts namely, Assam and Bengal and this provided great opportunity to the Bengali Muslim immigrants to come into Assam in a large number. Although Assam was made a separate province under a Chief Commissioner with its capital at Shillong in 1874, the inclusion of Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) and Cachar districts with Assam contributed a lot towards the growth of Muslim population in the province. It is notable that in 1905 Lord Curzon created a new province called 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' by dividing Bengal presidency into two parts namely, 'Eastern Bengal' and 'Western Bengal'. Such an act of the British government helped a lot in the process of Muslim immigration into Assam. Even after separation of Assam from East Bengal in 1912, the process of Muslim immigration continued into the state of Assam. The Census Report of 1911¹³ for the first time mentioned about the movement of immigrant labourers who were mostly Muslims from Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur to Assam who settled in the 'Char' lands of Goalpara district. The population of Goalpara district rose in the decade 1901-11¹⁴ by 30 percent, whereas it had risen by only 2 percent in the previous decade of 1891-1901. This sudden increase was perhaps due to the inflow of Muslim immigrants. Since then, this trend of Muslim immigration went on unabated. After 1911, these new settlers spread beyond the Goalpara district to other parts of the Brahmaputra valley. By 1921, the movement had extended in all the four lower and central districts of the valley to a considerable extent. Thus, in Goalpara district, nearly 20 % of the population was made up of these settlers. Then, next favourite district was Nowgaon, where they formed about 14 % of the population. In Kamrup, waste lands were being taken up rapidly, especially in the Barpeta sub-division. In Darrang, exploration and settlement by the colonists were in an earlier stage.¹⁵ In 1916, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgaon suggested a novel scheme which was to lead to a lot of acrimony in years to come. Called the line system, this consisted in drawing imaginary lines to segregate areas, where new immigrants could settle, from those which were declared the exclusive preserve of the Assamese.¹⁶ Later on, the growing number of Muslim immigrants compelled the colonial government to introduce the Line System mainly to restrict indiscriminate settlement of the immigrants. This 'Line System' was first introduced in Nowgaon in 1920 and later on introduced in Mangaldoi and Barpeta sub-divisions. Under this system, certain areas were marked for exclusive settlement of the immigrants. Although this system succeeded in restricting the large scale and indiscriminate settlement of the immigrants, it was not fully effective. The Census Report of 1931 noted the phenomenon in a very naked manner. It noted:

By 1921 the first Army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara. The second corps which followed them in the years 1921-31 has consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgaon. The Barpeta Sub-division of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely but few thousand Mymensinghians in North

Lakhimpur are an outpost which may during the next decade prove to be a valuable basis of major operations.¹⁷

As the line system was not fully effective, the Assamese people demanded a more rigid policy to stop further immigration into the state of Assam. In view of this, in 1928, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi contrived a "*Compact Colonisation Scheme*" outside which immigrants would not be allowed to settle in Assam and outlived land that would be left vacant to accommodate the future progeny of the Assamese people. Muslim League was not happy with this proposed system and took the case to national leaders.¹⁸ By 1931, most of the wastelands of the Brahmaputra valley was occupied by the settlers.¹⁹ While explaining the gravity of the situation, C. S. Mullan, the Superintendent of Census operation in Assam, of 1931 observed:

Where there is waste land, thither flock the Mymensinghians. In fact, the way in which they have seized upon the vacant area in the Assam valley seems almost uncanny. Without fuss, without tumult, without amount to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal to Assam valley during the last twenty five years. It looks like a marvel of administrative organization on the part of the government but it is nothing to the sort; the only thing I can compare it is the mass movement of the large body of ants.²⁰

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, a new element emerged, leading to the large scale immigration, particularly of the Muslims. The enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935 may be considered a significant constitutional development during the pre-independence period. As per the provisions of this Act, the Provincial Government was formed in Assam too under the leadership of either Saadulla or Gopinath Bordoloi at different times. After the election was over as per the Act, the Saadulla Ministry was formed in 1937. It was alleged that Saadulla Ministry always tried its best to increase the Muslim population in the province for its political interest. The Saadulla Ministry adopted a '*Land Development Scheme*' under which wasteland was to be distributed among the Muslim immigrants so that they could cultivate there to Grow More Food. In the name of '*Grow More Food*' campaign, it is alleged that Sir Saadulla encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants from East Bengal to come into Assam and to settle in the vacant lands in the Assam valley. The British Viceroy, Lord Wavell called his '*Grow More Food*' campaign as '*Grow More Muslims*'.²¹ The tempo of implementation of Land Development Scheme increased after 1939, when bulk of the Hindu members of the Assembly, who were Congressmen, had to remain absent due to imprisonment or detention in connection with Congress movement. In this connection, it may be noted that the Saadulla Government allowed the Bengali Muslim immigrants to settle over one lakh bighas of land in Assam valley during 1939-40 i.e., in just one year.²² Concerning the events, it was even alleged against the Saadulla ministry that it provided free travel to the immigrants to come to this province and to occupy vacant land.²³ It is notable here that Saadulla in his Budget speech of 1940 opined that to stop the flow of immigration from Bengal would be 'most unwise' as he felt that 'Assam is suffering from want of population to cultivate the vast quantity of arable land which is waiting for plough'.²⁴ On the other hand, it may be noted that in the new Saadulla Ministry which came back to power on August 25, 1942, the revenue portfolio was entrusted to Manawar Ali who was well known for his active sympathy for the immigrants.²⁵ Another notable aspect in this regard is that the pandal of Third Annual Conference of the Assam Provincial Muslim League which was held at Barpeta on 7th and 8th April, 1944 was decorated with the posters like 'Minister give us land or resign', 'Immigrants want better deal.'²⁶ etc. Here it needs mention that

