

# FEDERALISM IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ASSAM

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## ABSTRACT

*The working of the Indian Federal System has been affected by the predominant position enjoyed by the national political parties and the lack of adequate politicization of the masses in the country. Further, lack of well organized opposition capable of offering an effective challenge to the centrist ruling parties, and of forming a stable alternative government at the Centre, or even in a number of States, has been responsible for the steady growth of a trend of centralization of power in India. It has tended to reduce the States to the status of 'glorified and magnified municipalities.' Centralization of political powers in the hands of central leaders is bound to create reaction from regions whose interests seem to have been ignored. The emergence of regional forces in India is rooted in this malady.*

*Like the other regions of the country, demands for regional autonomy have also emerged in Assam in post-independence period. The history of political development in the State shows that the relationship between the Centre and Assam was marked by a consistent and deep sense of grievances, injustice and negligence on the part of Assam. The underlying causes of this political development were both political and economic. In this context, it is important to analyze the causes of emergence of regional forces in Assam to understand the federalizing process of the Indian Union. This paper highlights that the pace of development in Assam has been extremely cumbersome due to 'unequal treatment' meted out to the State by the Central Government. Under the circumstances, 'Assamese nationalism' found fertile ground to take firm root in the Assamese conscience and the middle class elite undertook the task of consolidating this 'self-consciousness' among the Assamese masses with the hope that mass mobilization might transform such conscience into a widespread movement to achieve the goals of socio-economic, political and cultural significance. The basic objective of the paper is to examine, to what extent, regionalism in Assam has been contributing towards the growth of federal process and national integration.*

**Key Words:** *Federalism, Regionalism, Assam, Reorganization, Financial Relations, Immigration*

## INTRODUCTION

Federalism maintains a balance between the centrifugal and centripetal forces in a society. It has been regarded as an effective means to form a big nation by uniting diverse elements who have differences on political, historical, cultural, ethnic, linguistic or such other grounds. A federation is formed "where there is a desire to be united, but not to be unitary" (Wheare: 1964). Its efficacy has

been accepted and proved in many big countries of the world in modern times. The popularity of this model of government has led to the opinion that “this is an age of federalism”. In a federation, the equation between centralism and de-centralism, between Union and States, are not adversarial, or of ‘either or’ dichotomy, but of convergence in a pattern of cooperative distribution of jurisdiction and power. Federalism is not merely a structural arrangement but also a process of functioning (Khan 1997: 3). However, perhaps there is no federation in the world, in which the division of power between the Centre and the Units has been satisfactory to all concerned and without any controversy.

India has been regarded as the world’s most classic, complex and largest social and cultural federation. The Indian political identity is the heritage of India’s national movement, coalescing the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-regional segments into a holistic federal system (Khan 1997: 4). However, its continental size, diverse character, and centripetal governmental character have given rise to debate and contradictions between the Centre and the States in post-colonial period. This debate on the Centre-State relation in Indian federation has been a persistent feature of Indian politics especially after the fourth general election of 1967. The general election of 1977 brought a qualitative, and, apparently, durable change in the country’s political landscape thereby reviving the demand for a revision of Centre-State relation. In fact in 1977, the perceptible erosion of power structure at the Centre created certain new dimensions in federal polity in India. Under these circumstances the regional political parties in Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and the CPI (M)-led government of West Bengal and many others began to assert their demands for greater State autonomy. This trend did not stop, even though Mrs. Indira Gandhi regained her lost power after the fall of the Janata Government at the Centre. The same trend continued under the dominance of Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress rule at the Centre. The demand for restructuring the federal polity to make it more subservient to the needs of the society has been raised from a wide spectrum of political commitments. The CPI (M) in West Bengal and Tripura, the AIADMK and DMK in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir, Akali Dal in Punjab, AGP in Assam and Janata Party in Karnataka are not the only champions of this demand; some of the leading opposition parties in one way or another are also emphasizing the need for reshaping the federal polity. The Centre responded by setting up the Sarkaria Commission to look into the issue. This pursuit of institutional change and innovation accelerated in 1989 when the National Front coalition, with V.P. Singh as Prime Minister, assumed office at the Centre in the Ninth Lok Sabha. In the subsequent elections of 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004 and in 2009 no single political party could secure absolute majority in Lok Sabha. As a result trend of coalition government has emerged in national politics as well as state politics. However, in the Sixteenth Lok Sabha election (2014) BJP secured absolute majority challenging the twenty five years trend of coalition politics at the Centre. In spite of this, the Centre-State tension continued towards the second decade of this century, during UPA’s two consecutive terms under the leadership of Congress as well as even during the present NDA government led by BJP.

