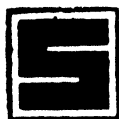


ASSAM
Attitude to Federalism

ASSAM

Attitude to Federalism

GIRIN PHUKON



STERLING PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LTD.,
NEW DELHI-110016 JALANDHAR-144003 BANGALORE-560009

STERLING PUBLISHERS PVT. LTD.,
L-10, Green Park Extension, New Delhi-110016
5th Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Bangalore-560009
695, Model Town, Chandigarh-144003

A. P. O. U. LIBRARY	
Acc. No.	5752
Date	8-9-1-85
	354-54162
Call No.	PHU

The publication of this book is financially supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research. The responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, or conclusions reached, is entirely that of the author, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research accepts no responsibility for them.

Assam: Attitude to Federalism

© 1984, Girin Phukon

Published by S.K. Ghai, Managing Director, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., L-10, Green Park Extension, New Delhi-110016
Printed at Gahlot Printers, 1/2317, Ram Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi-110032.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xv</i>
I Contemporary Socio-Political Issues	1
II Federalism and Assam: Centrifugal and Centripetal Tendencies	45
III Federalism-I : Division of Powers	82
IV Federalism-II : Distribution of Financial Powers	109
V Federalism-III : Miscellaneous Issues—Citizenship, Emergency Powers and Election Commission	132
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>171</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

***ALAD* : Assam Legislative Assembly Debates**
***ALCO* : Assam Legislative Council Debates**
***ALCP* : Assam Legislative Council Proceedings**
***APCC* : Assam Pradesh Congress Committee**
***CAD* : Constituent Assembly Debates**
***CSD* : Council of States Debates**
***IPD* : Indian Parliamentary Debates**
***NAI* : National Archives of India**

FOREWORD

Ever since the Indian Constitution was drafted there has been a general consensus among the scholars of Indian political system in general and Indian federalism in particular that there was near unanimity in the Constituent Assembly and the country in favour of a strong centre. This view gained greater strength with the publication of Granville Austin's influential book, *Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford, 1966, which pointed to the absence of any State's rights and centrifugal pressures in the Constituent Assembly. So firmly had this view been established that almost no scholar questioned its validity.

Yet the interesting fact was that almost immediately after the inauguration of our Republic, several regional demands began to be voiced. Those included not merely demands for greater provincial autonomy but even for the reorganization of states. With the emergence of a new type of region-oriented leadership, there have been demands for the reopening of the basis of centre-state relationship. Consequently there have been demands for greater autonomy.

Were these new developments or was there some undercurrents in the politics of the late forties and the debates of the Constituent Assembly which the scholars have missed in their evaluation of the Indian political system. It is this question which put Dr Girin Phukon on this pioneering work by undertaking a thorough and painstaking analysis of the debates of the Constituent Assembly (and of Assam Legislative Assembly). Dr Phukon has shown that the idea of a unanimity in favour of a strong centre in the Constituent Assembly is a myth. Indeed there was considerable opposition to the establishment of a strong centre in both the political climate of certain states as well as in the Constituent Assembly.

To handle this problem, Dr Phukon has taken each article of the draft Constitution dealing with centre-state relations and shown that the members from Assam were neither in

PREFACE

This book is a revised version of my Ph.D. which was completed under the supervision of Professor Shanti Swarup, Lajpat Rai Professor of Political Science and Dean of Faculty of Arts, Panjab University, in 1977. It is a study of Assam's attitude to federalism at the time when the Indian Constitution was being framed. Mention may be made that since independence a process of reorganization of the state was started and the original state of Assam has now been cut up into several separate states and Union territories such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. At present, therefore, 'Assam' consists of the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys and the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar only. But during the period covered by our study Assam was a much larger political unit. Nevertheless, even at that time, the most articulate section to put forward the attitude of Assam has been the people of the Brahmaputra Valley. And more particularly, this articulate section belonged to Assamese Caste Hindus. The leaders of this group were in the forefront of the national movement and intimately connected with the Indian National Congress. Therefore, with the dawn of independence, this group became politically dominant and was the major opinion-maker in Assam. Owing to this obvious advantage, the number of their representatives in the Constituent Assembly was larger than those of the other sections of the province. For this reason, the attitude of this articulate group towards the federal polity in the Constituent Assembly invariably implied the attitude of Assam in general. Hence this work is mainly based on a study of the various pronouncements and publications of this section of the people.

In completing this study I have received generous help from many sources, which I take the pleasure to acknowledge here. The foremost of my debt is to Professor Shanti Swarup,

for an understanding of the direction of political change that is taking place in that country. And in order to have a clear knowledge about it, it is pertinent to know the legacy of the past which may have had profound impact on the present political process in the States.

Basically, in this study an attempt has been made to deal with state politics of Assam as it impinged upon Assam's attitude to Centre-State relations when the Constitution was on the anvil. As is well known, the fundamental issue of federalism centres round this particular relationship. The degree of harmony or conflict between the Centre and the States very much depends upon whether institutional arrangements have been able adequately to synthesise the centrifugal and centripetal forces which exist at a societal level. If they have been able to do so, this is bound to be reflected in the constitutional provisions which in a sense would faithfully reflect the harmony in that society. If they do not, there would always be tensions. It is generally assumed that there was consensus in India during 1946-50, for a quasi-federal institutional arrangement. Yet soon afterwards, demands for greater provincial autonomy were heard. Was this tension due to new forces which emerged in the post-independence period or did they exist even prior to the inauguration of the Republic? This aspect of Indian politics remains as yet unexplored. In the case of Assam, it is interesting to examine whether the present Assamese elite's urge for distinct identity as displayed through the current 'movement' 1979 on the issue of 'foreign nationals' is entirely new or this was already there at the time of the constitution-making? Did they seek any kind of constitutional protection against the 'threat' to their socio-cultural identity as being perceived today through federal policy? With this end in view, the present study is intended to analyse the attitude of Assamese elite towards the nature of federal polity in India, which was then being conceived and the type of Centre-State relation which was being visualized in 1946-49, when the Constitution was being framed.

II

A federal government results from two types of processes. One, when a unitary state creates new regional units endowing them with independent functions, or alternatively, when distinct political entities join together for limited purposes and form a general government dealing with matters of common interests. The Indian federation is the result of the first; a process of new gradual evolution from a unitary to a federal structure, ever since 1919¹ and, in some sense, since 1861.² Despite the understandable preference of the British for a highly centralized administration for India, they were unavoidably driven towards a policy of decentralization. After all, India possessed two major prerequisites for such a polity—namely its sub-continental size and marked regional diversities. The shift in British policy from decentralization to federation was an inevitable concomitant of the decision to introduce 'responsible government' in India. The first instalment of responsible government introduced in the provinces under the Government of India Act, 1919, was accompanied by the first significant step towards a formal, though partial, federalization of the Centre-province relations in British India. The extension of the principle of responsibility and the introduction of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act 1935, necessitated an increased emphasis on the federal principle.

Besides the need of the British to allow only a limited transfer of power, there was another important factor which was responsible for a federal reorientation of the state structure, i.e., the Hindu-Muslim question. The Muslims, who were a minority in the country, as a whole, formed majority in a number of geographically compact areas. Federalism, therefore, offered to the Indian Muslims a way of integrating themselves in the Indian polity while enjoying a larger share of autonomy in areas where their numbers were substantial. In the words of poet, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, "the Muslims demanded federalism because it is preeminently a solution of India's most difficult problem i.e., the communal problem."³ Thus, the strong desire of the Muslims to maintain their political and cultural identity created a situation which

obviously lent itself to a federal solution, vesting maximum powers in the federating units. By and large, politically conscious Muslims were perhaps motivated by a strong feeling of being a distinct and separate political entity and the fear of being swamped by the Hindus in any majority-based democratic system of government in the country. Another factor, which seemed destined to have a vital influence in determining the character of Indian federation was the position of the princely States in the Indian political system as it developed under the British. The British, who were afraid of the democratic popular-based orientation of the Congress, were anxious to conserve their position and to bring the conservatively inclined Indian princes into an organic relationship with the rest of India.