the famous slogan enumerated by the Muslim immigrants was called 'Saadulla to Shala' (Brother-in law) doctrine with Saadulla at the helm of affairs in Assam in the late forties, the popular slogan was 'Upar Allah Niche Saadulla', 'Cholo Bhai -O-Shala Jo Kare Allah'.²⁷ From such slogan, it may be assumed that the Muslim immigrants knew nothing about the policy of Saadulla of encouraging the Muslims but they carried the bidding of the Muslim leaders only to come and settle in Assam. In other words, the League ministry under the leadership of Sir Saaddulla tried its best to increase the Muslim population in the province. Thus, it may be assumed that Saadulla, sometimes due to pressure of the immigrants, or sometimes to fulfill his political interest, encouraged a large number of immigrants from East Bengal to come and settle into the soil of Assam. Whatever may be the reason, the League's policy of encouraging the Muslim immigrants was very much opposed by the then Congress leadership. "There is no more land to spare", said the then Premier Bordoloi, "and those who say there is must be thinking of the bed of the Brahmaputra".²⁸ But, the flow of Muslim immigration into Assam could not be prevented at any cost during the pre-independence period and as such, the number of Muslim immigrants, particularly from East Bengal, increased to an unimaginable extent. The table given below shows the number of East Bengal immigrants who settled in Assam²⁹ as per Census Reports of different decades during the pre-independence period:

Table 1.1
Number of East Bengal immigrants settled in Assam
(Census Reports of Different Years)

Census Years	Number of immigrants
1891	17336
1901	17711
1911	74666
1921	195847
1931	225963

Source: Borah, A.C. (ed.),: *Immigration and Demographic Transformation in N.E. India*, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, 2012. p.108.

It appears from the above table that the number of East Bengal immigrants who settled in Assam during the pre- independence period increased after every decade which in turn helped a lot in the growth of Muslim population in the state. The following table shows the decadal growth of Muslim population³⁰ in the pre-independence period:

Table-1.2
Muslim Population (Census Reports of pre-independence Period i.e., 1911-1941)

Year	Muslim Population
1911	3,53,320
1921	5,85,943
1931	9,43,352
1941	13,03,963

Source: *Census Reports, 1911-1941*, cited in Phukon, Girin: *Politics of Regionalism in North East India*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1996, p.36.

It appears from the above table that in the pre-independence period i.e., 1911-1941, the number of Muslim population increased after every decade in one way or the other. The number of Muslim population in 1911 was 3,53,320 which increased to 5,85,943 in 1921 and 9,43,352 in 1931 and 13,03,963 in 1941. It may be noted that although, during the pre-independence period, the number of Muslim population increased after every decade, transfer of Sylhet, the largest Muslim dominated district, through a referendum held in June, 1947 helped a lot in decreasing Muslim population before independence.

Push and Pull factors:

It needs mention here that behind the process of Muslim immigration into Assam, a number of causes are there. Although there were economic causes behind the continuous and unheated process of Muslim immigration into Assam at the beginning, it was later on mixed up with the game of power politics in the state. In other words, there has been both push and pull factors in the physico, socio-economic and political environments of East Bengal and Assam for the incidence of immigration from the former to the later. In fact, a number of push and pull factors greatly helped in the process of Muslim immigration into Assam. The high rate of population growth, poor economic condition, tremendous pressure of population on land, increased fragmentation of land holdings and growing number of landless labourers etc. are responsible in case of Eastern Bengal in general and the Mymensingh district in particular. Besides, the oppression by the zaminders in the district of Eastern Bengal also forced a large number of cultivators to come into Assam. In brief, poor and backward economic condition of East Bengal (now Bangladesh), high growth rate of population etc. may be regarded as some push factors on the part of East Bengal, later East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. On the other hand, the virgin and rich unexplored fertile lands, substantial forest reserves unlike East Bengal, the expansion of Jute cultivation in Assam by the colonial ruler etc. are some of the important pull factors on the part of Assam. During the later part of the 18th and early part of the 19th century, the natural population of Assam decreased to a large extent due to the 'Moamoria peasant rebellion' and 'Burmese invasion'. Moreover, diseases like kala-zar had yet another effect in this direction during the early period of the colonial rule.³¹ Therefore, a large area of the valley remained vacant and uncultivated for a long time. In such a situation, the colonial government encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants, particularly cultivators, to come from Bengal to Assam. In short, the virgin and fertile land of Assam, the expansion of jute cultivation in Assam by the colonial ruler, disease and disaster, epidemics and earthquakes etc. may be called pull factors on the side of Assam. On the other hand, many Assamese claim that the Muslim League government encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants, particularly cultivators, to come from Bengal to Assam. In other words, apart from geographical push and pull factors, the political design of the Muslim League in Assam also helped in the large scale influx of immigrants.