Like the rest of India, regional forces have emerged in the politics of Assam. The State of Assam had been under the Congress Government slightly with a break in 1977-79 till the

installation of AGP Government in 1986. Ordinarily it was expected that since the State was ruled by the Congress, there should have been a very cordial relation with the central Congress authorities. But the history of political development in the State would clearly show that the relationship was far from being happy and was marked by a constant and consistent sense of grievances, injustice and neglect on the part of the State of Assam. The causes for this were both political and economic. The most significant political reason was the Centre's authoritarian policy of reorganisation of Assam which led to a bitter confrontation and a sense of helplessness and frustration in State leadership (Gogoi 2014: 81). In the economic field, the issues such as the location of first and second oil refinery in public sector, the determination of oil-royalty, the establishment of industries, extension of railway broad-gauge line, the inadequate allotment of funds for development plan etc. greatly contributed to Assam's confrontation with the Centre (Misra 1980: 1357-1365). Another important constituent, which created bitterness between the Centre and Assam in the post-colonial period, was continuous influx of people from outside and other parts of India to Assam leading to the threat of very existence of the indigenous Assamese people. Keeping in view these facts in mind this paper is an attempt to highlight the pulls and pressures on the issue of reorganization of States in Assam and the reactions of the Assamese elite to the issue in particular. The paper also focuses on the Centre-Assam financial relations and reactions of the Assamese elite on it. In addition, this paper endeavours to highlight how issue of migration has been affecting the Centre-Assam relations and regionalized the politics of Assam and, in turn influences the federalizing process of the country.

As already noted, Centre's authoritarian policy of creating new States and to change State boundaries has been of enormous consequence to the politics of Assam. The Central government carved out separate States in the face of the aspirations for cultural and political autonomy of the tribal peoples in the post-independence period. The Union Government's policies of carving separate States out of Assam deeply affected its politics in the subsequent period. It energized movements for further separation and discouraged a politics of accommodation (Baruah 2010: 107). Nagaland was formed in the year 1963 after its separation from Assam and afterwards the processes of the successive reorganization of Assam's boundaries had begun in Northeast India. The incumbent Chief Minister of Assam B. P. Chaliha considered reorganization as 'vivisection of the Assam' and maintained that "the people and the Government of Assam will not accept any decision of the Centre which will be ruinous of this part of the country" (*The Assam Tribune* 1967, Oct. 23). However, the trend of break-ups continued with Meghalaya being declared as Sub-State in 1970 and then into a full-fledged State after curving out from Assam. In 1972 it was Mizoram which was separated from Assam and made first into a Union Territory and then into a full-fledged State. In the same year NEFA was transformed into a Union Territory with a new name, 'Arunachal Pradesh'. It was made a separate State in 1987, thus successfully accomplishing the process of creation of new States in the Northeastern region. The Assamese elite did react sharply against the move of the Centre to reorganize Assam as the Assamese middle class had firm conviction on their ability to keep the territorial integrity of Assam intact. In spite of the formation of the Assam Anti Federation Action Council (AAFAC) in 1968 which had undertaken the first initiative to organize a State-wide strike against the process of reorganization, the Union Government's efforts at

reorganization of the State continued and it resulted in large-scale disturbances. The people observed “Unity Day” on January 24, 1968 and they even called for Assam’s separation from India due to the rising anger against the Union. The issue of reorganization unleashed a series of disturbances in the State which largely moulded the attitude of the Assamese elite and the masses towards the Centre.