However, once limited provincial autonomy was introduced, the increasing transfer of powers to the provinces sharpened the contours of provincial 'personality'. In view of the scope available in the provincial sphere for the satisfaction of political ambition, there emerged new local elite groups who had their political roots in provinces and whose interests lay in the expansion of autonomy in linguistically homogeneous provinces. Eventually, it encouraged the growth of what came to be known as the feeling of 'provincialism'. In fact, the partially democratic local governments functioning under an autocratic central authority of the British regime gave rise to provincial patriotism which constituted a potential danger to the political unity of India. Thus, with the advent of decentralization, the democratization of provincial administration and the progressive extension of representative government, the natural trend towards federalism in India was strengthened by the growing volume of popular support to the concept of the 'provincial autonomy'.

As a matter of fact, the basic factor, which made a federal structure inevitable for India was the country's size accompanied by wide diversity. Federalism, in other words, has been as inescapable for India as for other plural and diversified societies since it offers in the words of Professor William S. Livingstone, "a political arrangement best calculated

to maintain and foster a national coherence while at the same time articulating and protecting the several diversities within the society to which value is assigned."⁴ In fact, as Professor Rasheeduddin Khan argues, India tended to become a federal polity because it was an 'authentic' federal society.⁵

Thus, it would appear that the foundation of Indian federal system was laid during the British rule in India. It was over this foundation that the Constituent Assembly raised the federal superstructure. The deliberations of the Constituent Assembly were conditioned by the fact that the principle of a federal Constitution for India had been mooted over the past years and had been accepted at the First Round Table Conference. The Constitution makers of free India were inevitably influenced by the fact that the trend of constitutional development of India, since the initiation of a policy of decentralization and, more precisely since the introduction of partial provincial autonomy under the Montford Reforms (1919), had been in the direction of federalism. The members of the Constituent Assembly were further aware that a federal form of government would also suit the requirement of a country of India's gigantic size and manifold diversities.

In fact, the consensus in the Constituent Assembly in favour of a federal polity was so overwhelming except for few individual members,⁶ that Dr N. V. Gadgil, a member of the Constituent Assembly, declared, albeit with some exaggeration, "I doubt whether there is a single individual here or outside, or a party here or outside, which has stood for or even stands for a completely Unitary state."⁷

Though Dr Gadgil was not absolutely correct in his generalisation, it is quite clear that there was near unanimity in the constituent Assembly as regards the unavailability of a federal set up for India. If there were some differences, these were not so much about the principle of federalism, but about the precise areas which the Constitution would leave to the States and in which the States would be legally free to act independently of central control. In other words, the only issue was whether India would have a federation with the existence of a strong Central government or a relatively weak Centre.

Nevertheless, protagonists of this view were critical of the policy of strengthening the Centre at the cost of the units.¹² Therefore, the absence of an organized states' rights group in the Constituent Assembly did not mean that the interest of the state autonomy was not strongly advocated.

It is remarkable that Assam was one of those few provinces which were strongly in favour of a larger measure of provincial autonomy. Therefore, those provisions of the Draft Constitution which sought to make the Centre strong created considerable resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. They were anxious to limit the powers of the Central government. Although the participation of the Assamese representative in the Constituent Assembly was not so significant in other matters, they were vocal in matters relating to Centre-State relationship. It is worth mentioning that in demanding provincial autonomy the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly had shown remarkable unanimity transcending castes and communities. In fact, so far as the attitude towards 'federalism' was concerned, it cut across caste differences.¹³

This attitude and behaviour of the Assamese elite was mainly conditioned by certain fundamental socio-economic and political factors of Assam. It may be noted that unlike other provinces in India Assam had certain peculiar socio-political problems, such as tension between the Assamese and the non-Assamese; the tribals and the non-tribals; the hill people and the people of the plains, in addition to her economic backwardness and strategic position as a border State. All these problems made the Assamese elite conscious of need to have greater control of their own destiny. And they began to think that a larger quantum of provincial autonomy would be a means of safeguarding the Assamese interest in various socio-economic and political fields. This urge was reinforced by their consciousness of a distinct identity arising from the fact that traditional Assam had not been politically unified with the rest of India prior to the British occupation.

IV

The problem of federalism in India has so far been studied at the macro-level. In this study an attempt has been made to examine this problem at a micro level. In doing so, we are not oblivious of the fact that the problem of Federalism is an all-India problem and during 1947-49, it was discussed throughout the country. Nevertheless, we feel that by looking at this problem in detail and depth at a micro level, we may be able to develop new insight into the federalizing processes in India. Because of the facilities available to the present author as native of Assam and as one who knows the Assamese language, it was decided to limit this study to the attitude of the Assamese elite in particular.

The elitist view assumes that in all societies that social power is held by a small top minority group. Vilfredo Pareto, one of the pioneers to the elitist theory, uses the term 'elite' to refer to 'superiority' in intelligence, character, skill, capacity and power.¹⁴ Gaetano Mosca another propounder of the elite theory considers that elite is a minority class with better organizational ability.¹⁵ C. Wright Mills believes that the power-holders of some dominant institutions are the top decision makers and they constitute the 'power-elite'.¹⁶ Apart from these writers, several others have devoted themselves to the study of elite¹⁷ and with the development of the concept of elite, difference began to grow among the various writers regarding applicability of the term. In spite of the differences, it may safely be assumed that the 'elite' is a minority group in a society who formulate the major decision in the society and play an important role in moulding public opinion. In a liberal democratic society the elite usually come not from among the ranks of the masses but from the privileged classes who enjoy greater economic facilities and make decisions which are conducive primarily to their own well-being and are not much concerned with the welfare of the masses even though in their public statements they may be at pains to avoid giving this impression.

Keeping in view this conception of the elite in our present study, the term 'Assamese elite' mainly refers to the articulate

section of the Assamese caste Hindu group. Indeed, it was this group who made an immense contribution towards the Assamese nation building process even during the Ahom rule. Originally, they came to this region from other parts of India and because of their intellectual superiority they even held important positions in the Ahom administration. During the British rule, they had grown into a more articulate and homogeneous community. And most of the important positions both in the governmental establishments and commercial undertakings were occupied by the members of this community. Thus, a section of urban Assamese middle class began to grow out of this segment of the Assamese society.¹⁸

By and large, during the period of British administration, the Assamese caste Hindus emerged as the most consolidated and powerful group within the Assamese society. Because of their education and other facilities, they became politically much more conscious than the other groups. Thus, western educated modernistic elite of this group took the leading part in the national movement in Assam and the Assam Congress was virtually dominated by them.

In fact, due to their upper-caste status and superior intellectual capabilities, they became culturally, politically and even economically dominant within the Assamese society. Obviously therefore, they controlled the Assamese Press and other platforms and thereby played an important role in the articulation of public opinion in Assam. For this reason, the attitude of the Assamese in general towards the question of 'federalism' mainly implies the attitude of this dominant section of the Assamese. The representatives of this group in the Constituent Assembly were inevitably larger than the other groups of people in Assam. And more importantly, all the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly, irrespective of caste and community, adequately represented the views and sentiments of the dominant Assamese elite so far as the question of federalism was concerned. In fact, when the issues relating to federalism were discussed in the Constituent Assembly, as this study will reveal, Assam's members were articulating the feelings and anxieties of the dominant section of the Assamese people towards the type of federalism

envisaged in the new Constitution. In this sense, the attitude of the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly on this question may be treated as the attitude of Assamese elite in general. However, this is not to imply that this study is merely confined to an examination of attitudes of the representatives from Assam in the Constituent Assembly to the question of 'federalism'. In addition to this group, we have also taken cognizance of the attitudes of the members of Assam Legislative Assembly, Assam's representatives in the Council of States, Assamese intellectuals and leaders of the press on this question.