Besides the above mentioned causes, a notable section of the Assamese middle class also contributed towards the process of Muslim immigration. For example, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, a leading personality of the Assamese society, during the middle of the nineteenth century, in a memorandum submitted to A. J. M.M. Mills, pleaded that the people from some of the back provided parts of Bengal could be invited to immigrate as a means of improving population of the province.³² Again, Gunabhiram Baruah, a member of Assamese gentry, even estimated that no less than a million could easily be settled from outside on wasteland of Assam.³³ On the other hand, the view of Jawaharlal Nehru was that in sparsely populated and land-rich Assam, immigration is bound to take place as an economic necessity. Nehru, in a letter to Bishnu Ram Medhi, an Assamese

leader and later Chief Minister of Assam, dated December 1, 1937, admitted the seriousness of the problem and advocated a policy of restricted immigration.³⁴ Even some Assamese Mahajans provided a substantial part of the necessary finance to enable the immigrant peasants to bring virgin soil under plough.³⁵ On the other hand, a number of Assamese people sold off their lands to immigrants at a good price.³⁶ The Muslim immigrants were also encouraged to immigrate as they were cheap labourers in different fields. Besides, the corrupt revenue officers, most of whom belonged to the dominant Assamese group, also helped the immigrant peasants to come into Assam. Thus, it is of great importance to note that it is not the Britishers or Leaguers only who encouraged the Muslim immigrants, but a section of the Assamese middle class is also responsible in bringing the immigrant Muslims into Assam. In other words, not only the Britishers or the Leaguers, but a section of the Assamese people also contributed towards the process of Muslim immigration into Assam.

After independence:

Although India got her independence on 15th August, 1947, it was only at the cost of partition. Even the partition and independence of the country could not prevent the flow of Muslim immigration into Assam. Before partition and independence of the country, inter-state immigration continued from the neighboring province of East Bengal, but after partition, independence and the inauguration of the Republic, there yet continued a large scale Muslim immigration from across the international border, first from East Pakistan, former East Bengal, then from Bangladesh (East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971). The different Census Reports of post-independent India reveal that there has been uninterrupted and continuous flow of Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan, later on Bangladesh into Assam. In 1951, the Census Commissioner, Mr. Vaghaiwalla wrote:

I have personally seen hundreds of persons coming by trains during the first months. I held the charge of Goalpara district. I had seen some experience as the Deputy Commissioner in Cachar during 1948-49 when hundreds of Muslim immigrants regularly travelled by the hill section railway from Badarpur to Lumding in order to go to Assam valley for settlement.³⁷

The table given below shows the percentage of the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam as per the Census Reports of 1961, 1971, 1991, 2001 and 2011.³⁸

Table 1.3
Percentage of the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam
(As per the Census Reports of 1961, 1971, 1991 and 2001)

Year	Percentage of total population	
	Hindus	Muslims
1961	71.33	25.30
1971	72.51	24.56
1991	67.13	28.43
2001	64.89	30.92

Computed from the *Census Reports* of 1961, 1971, 1991 and 2001.

Source: *Census Reports* of 1961, 1971, 1991 and 2001.

The above table shows that in 1961 the Hindus constituted 71.33 percent in Assam while Muslims constituted 25.30 percent. As per the Census Report of 1971, 72.51 percent was Hindu and 24.56 percent was Muslims. On the other hand, the Census Report of 1991 recorded 67.3 percent Hindus and 28.43 percent Muslims. Again, as per the Census Report of 2001, the Hindu constituted 64.89 percent while the Muslims constituted 30.92 percent. As per the Assam Religion Data of Census 2011³⁹ the Hindus constitute 61.47 percent while the Muslims constitute 34.2 percent out of total population in Assam. Thus, it appears that in 1961 Muslims constituted 25.3 percent of the total populations which had decreased to 24.56 in 1971, but rose to 28.43 percent in 1991, 30.92 percent in 2001 and 34.22 percent in 2011. In view of this, it may be mentioned firstly, the continuous flow of influx from across the international border i.e., first from Pakistan and then from Bangladesh and secondly, high birth rate and economic backwardness among the Muslim immigrants are mainly responsible for the growth of Muslim population in state which in turn changed the demographic composition of the state.

As no Census was held in 1981 in Assam due to student agitation, the proportion of Muslim population as per the Census Reports of 1971, 1991 and 2001⁴⁰ in different districts of the state given below

Table 1.4
Proportion of Muslim population in different districts of Assam (As per the Census Reports of 1971, 1991 and 2001)

District	Muslim Population (in %)		
	1971	1991	2001
1. Dhubri	64.46	70.46	74.29
2. Barpeta	48.58	56.07	59.36
3. Hailakandi	51.40	54.79	57.62
4. Goalpara	41.46	50.18	53.71
5. Karimganj	44.24	49.17	52.30
6. Nowgaon	39.24	47.19	51.99
7. Marigaon	40.16	45.31	47.58
8. Bongaigaon	27.96	32.74	38.52
9. Cachar	32.51	34.49	36.13
10. Darang	23.91	31.98	35.54

Computed from the *Census Reports* of 1971, 1991 and 2001.
 Source: *Statistical Hand Book*, Assam, 2001.

The above table shows that in Dhubri district there is the highest number of Muslim population as per the Census Reports of 1971, 1991 and 2001 respectively. It was 64.46% as per Census Report of 1971 which increased upto 70.46% in 1991 and 74.29% in 2001. Again, it is noticed in five other districts i.e., Barpeta, Hailakandi, Goalpara, Karimganj and Nowgaon (as mentioned in the table), the increase of percentage of Muslim population even crossed 50.00% of the total population in 2001. It too appears from the above table that Marigaon is fast approaching towards