The working of Indian federalism was such that it ended up dissecting post-colonial Assam into five States, and afterwards there were more demands in the offing for further division of the existing State. The Assamese intelligentsia and legislators had expressed a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the reorganization of Assam. By criticizing the role of Central Government the Assamese elite demanded that it should not be encouraged. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika called it “a sharp knife to fragment the Northeastern region” (*The Assam Tribune*, 1971, Nov 6). As already noted, in spite of the efforts of the Assamese middle class to protect the territorial integrity of the State (Misra 2000: 121) in the form of AAFAC in 1968 itself, Assam has to face subsequent reorganization which was sharply criticized by the legislators and intelligentsia of Assam. The proposal for reorganization of Assam was squarely blamed by the leader of the United Legislature Party Gaurishankar Bhattacharyya who termed disintegration as ‘contagious disease’ (*The Assam Tribune* 1967, Oct. 26). Debeswar Sarma was also not in favour of separation as “the reorganization would divide the people of the eastern region further which might serve the purposes of the ruling clique in New Delhi” (*The Assam Tribune* 1971, Oct. 29). Terming the reorganization as ‘imposition’, member of Assam Legislative Assembly Dulal Chandra Barua said “the reorganization is an important imposition from above and is the creation of some political leaders for their personal benefit.” Lakshyadhar Choudhury regarded that “creation of seven different administrative units in one Reorganization Bill is something like a break of nature where a woman giving birth to seven children at a time” and “this ‘Black Bill’ would dig our own grave” (*The Assam Tribune* 1971, Nov. 6). Thus, the Assamese intelligentsia and legislators showed a deep sense of dissatisfaction towards the policy of reorganization of Assam and public opinion was formed against the policy of the Centre.

In spite of this, due to India’s weak federalism Assam was dismembered. The voice of Assamese elite was never heard by the Centre. They gave rise to fresh demands for more and more States. The ongoing demands for new States such as Bodoland, Karbi Anglong Autonomous State, and Kamatapur etc. are the result of this policy of the Centre. The success of one encourages others to press further their demands and give rise to some fresh demands. The situation has become so acute today that certain political parties have already started demanding another State Reorganisation Commission (Talukdar 1996: 40). In this way, Centre’s policy for carving separate States out of Assam affected the reorganization politics in Assam in the subsequent period. Actually most of the movements for separate States in the Northeast India started with a demand for socio-economic upliftment. The market economy and uneven economic development widens the gap between the ethnic groups and no effective efforts have been made to meet the demands of the ethnic groups. Long years of indifference to their grievances further agitate the tribals’ minds which finally led to the demand for separate States. In addition, the emerging conflict between the governing and non-governing elites at various levels played the crucial role as the elite tend to

generalize their conflict and build up movements mobilizing their respective communities. Added to it, Centre's policy of carving out separate States encourages others to press further demands and give rise to tensions. Due to Centre's continued neglect and indifference to Assam's socio-political and economic issues and the existence of the region's sub nationalist sentiments, new demands of separate States have come to the fore and the Centre conceded it one after another in the post-independence period. Therefore, a section of Assamese elite, especially the dominant section of the plains, have become quite dissatisfied with the Centre. Thus, the voice raised by Assamese elite against reorganization of Assam is, indeed, a dominant issue which moulded the attitude of the Assamese elite to India's weak federal structure in the post-independence period.