It is well-known that the press in a democratic society plays a very important role as a means to articulate public opinion. In Assam particularly, one English daily, *The Assam Tribune*, a mouthpiece of dominant Assamese elite (formerly it was a weekly published from Dibrugarh, 1939-46) and a few other papers played an enormous role in this regard. For this reason, in order to examine the attitude of the dominant section of the Assamese people, the views of the local press, the organizations of different socio-political groups, the sectional elite have also been taken into consideration.

This study is, therefore, largely based on the records of the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, Assam Legislative Assembly (1946-50), Indian Parliament (1946-50), contemporary local newspapers (particularly *The Assam Tribune*, 1939-50 and the *Dainik Asamiya* 1918-47) and the other language periodicals. Moreover, we have examined the primary government sources such as the Census Reports; relevant reports of certain Commissions; Memoranda submitted to concerned authorities by various bodies; booklets, pamphlets etc. With these sources of materials an attempt has been made to examine the basic reasons why the Assamese elite wanted greater provincial autonomy and a relatively weak Central government. It may be noted that in this study the method of interview could not be employed. The main difficulty that was faced in adopting the interview method is that the prominent Assamese members of the Constituent Assembly as well as the contemporary Assamese leaders have already

passed away. It is, however, hoped that sufficient documentary evidence has been supplied to uphold the findings of the study.

REFERENCES

1. For the first time, The Montford Reforms 1919, recognised the principle of division of powers between the Centre and the provinces.
2. The first step of decentralization of powers was taken under the Indian Councils Act of 1861.
3. *Mitra's Indian Annual Register 1931*, Vol. II, p. 342.
4. William S. Livingstone (ed.) "Introduction", *Federalism in Commonwealth*, London, 1963, p. 17.
5. Rasheeduddin Khan, *Political and Socio-Cultural Determinants of Federalism in India*, Paper presented at the Seminar "Political and Economic Determinants of Federalism." (January 29-31, 1976, at the Panjab University, Chandigarh).
6. Although it is true, that there was no organised party or group in the Constituent Assembly which stood for a Unitary Constitution, there certainly were individual members like Brajeswar Prasad, P.S. Deshmukh and Frank Anthony who were opposed to Federalism. Brajeswar Prasad, a member from Bihar, with remarkable perseverance and strength of conviction moved amendment after amendment calculated to ensure a unitary orientation to the Constitution. Speaking on Article 109, of the Draft Constitution which vested in the Supreme Court the power to adjudicate dispute between the States, and the Centre, and the States, he said—"I am never tired of repeating the argument because I feel that repetition may have some effect and may bring about a change in favour of a unitary form of government. I oppose both the Federalism and the Supreme Court." (*CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 875).
7. *CAD*, Col. XI, p. 657.
8. Before Partition an Honourable member of the Constituent Assembly said—"For the sake of securing the Muslim League's co-operation we have been accepting many things against our ideals." (*CAD*, Vol. I, p. 67, 1946. Purushottamdas Tandon).
9. In this regard, the Second Report of the Union Powers Committee stated—"now the partition is a settled fact. We are unanimously of the view that it would be injurious to the interest of the country to provide for a weak central authority which would be incapable of ensuring peace, of co-ordinating vital matters of common concern and speaking effectively for the whole country in the international sphere." (*CAD*, Vol. III, Appendix 'A', p. 58).

10. W.H. Morris-Jones, *Parliament in India*, London, 1957, p. 7.
11. To a reader of *CAD*, it is clear that it was the deliberate intention of the framers to create a federation in India. Nevertheless, statements made by members of the Drafting Committee and others often betrayed a certain degree of confusion in thought and expression. Thus at one stage Dr Ambedkar asserted that, "States are not administrative unit or agent of the Union government." (*CAD*, Vol. VIII, p. 33). On a subsequent occasion however, we find him declaring that "Provincial governments are required to work as sub ordinate to the Central government" (*CAD*, Vol. VIII. p. 502),
12. *CAD*, Vol. IV, p. 94 (Omeo Kumar Das).
13. It is remarkable that such differences were quite visible in case of other provinces except Assam and Orissa. According to at least one scholar, the Brahmin and the Scheduled Caste members were more favourably inclined towards a centralized federation rather than to members from other castes. (Shanti Swarup, *Position of Governor and Centre-state Relations: Intentions of the Constitution Makers—A Socio-Political Analysis*, Paper presented at the Seminar on Union-State Relation in India. May 1831, 1969, at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla).
14. Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1935, Vol. III, p. 2032.
15. Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, Macgraw, New York, 1939, p. 50.
16. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1956, p. 4.
17. In this connection reference may be made to the work of Raymond Aron, *Social Background and Ruling Class*, British Journal of Sociology, March 1, 1950; D H. Mathews, *The Social Background of Political Decision Makers*, Glencoe, Free Press, 1961; Giant Parry, *Political Elite*, George Allen Unwin, London, 1969; S.M. Lipsed and A. Solari, *New Elites of Tropical Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1968; Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961; B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes : Their Growth in Modern times*, Oxford University Press, 1961, etc. etc.
18. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Policies in Assam (1826-1947)*, New Delhi, 1977. See, "Assamese Middle Class, Last Quarter of the 19th Century): a cross-section", Appendix 5, p.342.

1

Contemporary Socio-Political Issues

In the introductory note it was argued that the attitude of the Assamese elite towards Indian federalism was conditioned by certain contemporary socio-political and economic problems of Assam. In fact, it is quite natural that socio-political and economic factors of any society should have a profound impact on the attitude of its elite towards certain questions. This chapter is, therefore, intended to deal with certain basic socio-political and economic issues which not only made the Assamese elite conscious of their distinct identity but also determined their attitude towards the type of federalism which was then being conceived for India. It may be noted that the Assamese elite have for long been conscious of their distinct identity. And it appeared to them that this distinct identity was being threatened by the continuous stream of immigration in the face of economic stagnancy, ever since the British came to Assam. In fact, the influx of people from other parts of the country had resulted in a curious situation. Hence, the Assamese elite thought that if immigration remained unchecked and economic backwardness was not immediately removed, the Assamese people would soon lose their distinct identity. Not unnaturally, therefore, a check on federal power in this regard was seen by the Assamese elite as a means to preserve the distinct Assamese identity.

II

Assam was an independent state till the advent of the British power in 1926, when the six hundred-year old Ahom rule came to an end. The tradition of freedom and independence

which the Assamese people had been enjoying for such a long period, became a source of inspiration to them for their fight against British imperialism. As in many other parts of India, the traditional Assamese elite who had lost their power objected to the new power system.¹ And gradually a new class of educated modernistic elite was emerging who not only felt unhappy at the British rule but also resented the British policy which enabled educated non-Assamese, particularly the Bengalis, to compete with them. This shows that they became increasingly conscious of their distinct identity. The formation of the 'Assam Association' in 1903, was the result of this consciousness. Since its inception till 1920, the 'Assam Association', served as the mouth-piece of the westernized Assamese elite in articulating their needs, grievances, hopes, aspirations and placing their economic demands before the government of the day. Apart from this, under the banner of 'Assam Association', the politically conscious Assamese middle class had engaged themselves in laying the foundation for the movement against the British rule.²

The early stage of the movement, till 1920, was basically regionally oriented. A distinct anti-British movement³ grew up within the regional framework of Assam, arousing a particularistic sentiment among the Assamese elite. The intellectual articulation of this sentiment was reflected in the writings of journalists and litterateurs of that period, the chief among whom was Lakshminath Bezbaruah⁴ who contributed a great deal to the growth of Assamese sub-nationalist sentiment. The Assamese elite began to conceive of nationalism not so much in the larger Indian context as it was in the context of Assam. They talked mostly of 'Assamese nationalism'⁵ and very little of Indian nationalism. The appearance of newspapers and periodicals such as the *Arunoday* (1846), the *Asom Bilasini* (1871), the *Jonaki* (1889), the *Bijulee* (1890), the *Usha* (1907), the *Banhi* (1902), the *Asamiya* (1918), the *Chetana* (1919), the *Times of Assam* (1923), the *Bonti* (1927), the *Avahan* (1929), *The Assam Tribune* (1939), to mention the more important ones, had made immense contribution to the growth of Assamese sub-nationalist sentiment. The formation of the 'Asom Chhatra Sammilan' (Assam Students' Conference) in

1916 and 'Asom Sahitya Sabha' in 1917 had yet another effect in this direction. Although the 'Asom Sahitya Sabha' was basically a literary and cultural organization, generally it laid more stress on the distinct entity of Assamese culture rather than on Assamese culture as a part of the larger Indian culture.