this direction. It too is clear from the above table that in Bongaigaon, Cachar and Darang too, the percentages of Muslim Population are increasing from decade to decade. As per the Census Report of 1991,⁴¹ four districts namely, Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara and Hailakandi emerged as Muslim majority districts and as per 2001 Census Report,⁴² two more districts namely, Nowgaon and Karimganj emerged as Muslim majority districts. It is of great importance to note here that the Assam Religious Data of Census 2011⁴³ records nine (9) Muslim majority districts and these are Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Darrang Goalpara, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Morigaon and Nagaon. It appears from the Census Reports of 1991, 2001 and 2011 that the numbers of the Muslim dominated districts are increasing from decade to decade in the state. Now, the percentage of Muslims is the highest in Assam after Jammu and Kashmir. Although the government has taken different steps such as undertaking of Pakistani Infiltration Project, passing of the Passport Act, 1952, the Immigration (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 etc., to check the flow of Muslim immigration, the failure of these Acts greatly encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants to come into Assam. The Nehru-Liaquat Ali pact of 1950⁴⁴ further encouraged Muslim immigrants to come into Assam. The Act had a provision that the minorities who ran away to East Pakistan in the wake of 1950 communal riots in Assam can return to their homeland, if they so desired. This enabled the Muslims in large number to return to Assam. Again, during the Bangladesh Liberation Movement, a large number of people from East Pakistan came to the North Eastern states in general and reorganized Assam in particular. The process of Muslim immigration from across the border, particularly from Bangladesh, is still going on into the state of Assam. Some of the causes which seem to be responsible for increasing influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh are: border with half broken fencing or without fencing, failure of the river police to check illegal infiltrators from across the border, lack of adequate number of Border Security Forces (BSF) in its international border, lack of responsibility of some BSF to carry on their duty in a proper way, utilization of illegal immigrants, mainly Muslims, as vote-bank by some politicians of Assam etc. It is alleged against the Congress party that during the pre-independence period it strongly stood against the flow of Muslim immigration, particularly from East Bengal into Assam but, after partition and independence of the country, it seems that it has changed its policy towards the Muslim immigrants. It is very often alleged that the Congress party which ruled the country for a long period is very much responsible for encouraging Muslim immigrants first from East Pakistan and later on from Bangladesh. On the other hand, the backward economic condition of Bangladesh and high growth rate of population due to ignorance of family planning programme are also responsible for unending flow of Muslim immigration into Assam. In fact, nobody knows how many illegal immigrants are crossing both the landed as well as riverine borders to come into Assam but, it may be mentioned that a large number of immigrants are still continuing to flow into Assam, particularly from Bangladesh. This unending flow of Muslim immigrants increases the numerical strength of the Muslim population in the state of Assam which in turn seems to create a lot of apprehension in the minds of the Assamese people regarding the maintenance of their distinct socio-political identity. These apprehensions are really very much significant from socio-political points of view.

Apprehensions developed in the minds of the Assamese people:

The apprehensions which developed in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people are not only a post-independent, but a pre-independent phenomenon as well. During the pre-independence period, mainly in the early parts of the 20th century, the Assamese people seemed to make demand for the imposition of a more rigid policy mainly to stop further immigration into

the state of Assam. Similarly, on November 28, 1937, Ambikagiri Roychaudhury and Nilam Phukan, both Assamese patriots, submitted a memorandum to Nehru in Rangiya on behalf of "Asamiya Samrakohni Sabha" (ASS). Another memorandum was submitted on behalf of "Assam Deka Dal". They demanded separation of Sylhet and Cachar from Assam and a total ban on Bengali immigrants.⁴⁵ In fact, such memoranda may be regarded as the manifestation of apprehensions developed in the minds of the Assamese people against the continuous flow of Muslim immigrants into Assam. Similarly, the Congress party's stand against Sir Saadulla's 'Grow More Food' campaign may also be regarded as another expression of the Assamese people against the flow of Muslim immigrants into Assam. The Assamese people believed that if the process of Muslim immigration continued unabatedly even in near future it would be a great threat to the very identity of Assamese people and therefore they stood against such influx.

It is not only in the pre-independence period, but in the post-independent period too, that Assamese people suffered from constant fear and anxiety of being gradually dominated by Muslim immigrants both socio-culturally and politically. Therefore, the process of Muslim immigration may be noticed from two different angles. One is social while the other is political in nature. The social dimensions of Muslim immigration have great significance regarding the question of lingo-religious identity of the indigenous Assamese people. Although the Muslim immigrants may be regarded as a distinct religious group, they happened to be Bengali linguistically at the same time and thus, they contributed towards the numerical strength of the Bengalis as well. Such a situation created a lot of fear and anxiety in the minds of the Assamese people regarding the maintenance of their distinct lingo-cultural identity. On the other hand, the flow of Muslim immigration seems to increase the numerical strength of the Muslims in the state which appears very much significant from the political point of view.

Again, in the political scenario of Assam, too, no one can deny the influence of the Muslim immigrants. Ever since the British occupation of the province, the Muslim immigrants play a very significant role in the politics of the state. It may be alleged that the Saadulla ministry, during the pre-independence period, exploited the sentiment of the Muslim immigrants for political gain. It is alleged that the Congress party which stood against the process of Muslim immigration in the pre-independence period, now seems to exploit the sentiment of the Muslim immigrants and to utilize it in the game of power politics. But, it is not the Congress party alone who is exploiting the sentiment of the immigrants for political interest. Other political parties, whether national or regional, are also following the line. As the Muslim population increases, there seems to be the possibility of having the Muslim representative from such constituencies where Muslim people occupy a significant position. Such an idea creates a lot of anxiety in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people. Therefore, a section of the Assamese people demanded for detection and deportation of illegal immigrants and deletion of their names from the electoral rolls. The year long Assam Movement (1979-1985) on the issue of "Foreign Nationals" may be regarded as an extreme expression of Assamese nationalism, as the very purpose of this movement was to detect and deport the foreign nationals and to delete their names from the voter list to preserve the distinct Assamese identity. The formation of the first regional political party in the state i.e., Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in 1985 and even the formation of state government by this party for the first time i.e., (1985-1990 and 1996-2001) is a notable political development arising out of such anxiety. Similarly, the strong demand for repealing the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983, the signing of the historic Assam Accord in 1985 which aimed at identification, detection and deportation of foreign nationals along with deletion of their names