Again in the area of distribution of fiscal resources, Indian federalism is probably at its weakest. The Constitution of India empowers the Central Government to exercise enormous powers in fiscal field. The States are certainly unhappy in this financial arrangement. Financially too Assam depends heavily on the Centre, a result of centripetal constitution, to discharge its responsibilities. It has been argued that Assam is an endowed region, gifted with many natural resources, but the endowments have not translated into economic growth and development. The path of development adopted by the Indian State is fundamentally capitalist in nature which generates severe regional disparities including Assam. Assam is located in a strategically sensitive region which faces perennial floods, political disturbances and severely underdeveloped infrastructure of roads, railways, communication, power, terminal and institutional facilities and abject poverty (Hussain 1993: 67). Hence, Assam fails to draw worthwhile private investment for its economic development. Subir Bhaumik argued, "Instead of investing in the region's infrastructure and allowing market forces to do the rest the country's federal government pumped huge quantum of funds to sustain the region's economy" (Bhaumik 2009: 231). Terming Assam as "colonial hinterland" Tilottama Misra stated that "there has been a systematic exploitation of the rich resources of Assam, before 1947 by the colonial rulers, and since then by the Indian State and Indian capitalists who have continued the colonial tradition" (Misra 1980: 1357-1365). It led to the growing awareness among the Assamese people of being subjected to gross economic exploitation on a scale comparable to, and even sometimes worse than in the pre-independence days.

Thus, the policy of strengthening the Centre at the cost of the States has led to serious consequences to the federalizing process of the country. Despite being the country's largest producer of tea, oil, plywood and forest products, Assam is one of the poorest and industrially most backward States of India. After decades of independence, Assam is lagging far behind the rest of the country in most important parameters of growth. Its economy remained predominantly agrarian. In addition to this, Assam faces perennial floods. The failure to control the Brahmaputra and other rivers contributed decisively in keeping Assam agriculturally backward in spite of its fertile soil. The growth in agricultural sector in Assam was virtually stagnant leading to dependence on other States for food grains (Alagh and Sarma 1984: 96; Hussain 1993: 68). The development in industrial sector is also not encouraging. Assam is deprived of her legitimate share and benefits because of the practice of concealment of real profit of tea earned by the foreign as well as big Indian capitalists (Borgohain 2012: 64). Moreover, except the Assam Tea Corporation which is a public sector organization owning a few sick and unprofitable tea gardens, the overwhelming

majority of the big gardens are under foreign and Indian companies which are controlled from London and Calcutta. As a result, a large share of profits from the Assam gardens flow out to foreign and Indian big companies.

Another important natural resource of Assam is crude oil which has become a cause of contention between Centre and Assam in post-independence period. Assam has an estimated reserve of 1.3 billion tones of crude oil and 156 billion cubic metres of natural gas (*The Hindu* 2009, Nov. 14). But, the oil industry did not develop in Assam contrary to the expectations of the people of Assam. The Government of India was not interested in establishing refineries in Assam until the vigorous movements started by the people of Assam. Apart from the question of the establishment of refineries, the people of Assam have been feeling that the State is not getting adequate royalty for crude oil (Misra 1980; Hussain 1993: 76). Further, the Government of Assam repeatedly raises demands to release the existing oil royalty of around Rs. 10,000 crores, but in vain. Very recently the announcement of Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan regarding global bidding process for 12 small oil fields in Assam is strongly criticized by several nationalistic organizations of Assam (*The Assam Tribune*, June 26, 2016). In addition, there was much possibility of establishment of petro-chemical and some other ancillary industries on the basis of natural gases extracted from the oil fields in Assam. But, the growing importance of natural gas as a source of energy and as raw material for a variety of modern industries does not seem to impress the Central Government much. Of late, as a result of Assam Accord the Assam Gas Cracker Project registered as 'Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited' on January 8, 2007 is coming up at Lepetkatta in Dibrugarh which has started commissioning from the year 2016.

Besides, Assam has a tremendous potential in tourism that has not been exploited at all. It can be termed as a miniature India which has diverse ethnicity, varied climatic conditions, national parks like Kaziranga and Manas, rain forests, beautiful hilly landscape, tea gardens and rivers like the Brahmaputra and Barak and its tributaries. Assam has each and everything from topographical diversity to scenic beauty and from rich historical background to unique ethnic life-style. In spite of its identification as a tourist destination it lacks the infrastructure and the marketing drive to attract tourists. Richly endowed with flora and fauna, landscape and ethnic diversity, Assam can be developed into a viable tourist hotspot.