Thus, it seems obvious that with the growth of the national movement in Assam a strong sentiment of Assamese sub-nationalism had also grown side by side. Of course, this feeling of sub-nationalism was apparently submerged by the Indian nationalism in the subsequent period. When in the year 1920 the new Congress Constitution was adopted and the Provincial Congress Committees were being reorganized on linguistic basis, the Assamese Congressmen too, like their counterparts in other provinces, put forward the claim that Assam should be recognized as a separate Congress Province. Consequently, at the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in December 1920, Assam was virtually recognized as a separate Congress Province. Those members who previously belonged to the "Assam Association" now realized that their interest could be better served by the Congress.⁶ In a sense, a section of the Assamese elite became conscious of the fact that the separate interest of Assam could not be served without the achievement of larger national interest. Consequently, even at the level of political movement, Assam lost her distinct political entity to receive in return her personality as a part of the larger whole. She began to follow the all-India leadership in order to contribute to the national efforts to overthrow foreign rule. Thus in common with the national movement elsewhere, Assam also developed national sentiment. As the British were the common enemy to all, this helped the development of a sense of Indianness among the Assamese elite. They began to realize that since the British were a great power, no province by its independent effort could effectively challenge the British. Thus, the British rule established Assam's political link with the rest of India both at the level of administration and national movement.

The participation of the Assamese elite in the national movement, however, was not without reservations. They

non-Assamese, became more acute in Assam. No wonder, in a society marked by communal disharmony, politics cannot but become important. The Congress and the Muslim League were the only major political parties then. The first Ministry in Assam under the Government of India Act of 1935 was formed in 1937 by Gopinath Bordoloi, the leader of the Congress Party. Muhammad Saadulla, an undisputed leader of the Muslim League, also formed ministries under his leadership three times at irregular intervals between 1939 and 1946. It is significant to note that within the same period Gopinath Bordoloi had also formed ministries two times with a pro-Hindu bias. Thus, ever since the operation of the Act of 1935, two major socio-political issues namely (i) the Hindu-Muslim question and (ii) the tension between the Assamese and the non-Assamese (particularly the Bengalis), became acute in Assam. And these two issues certainly moulded the attitude of the Assamese elite toward federal polity in India when the constitution was being framed. Now, we shall examine the basic sources and dimensions of these issues.

III

The British administration made territorial adjustment and readjustment with Assam,¹⁵ in order to suit its own imperialist designs. For example, after the British occupation Assam was being administered as a part of Bengal from 1826 to 1873. It was only in 1874 that, with the addition of three Bengal districts—Goalpara, Cachar and Sylhet—Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissioner Province. But under the Curzon Plan, she was again brought under Bengal administration in 1905. Assam remained a part of Bengal till 1912, when she was made a separate province. Moreover, the neighbouring hill areas were gradually brought within the administrative jurisdiction of Assam. Therefore, Assam consisted of twelve districts with three natural geographical divisions: (i) the Brahmaputra Valley popularly known as Assam (comprising the districts of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang, Nowgong, Kamrup and Goalpara), (ii) the Surma Valley (Sylhet and Cachar districts), and (iii) the four Hill Districts (Garo, Khasi Jaintia, Lushai and Naga) with diverse languages and

dialects, social customs and cultures. Thus, the process of territorial adjustment and readjustment made Assam more heterogeneous in character than ever before, which had a tremendous impact on the socio-political and economic aspect of the province.

In addition to territorial adjustment, there had been a continuous flow of non-Assamese Indians into Assam ever since the British occupation. In fact, in order to run the imperialist administration smoothly, clerks and officers familiar with the system of company administration were brought by the British from outside the province. Moreover, they imported a large number of working hands to work in tea plantation, transport, road construction, oil-field and coal mines. A certain number of other people also came within this flow to fill the various demands of colonial economic development. A large majority of the Assamese people, like most other traditional societies, were agriculturists and most of them looked down upon wage labour, i.e., working for others. At the same time, it is also a fact that like many other societies, the Assamese caste traditions did not look with favour at the low-graded professions such as barbers, washermen, shoemakers, etc. Therefore, the tea garden labourers and other manual labourers (and in our time the rickshaw pullers) came to Assam from other parts of the country. The Marwaris and few Biharis came to fill the necessities of trade and business, created by the opportunities of economic expansion under the British rule. By and large, colonial economic development necessitated the immigrant population to the province. Mention may be made that the imperialist economic development was seldom for the benefit of the province. Its chief aim was clearly "to develop British owned plantations in order to export tea to U.K. and to develop such other ancillary productive assets as were necessary to sustain colonial economy".¹⁶ At any rate, as a result of immigration, gradually "there developed small townships, mostly peopled by middle class element from outside the province, to cater to the growing need of administration and trade".¹⁷ Since the late nineteenth century the Assamese middle class elements became unhappy with all these developments and felt anxiety for this

unrestricted large-scale immigration. However, upto the end of nineteenth century, despite a conflict of interest between the elite of immigrant communities and the Assamese elite for jobs in the administration, their mutual relations had not as yet been embittered. But since the beginning of the current century, there developed hatred and ill-feeling between them. The Assamese middle class had to face keen competition in their own home even for jobs and in the field of petty trade and business, with their counterparts of the immigrant communities. When they failed to compete with the non-Assamese elite, a section of the Assamese elite began to think that the non-Assamese elements were "hostile to the Assamese."¹⁸

This situation became more critical because of the penetration into Assam by the immigrants from Bengal, particularly from the district of Mymensingh. These immigrants came mainly to settle on agricultural land. For the first time, the Census Report of 1911 mentioned the movement of immigrants from Bengal to Assam. First, the settlers from Mymensingh began to flow into the lands in the Goalpara district. The population of Goalpara which had increased by 2 per cent only in 1891-1901, suddenly jumped up to 30 per cent in 1901-1911 due to the inflow of this stream of immigrants. In 1911, the immigrants formed a fifth of the total population of the Goalpara district.¹⁹ After 1911, the settlers spread beyond Goalpara to other parts of the Brahmaputra Valley. They came to Assam with their families and began to increase the permanent population of Assam. The number of immigrants in the province by the time of the Census of 1931 was considerable.