from the voter list or demand for updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in a democratic way, too, may be regarded as the manifestation of apprehensions developed in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people against continuous and unabated flow of influx from across the border, first from East Pakistan and then from Bangladesh. Whatever it may be, it is to be mentioned here that the Muslim population is slowly but surely playing an increasingly important role in the politics of the state. In such a situation, a section of the Assamese people suspect that Bangladesh has deliberately been conspiring to send large number of people to change the communal ratio of the state in the hope of justifying the annexation of Assam by Bangladesh.⁴⁶ Noted historian and former President of Indian History Congress, H. K. Borpuzari has expressed this fear and apprehended that 'unless infiltration from Bangladesh is stopped, large part of it (Assam) may become a part of Bangladesh within the first decade of 21st century.'⁴⁷ Whether his view becomes true or not within the first decade is not the matter, but, such a fear continues through every conscious mind of the state and therefore, they believe that if the Muslim immigration is allowed to continue even in near future then the very identity of the indigenous Assamese people including their political life would be at stake in near future.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the problem of Muslim immigration into Assam is a historical process. It is not a post-independent, but a pre-independent phenomenon. It was deeply rooted even during the colonial period. Even the partition of the country could not stop the process of Muslim immigration into Assam. Partition, instead of stopping further movement of population from East Bengal into Assam, added a new dimension to the problem. During the pre-independence period, such a movement was called internal migration, but, after independence it acquired the character and complicity of international immigration, mainly from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. Thus, the process continued in independent India as well. The process of Muslim immigration could not be stopped even by creating Bangladesh. Till date, the process of Muslim immigration, particularly from across the border, mainly from Bangladesh, continues at a large scale into the state of Assam. In spite of adoption of different measures to check the flow of Muslim immigration, the process of Muslim immigration still seems to continue from across the border, contributing towards the growth of Muslim population in the state. In other words, the increasing number of Muslim immigrants is creating a lot of fear and anxiety in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people regarding the maintenance of their distinct socio-cultural identity. What seems more significant is that the process has become a threat to the political identity of the Assamese people as well. Since politics in a democratic country like India is always determined by the numerical strength of a particular group or community, the increasing numerical strength of the Muslims due to continuous flow of Muslim immigrants has become a great threat to the political identity of the state of Assam. Such an idea created the sense of fear and anxiety in the minds of the Assamese people which got expression in the six-year long anti-foreigner movement in the post-independent era. The formation of the AGP, the first regional political party in the state, as a result of the movement and its government for two terms, the demand for repealing the IM (DT) Act, 1983, the signing of the historic Assam Accord in 1985 along with the demand for its proper implementation or the demand for updating of the NRC may be regarded as some notable expressions of Assamese nationalism against the foreign nationals, particularly of the Muslims. Therefore, the problem of Muslim immigration into Assam could be better understood in the context of its historical legacy.

Recommendations:

- Some recommendations to check the problem of Muslim immigration are mentioned below:
1. Signing of a repatriation treaty with the Bangladesh government is the urgent need of the hour to check the illegal immigration into Assam. The Government of India must discuss on this burning problem with the Bangladesh government so that the illegal Bangladeshi nationals residing within the territory of India in general and in Assam particular can be sent back to their own country.
 2. It is noticed that a large number of Bangladeshi nationals are illegally crossing the Assam-Bangladesh international border in search of their livelihood in Assam. Therefore the Government of India may undertake a plan of action through which financial assistance may be extended to Bangladesh to implement the poverty alleviation programme. This will, in turn, make the Bangladeshis feel comfortable in their own home.
 3. The National Register of Citizens, 1951 should be reviewed, computerized and updated in a fair manner. The process of updating of the NRC should be done regularly and registration of citizen should be made compulsory by law.
 4. The criminal proceeding should be launched strictly against those who are found harbouring and employing illegal migrants. It will discourage the illegal immigrants to come and settle in Assam and help the government to check the problem of illegal immigration into the state.
 5. Illegal migration from Bangladesh should not be regarded as a problem of Assam only or a regional one. It must be recognized as a national problem. The Central and the State Governments must not underplay the gravity of the threat posed by illegal immigrants to the security of the country. United effort from both the governments is required to save the country from the problem of illegal immigration.
 6. It appears from the practical experience that political parties, whether national or regional are very much interested in exploiting the issue of immigration in the game of the power politics. In such a situation, the Election Commission of India, which is responsible for conducting election throughout the country, must come forward to stop the politicization of such issues in the state. The Election Commission of India can introduce a code of conduct preventing the political parties from politicization of such sensitive issues in the state. In other words, political parties engaged in the politicization of the issue of illegal immigration, which may pose a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country, should be debarred from contesting elections or such parties should be banned. All political parties, whether national or regional, ruling or the opposition, must be united and determined to check the problem of illegal immigration for the protection of the interest of the country in general and of the Assamese people in particular.
 7. The indigenous people of the state must be made conscious of the problem of illegal immigration and the problems created by it by organizing awareness programmes. In this regard, the educated section of the society can take the responsibility of organizing seminars or workshops on the problem of illegal immigration. Besides, academicians, research scholars and notable writers can express their views on the problem through print media and also make the indigenous people aware of the different aspects of the problem. The discussions and write ups on the issue of illegal immigration must remain

a balance; otherwise these will be responsible for creating communal conflict in the society.