Another cause for the slow pace of economic development of the State has been the inadequate transport facilities. Even after decades of independence Assam has been far behind in railway network. The British constructed the existing metre-gauge railway line in Assam in 1881 to facilitate the transportation of tea and troop movements whenever necessary. So, Assam's single main railway line passes through the tea-belts of the State without touching most of the important towns and villages. The railway map of Assam has remained the same since the British days, and the motives which impelled the British to construct the railway in this region appear to be shared by the administrators from Delhi. Hence, Assam remained backward in spite of enormous wealth due to post-colonial capitalist nature of economy of India.

An another important constituent cause which created bitterness between the Centre and Assam in the periods after independence was continuous influx of people from outside and other parts of India to Assam leading to threats to the very existence of the Assamese people. Due to the encouragement of British officials and support of Assamese middle class personalities immigration to Assam started during colonial period. The demand for labour in the tea plantations was the first major reason to turn to immigrants. In the absence of a strong local labour force, Assam had to face mass-migration of labour, mostly from the Jharkhand region, to serve the interests of the British capital. Tea labourers' massive migration transformed the demographic structure very significantly in Assam. However, it was not only tea plantations that had to depend on immigrant labour. Other enterprises that developed during Assam's economic transformation in the nineteenth century such as coal and oil fields and the construction of roads, buildings and railways, also attracted immigrant labour. There were, in addition, immigrants who came to Assam to occupy the new middle-class positions that required new skills, such as the knowledge of English, and to take advantage of the expanding opportunities for trading (Kalita 2007: 10).

The situation became more critical when the virgin and fertile soil of Assam has attracted a large number of immigrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The colonization of land by settlers from East Bengal began in a big way in the second decade of the twentieth century to supply food grains and other agricultural products to the growing modern sectors in Assam. The immigrants gradually subjugated the vacant *chars* and forest lands of Assam. The Census Report of 1911 mentioned for the first time the movement of immigrants from the East Bengal to Assam's waste lands. Over the years, Assam had been transformed from a land abundant and thinly populated State to a land scarce and thickly populated state. The rapid growth of population adversely increased the pressure on land. By the 1931 census the population movement had become even more dramatic (*Census of India* 1931, Vol. III: 49). The issue of immigration got a new direction with the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan.

The partition of the country in 1947 did not prove deterrent to immigration problem. After the partition the Bengali Hindu 'refugees' from East Pakistan found no difficulty in crossing the porous border and settled down either by themselves or through their relatives unchecked and undetected to escape communal violence. Out of Assam's total population of 9,044,000 in 1951 as many of 1,344,000 or 14 percent were born outside Assam. But the way in which the refugee problem was dealt with by the Central Government created a considerable resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. They felt that the economic and cultural existence of the Assamese people was being seriously menaced by the 'so called refugee problem' created to cover up the old question of immigration. Indeed, what they pleaded was that 'Assam' must exist, and exist as the homeland of the Assamese people (Phukon 1984: 28). The Assam Government even expressed its unwillingness to continue settling refugees without limit (Barooah 1990: 30).

This flow of refugees was also seen during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 in which more than 12 million refugees poured into India, of which one million stayed back in Assam (Franda 1982: 109). On March 19, 1972 the Indira-Mujib Treaty was signed and accordingly Bangladesh agreed to accept the immigrants who entered India after March 25, 1971. The growing