The Census Report of 1931 shows the farm settlers coming from Mymensingh in the following way :

Number of persons in different districts of the Assam Valley born in Bengal (in thousand)²⁰

(Figures in brackets represent persons born in Mymensingh)

Year	Goalpara	Kamrup	Darrang	Nowgong	Sibsagar	Lakhimpur
1911	77 (34)	4 (1)	7 (1)	4 (1)	14 (—)	14 (—)
1921	151 (78)	44 (30)	20 (12)	58 (52)	14 (—)	14 (—)
1931	170 (80)	134 (91)	41 (30)	120 (108)	12 (—)	19 (2)

Thus, it appears that immigration assumed alarming proportion by the twenties of this century. The Assamese elite became increasingly concerned with this large-scale immigration which tended to threaten their distinct identity in their homeland by altering its demographic composition. The British Census Commissioner, C.S. Mullan, described this process of immigration as an 'invasion' of Mymensingh over the Assamese and remarked by way of warning:

...Probably the most important event in the province during the last twenty-five years, an event moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than the Burmese invaders of 1820. The whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry Bengali immigrants mostly Muslims, from the districts of Eastern Bengal and, in particular from the Mymensingh ...It is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home...²¹

Such remarks made by the British civil servants naturally frightened the Assamese elite even for their existence and it evoked considerable resentment among them. Whether the British Census Commissioners made such sensitive remarks in order to provoke the Assamese people against the immigrant population, as an eminent historian opines,²² or they had a genuine sympathy with the Assamese, is difficult to assess. But it seems obvious that the British certainly took advantages of the situation and contributed a great deal in the process of immigration into Assam so as to ensure colonial interest.

It may be noted that there had been an excessive pressure of population on land in East Bengal together with the zamindari oppression and exploitation over the peasants. Thus suffering from the oppression of zamindars, these peasants were flocking to the Brahmaputra Valley in large numbers in order to settle down on its beckoning waste land.²³ In this connection, another fact may also be taken into consideration: The Bengal's oppressed Muslim peasantry

gradually became articulate and organized to fight against the exploitation of zamindars and money-lenders, who were mostly Hindus.²⁴ The British imperialist and Bengal zamindars obviously thought it wise to send the landless peasants to the Assam Valley in order to check the revolutionary situation there. Thus immigration of East Bengal peasants into Assam was also encouraged under the landlord-imperialist machination. Moreover, this immigration was also connected with the growth of the jute industry in Bengal mostly financed by British capital. The expansion of jute cultivation became necessary with the expansion of jute trade. As the area of jute cultivation in Bengal was not unlimited, they wanted to grow the same in the soil of Assam. Hence the immigration of jute cultivators into Assam became imminent.²⁵ At the same time, a favourable situation was obtained in Assam for this. As a result of the Moamoriya peasant rebellion in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the Burmese invasion in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, there was a loss of almost half of the natural population of Assam.²⁶ Moreover, diseases like kala-azar had yet another effect in that direction during the early period of the colonial rule.²⁷ Thus, the natural growth of population in Assam was retarded for some time. Consequently, a large area of the valley remained vacant and uncultivated, and soon became covered with deep jungle.²⁸ As the cultivable land was much more in proportion to the inhabitants, and *as the Government did not want to be deprived of the land revenue from these lands*, the British administration obviously encouraged large-scale immigration into Assam from the various famine-stricken areas and provinces of India.²⁹

However, this is not to imply that a section of the Assamese middle class did not help the process of immigration. It appears from the contemporary evidence available to us that the modernist element of the then Assamese society also welcomed the importation of immigrant labour and skilled people and did not suffer from a 'Xenophobia' of the later period.³⁰ Bolinarayan Borah, a leading member of the Assamese middle class and an engineer by profession, wanted 'good Bengali' men to be appointed as teachers in the schools of Assam with

high salary.³¹ Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, another leading personality of the Assamese society during the middle of the nineteenth century, in a memorandum, submitted to A.J.M. Mills, pleaded that "the people from some of the badly provided parts of Bengal could be invited to immigrate" as a means of improving population of the province.³² Gunabhiram Barua, a member of Assamese gentry, even estimated that no less than a million people could easily be settled from outside on waste land of Assam.³³ In fact, the Assamese elite of the nineteenth century were convinced that no economic progress was possible unless the then depopulated condition was restored to normalcy.³⁴ Even some Assamese Mahajans provided a substantial part of the necessary finance to enable the immigrant peasants to bring virgin soil under the plough.³⁵ Besides, many Assamese sold off their lands to immigrants at a good price; then they cleared new plots of waste land and sold these again. At the same time most of them encouraged the influx of East Bengal men to Assam with a view to employing cheap labour in their field and homesteads.³⁶

Since the early decades of twentieth century the Assamese elite, however, became afraid of being swamped by the Muslim immigrants from East Bengal. Therefore, some of them advocated the immigration of Bihari Hindus into Assam to counter the influx of Muslims. As a matter of fact, Dr Rajendra Prasad had toyed with this idea of populating Assam with Bihari Hindu immigrants so that Muslim influx from East Bengal could be checked. For instance, in his autobiography Dr Rajendra Prasad maintained:

I sounded the Assamese on the subject and they welcomed it. Some thought it better to have the Hindus of Bihar than the Muslims of Mymensingh. They welcomed the idea also because by themselves the Assamese were unable to bring the land under plough. But the influx of Muslims from Mymensingh was upsetting the population ratio, and the Assamese wanted to retain a majority in the Brahmaputra Valley. The influx from Mymensingh could be countered only by Bihari Hindus to settle down on the land.³⁷

Thus, it is evident that what was initially an economic issue was turned into a communal one, not only by the Muslim League, but also by some eminent Congress leaders. It may also be noted that since the majority of East Bengal peasants were Muslims, very often the conservative section of the Assamese Hindu middle class recruited a large number of Nepalis for their cultivation and household work. Thus Nepalis got encouraged to come to Assam. Over and above, the corrupt revenue officers, most of whom were Assamese, also gave settlement to the immigrant peasants.³⁸ Mahadev Sarma moved a resolution in the Assam Legislative Council on July 23, 1927 in order to restrict the settlement of land with immigrants. Participating in the debate on the resolution, while Basanta Kumar Das (a Bengali) urged the preservation for sufficient land for the indigenous people, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi said that he "would not restrict immigration, so far as can be helped."³⁹ Thus it appears that along with the British, a section of Assamese middle class also contributed a great deal to the influx of outsiders into Assam.

In any case, it seems that the immigrant question, in its inception, was essentially an economic one, but since the inauguration of the provincial autonomy it had been given a communal colouring because political power had come to be assessed on the numerical strength of different communities. Obviously, the imperialist power exploited the situation and successfully created a condition for a conflict between the Assamese and the immigrant communities. They thought that their interest could remain intact so long as there was disunity among the people in the name of language, religion and nationality.

It needs no mention that a large number of immigrants from Bengal happened to be Bengali Muslims. Being Muslims, they had a separate religious identity different from the majority of the Assamese people while at the same time, being Bengalis, they belonged to a linguistically distinct group. Consequently, they (the Bengali Muslims), combined with the Bengali Hindu immigrants, constituted a sizable number of Bengali population in Assam. Thus the mass immigration into Assam, particularly from Bengal, had two major socio-political

dimensions: it (i) began to increase the numerical strength of the Muslims in the province which threatened the dominant position of Assamese caste Hindu elite; and (ii) created the Assamese-Bengali tension mainly on the issue of linguistic-cultural question.