8. It is important to promote a healthy work culture among the indigenous people of Assam to stop illegal influx into its soil in the near future. Instead of looking for government job, the unemployed youth of indigenous group must change their mindset and come forward to earn their livelihood by engaging themselves in various kinds of physical labour such as rickshaw pulling, using pushcarts or construction work which are now mostly done by the immigrants. If the indigenous people of the state change their mindset and are determined to develop work culture by engaging themselves in all sorts of physical labour, it will be the best way to stop future inflow of illegal immigrants.
9. The open border areas between Assam- Bangladesh should be sealed within a stipulated time. The large area of Dhubri district which touches Bangladesh border still remains open and it needs to be sealed within a fixed period. Electric fencing is to be erected in such open border areas.
10. Introduction of three-tier BSF is essential to ensure foolproof border security. If any BSF personnel is not doing his duty in a proper way he should be given strict punishment. Besides, additional BSFs are to be appointed in those areas where the present arrangement of guarding the riverine area is not at all adequate. At the same time, the government should take step for providing 'flood light' with proper electricity facility in the riverine open area to check the illegal immigrants at night.
11. Since high birth rate among the illiterate section of Bangladeshi people is one of the important causes to encourage a large number of Muslim immigrants to come into Assam, they are to be made aware of family planning schemes and encouraged to take necessary measures for the same so that high growth rate of population can be checked. Steps should be taken for expansion of education of women as well. The Government of India should come forward to assist its counterpart in this regard.

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EDITED BY : RAJEEV MOHAN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & HEAD
DEPT. OF ENGLISH, TINSUKIA COLLEGE
MRIGANKA CHOUDHURY
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPT. OF ENGLISH, TINSUKIA COLLEGE

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Muslim immigration into Assam: A threat to the political identity of the state

Dr Hima Hazarika Das

Asstt. Prof, Deptt. Of Political Science, Tinsukia College

Introduction: In the modern globalized world, the term immigration acquires a global character and becomes a global phenomenon. Generally, immigration means a process which people enter a region or place in order to settle there permanently. It is a multi-dimensional process which covers different aspects such as socio-cultural, economic, demographic or the political one.

Immigration, whether illegal or otherwise, takes place almost among all the countries of the world including the third world countries like India. In case of India's North Eastern states, the problem of illegal immigration becomes more significant. However, this problem of illegal immigration becomes much more critical in the north-eastern states namely, Tripura and Assam. It is mainly due to the heavy influx of illegal Bangladeshis into Tripura that the Tripuris, the indigenous people of Tripura have become a minority in their own place. In case of Assam, it appears that the continuous flow of immigrants, first from East Bengal, then East Pakistan and now from Bangladesh has greatly been influencing its different dimensions including the political one. Since politics in a democratic country like India is always determined by the numerical strength of a particular group or community the increasing numerical strength of the Muslims particularly in some lower districts of Assam appears to be a great threat to its political identity. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to examine how the continuous flow of Muslim immigrants poses a great threat to the political identity of the state.

Objective: The objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To highlight the demographic profile of Muslim population in Assam particularly in some border as well as lower districts.
2. To examine how the issue of Muslim immigration has become a great threat to the political identity of the state.

Sources of Materials and Methodology used: This paper is based on both primary as well as secondary sources. Besides, a historical-cum-analytical method is used in this paper.

Muslim immigration into Assam: In Retrospect- The process of Muslim immigration into Assam has a long historical background. It is believed that the process of Muslim immigration has been continuing since the early part of the 13th century. Even during the Ahom period, the Muslims were encouraged to come into Assam. Ever since the British occupation of the province the process of Muslim immigration appeared to become more significant than ever before. Even after independence of the country the process of Muslim immigration could not be checked which rather continued unabatedly into the state. Before partition and independence of the country, inter-state immigration continued from the neighbouring province of East Bengal, but after partition, independence and the inauguration of the Republic, there yet continued large scale Muslim immigrants from across the international border, mainly from East Pakistan. In 1951, the Census Commissioner, Mr. Vaghaiwalla wrote:

"I have personally seen hundreds of persons coming by trains during the first months. I held the charge of Goalpara district. I had seen some experience as the Deputy Commissioner in Cachar during 1948-49 when hundreds of Muslim immigrants regularly travelled by the hill section railway from Badarpur to Lumding in order to go to Assam valley for settlement."

Even the creation of Bangladesh too could not prevent the flow of Muslim immigration into Assam. Still, the process of Muslim immigration has been continuing into the soil of Assam from across the international border, particularly from Bangladesh which becomes very much problematic in the state.

It needs to be mentioned here that a number of push and pull factors greatly helped in the process of Muslim immigration into Assam. The high rate of population growth, poor and backward economic condition, tremendous pressure of population on land etc. may be regarded as some push factors on the part of East Bengal, later East Pakistan and now Bangladesh while the virgin and rich unexplored fertile lands, substantial forest reserves unlike East Bengal, etc. are some of the important pull factors on the part of Assam. Besides, frequent changes of boundary made by the Britishers or the Muslim League government led by Sir Saadulla, too, encouraged a large number of Muslim immigrants into Assam particularly from East Bengal.