numbers of migrants in Assam are viewed by a large section of the Assamese people as a threat to their socio-cultural, political and economic life. Prior to the elections of 1978 to the State legislature, the regional parties like Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD) and Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP) and their supporters raised the issue of the outsiders in Assam and their threat to the Assamese identity. However, the concept of outsiders remained vague. Later, the Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS) intervened to narrow down the meaning of the term to post-1951 immigrants from foreign countries with questionable citizenship status, and this got wide acceptance amongst the other constituents of the movement. The Assamese people began to think that the continuous immigration from neighbouring countries to Assam and inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls would endanger their distinct identity as a nationality as well as the sovereignty of India. The final stage for the Assam Movement on the foreigners' issue was set in April 1979 when there was the need of holding parliamentary bye-election of Mangaldoi constituency. For the election voters' list was newly examined and in the process the names of many foreigners were found out from the voters' list by the tribunal set up by the State Government in Mangaldoi Parliamentary constituency. It generated a very strong fear-psychosis among a large section of the Assamese middle class. Gradually it engulfed the majority of the Assamese masses. The press and the leadership persuaded the common masses to become their ally in their movement for asserting their identity. By mid-1979 the AASU took up the leadership position in organizing the students and the masses for a movement. Besides, a co-ordination body known as the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) was formed. The Asom Sahitya Sabha, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal and the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad were the main constituents of the AAGSP. The AASU and AAGSP led movement was supported by the Assamese bourgeoisie, the press, the rural gentry, a large section of the middle class including some bureaucrats and police officials, the employees of the State Government, contractors, transport operators etc. However, a few scholars exposed the intolerant and chauvinistic dimension of the movement which threatened the basic foundation of the composite society of Assam (Gohain 1980: 418-20).

After six years of agitation, the anti-foreigner movement culminated in the Assam Accord, which was signed on August 15, 1985 between the movement leadership and the Union Government. After the accord was signed, the leadership of the movement took up the initiative to form a regional party in Assam with the help of like minded organizations. As a result of lot of deliberations and discussions with organizations i.e. PLP, AJD etc, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a regional political party, was formed just 67 days before Assam Legislative Assembly election held in December, 1985. The AGP participated in the elections to the State legislature and secured absolute majority by securing 64 seats in the 126 member assembly and formed government under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

The major demand of the foreign national movement was to detect the foreigners, delete their names from the electoral rolls and deport them from the country and the Accord was supposed to be a panacea in resolving the vexed problem. However, the process of detection of foreign nationals in Assam has been extremely slow. It is opined that the timeframe of historic Assam Accord is made meaningless by the government. The descendents of earlier immigrants have become Indian and fresh immigration is still continuing. A large number of Bangladeshis have



clandestinely migrated into India, a process that continues unabated. Seeing these developments, in 1998, the then Governor of Assam, S K Sinha maintained that political parties have been underplaying the grave importance of the immigration problem and have been viewing it as affecting only the Assamese people. In his report to the President of India, he observed successive Governments at the Centre and in the State remains virtually oblivious to the grave danger to our national security arising from this unabated influx of illegal migrants (Sinha 1998, Nov. 8). After the completion of 25 years of Assam Accord AASU advisor Dr. Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharjee blamed the Central as well as State Governments for their failure to implement the Accord. He maintained that in the last 25 years the Government had shown total negligence to solve the identity crisis of the indigenous people. "In these years Congress (I), BJP, AGP, CPI, CPM were in power at Delhi and Dispur" ([www.aasu.org.in](http://www.aasu.org.in)) but they did nothing to implement the Accord, Dr. Bhattacharjee lamented. The Gauhati High Court also pointed out to this grave illegal migrant issue. By scrapping the IMDT Act the Supreme Court even cautioned against illegal migration as: "The presence of such a large numbers of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, which runs into millions, in fact and 'agression' on the State of Assam and has also contributed significantly in causing serious 'internal distibunces'" ([www.aasu.org.in](http://www.aasu.org.in)). The fears and anxieties of the Assamese elite regarding immigration were further deepened with the publication of the 2011 Census Report which once again highlighted the problem of illegal immigration in Assam. According to the Census report, the decadal population growth rate in nine districts, which are allegedly dominated by illegal immigrants, is over 20 per cent. Decadal growth rate of Dhubri district bordering Bangladesh is the highest in the State with 24.40 per cent. On the other hand, eastern Assam districts like Sivasagar, Jorhat etc. registered around 9 per cent population growth and these districts do not share any international border. Significantly, at 16.93 per cent, Assam's decadal population growth rate is less than the national average of 17.64 per cent. However, Assam's density of population is 397 against national 364 in the 2011 census.