IV

With the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, the issue of immigration got highly politicized. Over the years, the demographic composition of the Brahmaputra Valley was changed considerably by immigration. The proportion of Muslims in the population of the Brahmaputra Valley had increased from 9 per cent in 1881 to 10 per cent in 1931 and further to 23 per cent in 1941. In 1911, Muslims constituted only 0.1 per cent of the population of Borpeta sub-division; but by 1941, the percentage shot upto 49.⁴⁰ By and large, there was a tremendous increase of Muslim population in the Brahmaputra Valley districts (including the Garo Hills), during the period between 1911-1941 which may be shown as follows:⁴¹

<i>Year</i>	<i>Muslim population</i>
1911	3,55,320
1921	5,85,943
1931	9,43,352
1941	13,03,962

Thus the increase of Muslim population in the province gave an edge to the Muslim League to demand for inclusion of Assam in Jinnah's proposed East Pakistan. The Assamese upper caste elite were, however, convinced that the Muslim League Government in Assam under the leadership of Muhammad Saadulla was deliberately welcoming the Muslim element into the province with the introduction of 'Land Development Scheme'.⁴² Thus Harendranath Barua, a noted journalist, representing the sentiment of this section of the Assamese elite, observed:

"The Saadulla Government's welcome to immigrants from Bengal, over 95 per cent of whom are Muslims, in the form

of their Development Scheme has also close bearing on the Muslim League leaders' demand for inclusion of Assam in the proposed Eastern Pakistan."⁴³

Similarly, *The Assam Tribune*, which mainly championed the views of the Assamese upper caste elite, in one of its editorials complained that Saadulla Cabinet was "imbued with the idea of Pakistan" and the Land Development Scheme was "meant to reduce the importance of the Hindus both politically and numerically."⁴⁴ It was also alleged that the immigrants were even provided free travel by the Saadulla government to come to this Province and to occupy vacant land.⁴⁵ Whether the Muslim League government provided free travel to the immigrants or not, is difficult to ascertain. But it is evident that Muslim League leaders certainly encouraged immigration to Assam. Thus Abdul Matin Chaudhury, the then Muslim League Minister of Assam, maintained: "Commonsense demands that for the development of the province, settlement of land ought to be facilitated and unrestricted immigration encouraged as a deliberate and definite policy."⁴⁶ The tempo of implementation of Land Development Scheme increased after 1939 when the bulk of the Hindu members of the Assembly, who were Congressmen, had to remain absent due to imprisonment or detention in connection with the Congress movement. In this connection, it may be noted that the Saadulla Government allowed Bengali Muslim immigrants to settle over one lakh bighas of land in Assam Valley during 1939-40 i.e., in just one year.⁴⁷ The Muslim leaders felt that they could perpetuate their power in Assam only if the percentage of Muslims in the population was increased.

Obviously, therefore, the Muslim League leaders objected to the retention of the "Line System"⁴⁸ and demanded its abolition.⁴⁹ But on the other hand, they were enthusiastic enough to implement the Colonisation Scheme. Under this 'Scheme' the Government of Assam took the responsibility to settle immigrants in a planned way in selected places. The first Colonisation Scheme was started in Nowgong in 1928 and it was followed by Borpeta and Mangaldoi sub-divisions. The areas allotted to 1,619 Muslim and 441 Hindu immigrant

families under the Nowgong Scheme alone amounted to 47,636 acres till March 1933.⁵⁰ During the six years preceding 1936 as many as 59 grazing forest and village reserves had been thrown open in Nowgong under the Colonisation Scheme for settling the immigrants.⁵¹ Thus it appeared to the Assamese elite that the Saadulla Government was following, as *The Assam Tribune* put it, "a completely anti-Assamese policy",⁵² in the matter of immigration. This policy of the Muslim League government was resented by the Assamese elite⁵³ and it led them to believe that the land settlement policy of the League Ministry was connected with their demand for inclusion of Assam into the eastern zone of Pakistan. In fact a section of the Assamese elite described the settlement of land with the Muslim immigrants as an "invasion of the province" for political design of the Muslim League.⁵⁴ This feeling of the Assamese elite was, however, not without justification. Maulavi Abdur Rouf, leader of the immigrant Muslims, in the course of his presidential address to the Reception Committee of the third annual conference of Assam Provincial Muslim League, held at Borpeta on April 7-8, 1944, maintained that:

"The same fresh blood which runs through their veins even today again took the rudder to tow their boats against the current of the ever flowing Jomuna to make their way for a new conquest of Assam. Being deprived of their arms, shields and swords by the mercy of the British rulers, they with a cane shield and bamboo stick, spears and plough came and effected their landing either in chairs or in the jungles adjacent to the rivers. The souls of artrysm and devotees of past are witnessing this new expedition of the Bengali Muslims—the Holy servants of Allah, from above with yawning eagerness and thankfulness too... With increased vitality in the life of the community and with the help of numerous new reinforcements, the figure in the Borpeta sub-division alone could be raised up to 65,000. . . ."⁵⁵

Such statements of the Muslim leaders obviously caused much anxiety in the minds of the Assamese elite and they

believed that the Assamese would, in due course, be swamped by the Muslim immigrants converting Assam into a Muslim majority province. This apprehension of the Assamese elite further accentuated by the Saadulla government's policy of Census operation in 1941. For instance, in 1941 Census, the population of Assam was classified on the basis of community rather than religion.⁵⁶ In effect, a large number of tribals who were earlier treated as Hindus, Christians and Buddhists now came under the head "Tribal". This implied that the Hindu tribals in Assam had been shown as non-Hindu in the Census Report of 1941. Consequently, the Assam Census figure for 1941 showed, as *The Assam Tribune* alleged, "an amazing rise in Muslim and tribal population and equally surprising fall in the population of Hindus, Christians and Buddhists in the province."⁵⁷ The Assamese elite complained that the League Ministry "manipulated the Census figures to serve their communal interest" (particularly to justify their demand for inclusion of Assam into East Pakistan) by showing a larger Muslim population than the actual number and a smaller figure for the Hindus.⁵⁸ Gopinath Bordoloi, the leader of the Congress, challenged the Census Report of 1941 and demanded its revision by an independent body.⁵⁹ Similarly, Siddhinath Sarmah moved an adjournment motion in the Assam Legislative Council which generated a provocative response in the House.⁶⁰ And *The Assam Tribune* in one of its editorials called upon the Hindus of Assam to unite and take necessary steps to counteract the "sinister move" of the Saadulla government.⁶¹

Thus it is evident that owing to these factors, there was an apprehension in the minds of the Assamese elite that they would soon cease to be a dominant community in Assam. In the context of the slogan for Pakistan in pre-partition days, they feared that if the Muslim population of the province rose at the alarming rate at which it was then growing, Assam would become a part of Pakistan and Assamese people would lose their distinct identity. By and large, Saadulla government's policy towards the immigration from Bengal was being increasingly viewed as a calculated move to turn Assam into a Muslim-majority province, so that it could qualify

herself for inclusion into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

V

The second dimension of immigration into Assam from Bengal was the tension between the Assamese and the Bengalis which subsequently became an endemic problem of the province. In order to have a fuller appreciation of this problem we have to look through its basic causes.

As noted earlier, just after the British occupation, Assam was brought under the administrative jurisdiction of Bengal and later on she was made a separate province in 1912 with the inclusion of three other districts of Bengal namely, Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara. Because of close association with Bengal for a considerable period, the population of these districts, particularly of Sylhet and Cachar, adopted the Bengali language and culture, and developed the ways and outlook of Bengal. The population of the Brahmaputra Valley on the other hand, remained isolated from Bengal and developed a language and culture (i.e., Assamese), markedly different, as they saw it, from the temperament and character of their Bengali neighbour. As a result, there emerged a problem of establishing cultural and political integration between these two streams.

What added fuel to this fire was that, as we mentioned earlier, the members of public services were brought by the British, mostly from Bengal, to this province; since they (Bengalis) had learnt English earlier. In fact, the British won over the Bengalis through the spread of English education first, and took them to Orissa, Bihar and Assam so as to carry on colonial administration smoothly. And, as already noted, a large number of land-hungry Muslim immigrants from Bengal, who happened to be also Bengalis linguistically, came to Assam and adopted cultivation as their profession. In effect, within a short time, the Bengali-speaking people emerged as the second largest group in the Assam Valley (also called the Brahmaputra Valley). Thus, the immigrant Bengali population of Assam Valley may be divided into two main categories: (i) cultivators who had moved in recent years, particularly in the twenties and the thirties of this century. These were

mainly Muhammadans from Mymensingh (about whom we have discussed in the foregoing pages); (ii) Educated men, both settlers and sojourners whose presence was mainly caused by the British rule. This was a small yet a very important and influential group whose influence in profession and public service was considerably increasing. The senior positions in the services were generally held by the Bengalis who, therefore, had considerable influence over the decision-making process in Assam. This naturally included the question of recruitment.¹ Hence, the Bengali employees in different services continued to increase in number. The Assamese elite, however, resented this development and asserted that the increase of Bengali civil servants in Assam was mainly due to "nepotism and cliquishness of the Bengalis."⁶²