Along with these, a notable section of the Assamese middle class also contributed towards the process of Muslim immigration. It is to be mentioned that even after independence of the country different causes encouraged the illegal Muslim immigrants from across the international border particularly from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. In this regard, the Indira Mujib Treaty (1971) under which the Government of India agreed to take the responsibility of all migrants who entered India on or before March 24, 1971 is very much significant. The process of illegal Muslim immigration particularly from Bangladesh is still going on into the state due to a number of causes such as: porous Indo-Bangla border or retrograde nature of the people of Assam etc.

Demographic profile of Muslim population in Assam particularly in some border as well as lower districts: The continuous and unabated process of Muslim immigration, ever since the British occupation of the province till date, contributes in the growth of Muslim population in the state in general and in some border and lower districts in particular. During the colonial period, the Britishers' incorporation of Assam with Bengal presidency made Assam and Bengal two parts of the same province which encouraged the Muslims of Bengal to come into Assam easily. Although, later on, Assam was made a separate province under a Chief Commissioner, the inclusion of two districts i.e., Cachar and Sylhet with Assam contributed in the growth of Muslim population in the province. In fact, the major influx of Bengali Muslims appears to have begun after 1900. While the growth rate of Goalpara district had only been 1.4 percent in the entire decade from 1881 to 1891, only 2 percent from 1891 to 1900, it jumped to 30 percent between 1901 to 1911. --²The Muslim population increased not only in Goalpara district, but in some other lower districts such as Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon as well. The growth of Muslim population in the four lower districts of Assam valley seemed to be mainly due to continuous flow of Muslim immigrants from East Bengal. The increase was most marked in the district of Nowgaon where over 30 years the Muslim population increased by 1,500 percent.³ It may be noted that the process of Muslim immigration into Assam continued unabatedly through 1930s and 1940s as well, contributing towards the growth of Muslim population in the province. It is generally alleged that Sir Saadulla encouraged a large

number of Muslim immigrants in the name of Grow More Food programme, which in turn contributed in the growth of Muslim population in the state. But it needs to be mentioned that the transfer of Sylhet, the largest Muslim dominated district, through a referendum helped a lot in decreasing the percentage of Muslim population before independence.

Even after the partition of the country and subsequent creation of Bangladesh the continuous and unabated flow of Muslim immigrants into Assam contributed towards the growth of Muslim population in the state. The growth of Muslim population in the state in comparison to the Hindus can be assumed from the comparative study of the percentages of both the Hindus and the Muslims. The table⁴ given below shows the percentage of Hindus and Muslims in different decades in the state.

Table -1.1
Percentages of the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam

Census Report	Hindus (%)	Muslims (%)
1961	71.33	25.30
1971	72.51	24.56
1991	67.13	28.43
2001	64.89	30.92
2011	61.47	34.22

Source: Computed from the Census Report of different years.

In the above table, different Census Reports of post independent period shows the decline of percentage of the Hindu population while, except the Census Report, 1971, the percentage of Muslim population increased after every decade.

To give a statistical view of the growth of Muslim population in some of the border and lower districts of the state we can make a comparative study of percentages of the Hindus and the Muslims of different decades. The table⁵ given below highlights comparative percentages of both the Hindus as well as the Muslims in some border districts of lower Assam.

Table -1.2
Percentages of Hindus and Muslims in Border Districts of Assam
(As per 1971, 1991 and 2001 Census)

District	1971		1991		2001	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
Goalpara	50.17	41.46	39.89	50.18	38.11	53.71
Dhubri	34.80	64.46	28.73	70.46	24.73	74.29
Borpeta	51.19	48.58	40.26	56.07	40.19	59.36
Nagaon	59.64	39.24	51.73	47.19	47.79	50.99
Marigaon	59.57	40.16	54.56	45.31	52.21	47.58
Karimganj	55.14	44.24	50.15	49.17	46.69	52.30
Hailakandi	47.48	51.40	43.70	54.79	41.11	57.62

Source: Computed from Census Reports of 1971, 1991 and 2001.

It appears from the table that the percentage of Muslim population had been increasing in the above mentioned districts after every Census in comparison to the Hindus. The table highlights that the percentages of Hindus decreased to a considerable extent in these districts during these decades. If we keep our eyes on the Census Report of different decades, it becomes clear that the 1991 Census Report recorded four Muslim majority districts namely, Dhubri, Barpeta, Hailakandi and Goalpara while the Census Report of 2001 added two other Muslim dominated districts namely, Karimganj and Nagaon. According to the Census Report of 2011⁶, the number of Muslim dominated districts increased to nine and it added three other districts namely, Morigaon, Bongaigaon and Darrang in the list of 2001 Census.

We may also view from another statistical data that percentage of Muslim population in the border districts increased in contrast to the percentages of Hindu population in the same. The table⁷ given below highlights growth of Muslim population in percentage in some border districts of Assam during 1971-2001.

Table-1.3
Growth of Muslim Population (%) in some border districts of Assam (1971-2001)

Districts	1971-1991		1991-2001	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
Dhubri	-6.07	+ 6.0	- 4.0	+3.84
Goalpara	-11.0	+ 8.6	-1.68	+3.61
Borpeta	-9.4	+ 7.3	-1.0	+ 8.9
Karimganj	- 4.9	+ 5.0	-5.5	+ 3.1
Marigaon	-4.85	+4.90	-2.34	+2.29
Nagaon	-7.87	+ 7.3	-3.93	+3.90

Source: Borah, A.C. (ed.): *Immigration and Demographic Transformation in North East India*, Ananchal Prakash, Guwahati, 2012, p.123.