Due to this unabated immigration Assamese public opinion has continued to be agitated over the issue. In an interview with *The Assam Tribune*, Lt. Gen. S. K. Sinha, former Governor of Assam expressed the view that "around 700 kilometres of the international border with Pakistan was fenced by the Army in just over a year, that too in tough terrain of high mountains. But the 260-odd kilometres of fencing in Assam could not be fenced in 27 years since the signing of the Assam Accord, which showed lack of political will of the Government in sealing the border to check infiltration" (*The Assam Tribune* 2012, Sep. 10). Even after completion of 30 years of the Accord, with AGP Government for two terms at intervals, no substantial progress has been made in major issues like detection and deportation of foreign nationals and borders remained as porous as it was before the Assam Accord. Besides no effort has been made to provide constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect and preserve the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. However, due to the interference of the Supreme Court of India the updation of National Register of Citizens (NRC) is going on in Assam. Of late the initiative of Narendra Modi led NDA government to provide citizenship to Hindu Bangladeshis is strongly criticized by several nationalist organizations of Assam. This kind of 'lack of effort' on the part of

the Centre to seal border and to check further immigration continues to dissatisfy the Assamese people.

It can be observed that the Assamese people have been in constant fear and anxiety of being gradually dominated by the immigrants. The Assamese elite argue that Government of India fails to protect the distinct socio-cultural, economic and political identity of the Assamese people. In spite of the historic six year long foreign national movement led by AASU and AAGSP and signing of Assam Accord to protect the distinct identity of the Assamese people, immigration continues to be an influential and determining factor in Assam's politics. Though immigration started in the pre-independence period, the flow of illegal immigrants continued even after several decades of independence and it has caused a great deal of apprehension in the minds of the Assamese people regarding sustenance of their distinct socio-political identity. It has been creating serious socio-political and economic problem for the indigenous population of the State. Therefore, the Assamese nationalist organizations like AASU and AJYCP etc has undertaken the task of strengthening consciousness among the people by forming public opinion on regional grounds, with the hope that their mobilization might secure their goals of safeguarding socio-economic, political and cultural significance of the State. The lack of political will of the Government has further compounded the problem of immigration which is obviously an issue that agitates the minds of the people. Actually, the problem of unabated immigration issue regionalized the politics of Assam and helped in the growth of regionalism in Assam leading to the formation of regional political parties and some other regional organizations which affects the Centre-Assam relations in Indian federation and, in turn influences the federalizing process of the country.

Thus, in post-colonial India, the peripheral State of Assam is severely affected by economic backwardness, ethnic movements, unabated foreign influx, separation and insurgency. Democracy is also severely injured here due to gross negligence of the Centre and inefficiency of the State government. Because of capitalistic mode of development and modernization adopted in independent India, Assam has come to face acute regional disparities, which simultaneously create sub-regional, sub-national and ethnic movements. It becomes one of the most deprived regions and has remained economically depressed and politically subjugated State within the federal democratic polity of India. The national bourgeoisie with the help of regional bourgeoisie reap benefit of development and convert weaker nationalities into further marginalization. Hence, some of the groups of Assam, particularly the ethnic communities, who once considered themselves as a component of the larger Assamese society and had assimilated with the Assamese, are now trying to revive their own identity and demand for political autonomy because of their oppressed status and hatred against the dominant Assamese ruling class. The autonomy movements have virtually caused the consolidation of regionalism and sub-nationality questions. More significantly, the insurgency problem added fuel to the fire in Assam. Finally, the unabated illegal infiltrations of the foreigners into Assam from neighbouring countries create serious havoc and pose a threat to the existence of the indigenous people. Therefore, a peculiar discontent and feeling of alienation has been generated among the people of Assam, which amply got reflected in the mass participation in a number of social and political movements. Nevertheless, the existing problems may be solved to some extent by an ideological struggle and mobilization of the masses of all sections of people far

beyond the interest of dominant Assamese elite and the elite of the ethnic communities as well as to end perennial exploitation of the Central Government.

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