Another factor which favoured the continued occupation of the public offices and professions by the Bengalis was that the British introduced the Bengalee language, in place of the Assamese, as the official language of the province in 1837 and it remained so for nearly half a century. Assamese children were, under compulsion, taught Bengalee as their vernacular. It was not until 1873 that the Assamese began to be taught in primary schools and another quarter of a century was to elapse before it found its way into the high schools. Perhaps, finding the Assamese language closely akin to the Bengalee, the British looked on its differential as merely a dialectical variation which ought to yield to what they considered the more cultivated language of the Calcutta standard. It was this logic which was probably responsible for the introduction of Bengalee language in Assam. Although the British introduced it for their administrative convenience, it had also the effect of reinforcing their policy of 'divide and rule' in perpetuating the tension between the Assamese and the Bengalis on linguistic question. It is, however, surprising that the elite of the then Assamese society did not immediately react to this language policy of the British.⁶³ Rather, it seems that they readily accepted it and learnt Bengalee.⁶⁴ Although in 1853, in course of a memorandum submitted to A.J.M. Mills, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan urged the Government to re-recognise the Assamese language, he did not want that "Bengalee should

be altogether abolished from the schools.”⁶⁵ On the contrary, he pleaded that “it should be cultivated as a language indispensable to complete the course of vernacular education, and that the standard Bengalee works should likewise be introduced in the higher classes.”⁶⁶

At any rate, the replacement of Assamese by the Bengalee as the official language had a far-reaching effect. With the growth of Assamese sub-nationalism, the Assamese intelligentsia became increasingly conscious of establishing their language on a sound footing. They had to work hard to popularise the Assamese language among different non-Assamese people of the province.⁶⁷ It may be noted that prior to independence, it had never been the language of the majority of the people residing in the geographical entity called Assam. Although the Assamese language was introduced in the schools of Assam in 1873, Bengali community continued to have separate Bengali schools for themselves and they were not inclined to adopt Assamese as their medium of instruction. Together with the Bengali Hindu elite, the Muslim immigrants from Bengal also demanded equal rights for the Bengalee language. Thus Matiur Rahman Mia, who represented the views of Muslim immigrants in the Assam Legislative Assembly, pleaded:

“We are Bengalees, our mother-tongue is Bengalee..... Under the circumstances if this Assamese language be imposed as a new burden on our shoulders, on our children’s shoulders and if we are deprived of our mother-tongue, then that will amount to depriving our children from opportunities of education.”⁶⁸

Similarly, the third session of the Assam Domiciled and Settlers’ Association [renamed as Assam Citizens’ Association], which championed the views of the Bengali middle class in Assam, held at Nowgong on March 24, 1940, reiterated the demand for equal citizenship rights and education through the medium of one’s mother-tongue, irrespective of race and language.⁶⁹ By and large, a major section of the Bengali

settlers viewed the Brahmaputra Valley as a bilingual area. And they posed a challenge to the unilingual concept of the Brahmaputra Valley, as upheld by the Congress since 1920. But the Assamese elite apprehended that if Bengali immigrants get equal right to education through their mother-tongue then gradually the Bengalee will come to predominate and the Assamese language and culture "Will be drawn in the babel of tongue."⁷⁰ Therefore, they wanted that the Bengalis should learn Assamese and assimilate with the Assamese culture in order to contribute in the formation of a larger Assamese Society.⁷¹ Strange though it may seem, while the Assamese elite wanted to protect themselves from Bengali dominance they, at the same time, wanted to see the emergence of the whole of north-eastern zone as a single political unit having a common language i.e., the Assamese. Somehow, they did not see their idea of Assamese becoming the language of the whole of the north-east region was in some way similar to the Bengali idea of enforcing the legitimacy of the Bengalee being the language of this area. They were, however, forced to take up what tended to become a linguo-political question i.e., the position of Assamese language, literature, vis-a-vis the claims of the Bengali elite. The question of language got tied up with the economic issues, which, therefore, got highly politicized. Economically, the business of Assam was controlled by the Europeans and the Marwaris. The Bengalis had largely captured the petty trades, clerical and other jobs and professions like law and medicine, etc. In fact, the positions of influence and profit which the Assamese elite desired to hold were in large part in Bengalis' hands. It is interesting to note that although the Marwaris and the Europeans exploited the Assamese economically, the Assamese elite did not feel their dominance in the same way as they felt in the case of the Bengalis. This was due to the fact that the former did not pose a socio-cultural threat to the Assamese as the Bengalis did. In any case, the Assamese elite who were late in coming to commercial and industrial fields found themselves in some

difficulty and they deeply felt a sense of deprivation. More importantly, they felt that together with the British, the Bengalis were responsible for many of their economic miseries. Unfortunately, though inevitably, this situation eventually led to continuous tension between the Assamese and the Bengalis.

Mention may be made that the colonial rulers gave constant encouragement in this direction. Curiously enough, while the British themselves were also responsible for immigration into Assam, particularly from East Bengal, they at the same time even posed themselves as the champion of 'Assamese nationalism'. Indeed, they warned the Assamese that their own people would be turned into a minority in their homeland unless Bengali immigration into the Brahmaputra Valley was not checked.⁷² Thus C.S. Mullan in his Census Report, 1931 clearly noted that the distinct Assamese identity was being threatened by the large number of immigrants from Bengal. He even compared the immigration into Assam with a military invasion and maintained that:

"By 1921 the first army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara. The second army corps which followed them in the years 1921-31 has consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Borpeta sub-Division of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely, but the few thousand Mymensinghians in North Lakhimpur are an outpost which may, during the next decade, prove to be a *valuable basis of major operations*."⁷³

It is debatable whether these remarks were accurate, but rightly or wrongly it provoked the Assamese elite considerably. And, since emergence of "Assamese nationalism" was a middle class phenomenon, taking advantage of such remarks made by the British officers, the Assamese elite wanted to project its own interest as the interest of the toiling Assamese peasants and workers so that the latter could be politically mobilized in the struggle for power with the elite of non-Assamese outsiders, particularly the Bengalis. To some extent, they succeeded in

this effort. As a result, a sense of fear of being swamped by the Bengalis began to grow so deeply in the minds of Assamese people that the word "Bengali" was used to mean anyone who was not an Assamese.⁷⁴ Surprising though it may seem as the Census Superintendent of 1931 observed, there was a "tendency for Assamese enumerators to write down any foreign tongue as 'Bongola' (which means something foreign)."⁷⁵ In fact, most of the Assamese people used to call the Bengalis as 'Bongal'⁷⁶ (an inhabitant of Bengal which they meant foreigner). Indicative of this feeling was that in less sophisticated Assamese rural areas a European was popularly known as "Boga Bongal"⁷⁷ (white foreigner) as distinguished from 'Kola Bongal' (black foreigner) i.e., Bengalis. By and large, the Assamese people began to look at them as a ruling race, next in command to the British. Thus sometimes they characterised the National Movement in Assam as the 'Bongal Kheda Movement' (Oust Bengali Movement). This was the basis of the attitude formed by a section of the Assamese towards the Bengalis in the course of a century and a half of this encounter. What worsened this situation was that the militant section of the Bengali middle class even thought of establishing their dominance in Assam maintaining their distinct Bengali identity. For instance, according to a report in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on November 20, 1935, the Bengali residents of Assam assembled in a big public meeting at Tezpur and demanded that :

The brains of the 5½ lakhs of Bengali-speaking Hindus, the wealth of 20,000 Marwaris, the great labour force (6,00,000 ex-tea garden coolies) of Biharis, the agricultural instinct of 5½ lakhs Sikhs, 1,40,000 Nepalis and other settlers, if united together, these settlers would surely rule this country. The Assamese leaders must live here on the terms of the Bengali settlers who have already overflowed the province.⁷⁸