It appears from the above table that in some of the lower border districts of Assam namely Dhubri, Goalpara, Borpeta, Karimganj, Marigaon and Nagaon, the percentages of Hindu population decreased from decade to decade but the percentages of Muslim population in these border districts increased during the same decades. From such statistical report mentioned above, we come to the conclusion that the flow of immigrant Muslims into some border districts of Assam is an accepted fact which even badly affects its demographic composition of population.

The issue of Muslim immigration as a threat to the political identity of the state: It may be noted that the issue of Muslim immigration has become a great threat to the political identity of the state both during the colonial and post-colonial period. During the colonial period, the increasing numerical strength of the Muslim population in the province provided an opportunity to the Cabinet Mission (1946) to include Assam with Bengal, a Muslim majority province in group C in its Grouping Plan. But it was mainly due to strong opposition

Gopinath Bordoloi that Assam could be saved from the inclusion with Muslim majority provinces of Bengal in group C or in League's proposed Pakistan.

Even after independence of the country and subsequent creation of Bangladesh the issue of Muslim immigration appears to be very much significant. It is mainly at the time of by-election of the Mongaldoi Lok Sabha Constituency that the Election Commission reported that the names of more than forty thousand illegal immigrants are included in the electoral rolls, most of whom are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The report created a lot of apprehensions in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people regarding the maintenance of their distinct political identity. In such a situation, AASU made the slogan 'No Revision, No Election' and demanded for detection and deportation of foreign nationals. The issue of illegal foreign nationals particularly from Bangladesh even paved the way for the outbreak of six-years long Assam Movement (1979-1985) which is also known as Assam Foreigner Movement. The formation of the first regional political party in the state i.e., Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) in 1985 and its government for two terms i.e., (1985-1990 and 1990-2001) is a notable political development arising out of such an anxiety. The rise of the UMF (United Minorities Front) is also very much significant in this regard.

In a similar way, the demand for repealing the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983 too may be regarded as the manifestation of the apprehensions developed in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people regarding their future political identity. This peculiar piece of legislation, in place of detecting and deporting foreign nationals, made an attempt to protect the interest of the illegal immigrants. As such it may be assumed that through the demand for repealing this controversial Act, the people of Assam wanted to protect their future political identity. It is notable here that later on this controversial Act was declared as unconstitutional by the honorable Supreme Court of India on July 12, 2005. In protest of it, the AUDF (Assam United Democratic Front) was born in the state. The birth and rise of AUDF, presently known as AIUDF, is also very much significant from the political point of view.

The issue of Muslim immigration may be viewed as a great threat from the view point of non implementation of the core provisions of the historic Assam Accord, 1985 as well. The failure of the government to implement the core provisions of the Accord- identification, detection and deportation of foreign nationals or fencing the wide open international border too, highlights that the issue of Muslim immigration poses a great threat to the political identity of the state.

The process of updating National Register of Citizens (NRC) which is going on in Assam at the direction of the honorable Supreme Court of India too highlights the threat posed by the issue of illegal immigration to the political identity of the state. The demand for updating of the NRC in a fair and democratic way, too, may be regarded as the manifestation of apprehensions developed in the minds of the Assamese people regarding their future political identity. The increasing numerical strength of the illegal immigrants particularly Bangladeshis in the state created a situation of updating the NRC. It is hoped that it will help to identify the indigenous people in the state as well as the citizens of the country and to detect and deport illegal foreign nationals from the state.

If we examine statistical reports of the growth of Muslim population in some of the districts in Assam, the threat posed to its political identity becomes clear. From the Census Reports of 1991, 2001 and 2011 we can assume that the growth of Muslim population in some of the lower districts may pose a great threat to the political identity of the state in future. The Muslim dominated districts or some of them in the course of time may demand for plebiscite for merger with Bangladesh. If it so happens, it will be a great threat to the political identity of the state in near future.

However it may be, it is to be mentioned here that the Muslim population is slowly but surely playing an increasingly important role in the politics of the state. In such a situation, a section of the Assamese people suspect that Bangladesh has deliberately been conspiring to send a large number of people to change the communal ratio of the state in the hope of justifying the secession of Assam by Bangladesh.⁸ In 1998, then governor of Assam, S.K. Sinha had in a report on illegal influx of Bangladeshi immigrants into Assam, warned that the "silent demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geostrategically vital districts of Assam."⁹ Noted historian and former President of Indian History Congress, H. K. Ghosh has expressed this fear and apprehended that 'unless infiltration from Bangladesh is stopped, large part of it may become a part of Bangladesh within the first decade of 21st century.'¹⁰ Whether his view becomes true or not within the first decade is not the matter, but such a fear continues through every conscious mind of the state and therefore, they believe that if the Muslim immigrants are allowed to continue even in near future then the very identity of the indigenous Assamese people including their political life would be at stake in near future.

Conclusion / Recommendations: From the above discussion, we may come to the conclusion that the continuous and unabated process of Muslim immigration into Assam heavily brought changes in the demographic composition of population in the state in general and in some lower districts in particular, which, in turn, creates apprehension in the minds of the dominant section of the Assamese people regarding the maintenance of their distinct political identity. In view of the problem discussed above, this study may be concluded with some recommendations which will help to check the process of illegal immigration into the state. Some such recommendations are- signing of a repatriation treaty with the Bangladesh Government; deletion of the names of voters of doubtful origin from the updated NRC as well as from the electoral rolls; developing a healthy work culture among the indigenous people of Assam; fencing in the open border area within a stipulated time; providing 'flood light' with proper electricity facility in the riverine area; formation of monitoring committee to supervise the duties of the BSF etc. Last, but not the least, politicization of the issue of illegal immigration must be stopped by the political parties for the greater interest of the country in general and the people of Assam in particular.

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