Such news published in the Calcutta papers, provided at least some justification for the Assamese fear of being uprooted by the Bengalis in their own home. As unfortunately it often happens, the result was that a section of the Assamese elite

tended to become hostile to the Bengali-speaking residents of Assam. The reasons for this hostility against the Bengali settlers as distinct from the other non-Assamese elements of the population were many. But more important perhaps was the fact that other settlers such as the tea garden labourers, the Marwaris, the Biharis and the Nepalis who also formed a sizable section of the non-Assamese population of the province did never threaten the position of the entrenched Assamese elite as the Bengalis did. In their psychology of fear, the Assamese elite thought that the Bengalis not only proclaimed their distinct identity within the province, but also sometimes dreamt of 'Greater Bengal' which would include, among others, the territories of Assam.⁷⁹ *The Assam Tribune* asserted that as a measure of fulfilment of their mission of making Assam a part of "Greater Bengal" the Bengalis welcomed "more and more immigrants."⁸⁰ For this reason, the Assamese became more apprehensive of the Bengalis than any other non-Assamese group. What accentuated this apprehension of the Assamese elite were the remarks made by some people outside the province. For example, in 1944, Professor Humayun Kabir, the then Private Secretary to Maulana Azad, the Central Education Minister, writing in his monthly review, *India*, commented:

"One can easily visualise a Bengali State, comprising of about ten million people and living in a compact area. Such a State would include the present administrative province of Bengal and some of the outlying districts in Assam and Bihar. In fact, the province of Assam may be wholly incorporated in it. Cachar and Sylhet in the Surma Valley and Nowgong and Goalpara in the Assam Valley are Bengali majority districts. *There can hardly be an Assam if these districts join Bengal*".⁸¹

Such statements, made by a person so close to Maulana Azad, caused a great deal of anxiety in the minds of the Assamese elite about the existence of a distinct entity of Assam. The sensational statements of this type, even if they were rare, received wide publicity in Assam and they evoked considerable

resentment among the Assamese elite. Thus since the beginning of the present century, there had been a constant and continuous feeling in the minds of the Assamese elite that the Bengalis not only posed a threat to their language and culture but also to the very existence of Assam.

VI

All these fears and anxieties of the Assamese elite came very close to reality when according to the Cabinet Mission Plan, 1946, India was to be divided into three groups: A. B. C. sub-federations. This Plan was hatched to secure the advantages of a Pakistan for the Muslims without a partition of the country.⁸² Under this Plan, the representatives of the provinces in the Constituent Assembly were to divide themselves into three sections A, B and C, after a preliminary session of the proposed Constituent Assembly was over and each section was to decide upon its own provincial and group matters. Section 'C' was to consist of Bengal and Assam. Thus under the proposed Plan, Assam was intended to be clubbed together with the Muslim majority province of Bengal. Accordingly, the number of the Constituent Assembly members representing Assam and Bengal, supposed to sit in Section 'C', was as follows :

COMPOSITION OF SECTION 'C' UNDER CABINET MISSION PLAN⁸³

	<i>General</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bengal	27	33	60
Assam	7	3	10
Total	34	36	70

As the implementation of the Cabinet Mission Plan involved infringement of the basic principle of provincial autonomy, the Assamese elite reacted very sharply and made a strong protest against the Plan. They apprehended that if Assam were included in Group 'C', she would lose her existence and distinct identity. The *Dainik Asamiya* articulated this sentiment of

the Assamese as "a question of life and death of the Assamese nation."⁸⁴ Soon after the Cabinet Mission's proposals of May 16, 1946 were published, Gopinath Bordoloi, premier of Assam submitted a memorandum to All India Congress Working Committee on May 19, 1946 demanding withdrawal of the proposals. He asserted that the Cabinet Mission's proposals would "perniciously affect the province of Assam."⁸⁵ The Assamese elite believed that if the proposals were accepted by Assam, the provincial constitution as well as the Grouping would be determined by the majority of the Constituent Assembly Members sitting in Group 'C.' And in that case, Assam would inevitably remain at the mercy of the Muslim League.⁸⁶ The Assamese elite refused to accept such an imposition. Thus in a telegraphic message to the President, All India Congress Working Committee, Chairman, Constituent Assembly and to other national leaders, the President and Secretary, APCC clearly noted that "Assam shall resist any forcible compulsory imposition of Constitution, notwithstanding approval by Muslim League as against all canons of democracy and self-determination."⁸⁷ Further the APCC reiterated that Assam's decision to "stay out of the section was determined by the general principle of self-determination, autonomy for the provinces and fundamental principles of democracy".⁸⁸

Apart from these steps taken by the APCC, hundreds of public meetings were held throughout the Assam Valley to record vehement protest against the Grouping clauses. Resolutions adopted in those meetings, to that effect, were forwarded to the national leaders and the Government.⁸⁹ The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha played an important role in mobilizing the Assamese public opinion against any kind of Grouping with Bengal.⁹⁰ Similarly the *Asamiya*, a language weekly, made immense contribution in that direction. Throughout the period of anti-Grouping movement in Assam, it kept the people well informed and alert with the coverage of events regarding the Grouping. In one of its editorials, the *Asamiya* complained that the Grouping arrangement had given birth to a

de facto Pakistan and it pushed Assam to a Muslim Zone.⁹¹ Further, it believed that the Cabinet Mission Plan was a clever manoeuvre of the British to keep their commercial interest intact.⁹²

This issue not only caused great public concern, indeed it generated much heat in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Thus on July 16, 1946 the Assam Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution moved by the then premier Gopinath Bordoloi himself, expressing strong disapproval of the Plan. The same resolution also directed the representatives of Assam in the Constituent Assembly who had after all been elected by the provincial Assembly, not to sit in the 'Section' with any other province for devising the constitution and for settlement of any question relating to Assam.⁹³ But on the other hand, the supporters of the Muslim League in Assam extended their support to the Grouping Plan because, under the Grouping arrangements, the Muslims would have been in an advantageous position to become the majority in Bengal. For example, Muhammad Saadulla emphatically argued that Assam had already been in Grouping with Bengal in many spheres—Assam had to depend upon Bengal for University education, High Court, and even food provision. He, therefore, pleaded that the Cabinet Mission Plan would be to the benefit of Assam which would further enable her to make future economic prosperity.⁹⁴ At the same time, the All India Congress leadership also persuaded the Assam Congress to accept the same. Under this situation the Assamese elite thought that Assam would lose her distinct identity and individuality for ever in the 'political whirlpool' of India. This made them even more anxious about safeguarding their distinct identity. In the long run, the Assamese elite, however, succeeded in getting the Cabinet Mission Plan dropped. It is assumed that if Assam had not opposed the Grouping Plan the formal establishment of Pakistan might have been delayed for some time. Nevertheless, the proposed Grouping Plan deepened the Assamese fears about the existence of Assam and consequently it influenced the attitude of the

Assamese elite to the question of 'Federalism' in the Constituent Assembly.

VII

The partition of the country further accentuated the fears and anxieties of the Assamese elite for their distinct identity. After partition, streams of Hindu refugees flowed to Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The 1951 Census Report showed the number of refugees in Assam as 274,455. Of these 272,075 came from East Pakistan; 647 from West Pakistan and 1,733 from other unspecified areas. Because of its proximity to East Pakistan, the Cachar district alone sheltered 93,177 refugees. The number of refugees in other districts was as follows : Goalpara 44,967, Kamrup 42,871, Darrang 18,833, Lakhimpur 13,965, Sibsagar 7,514, Khasi Hills 5,990, Garo Hills 5,072.⁹⁵

With the coming of these refugees, new dimensions were added to the existing tensions between the major religious and linguistic communities in Assam. The Assamese elite felt that they were "now between two fires" : (i) there were the Muslim immigrants whose hearts would always lie in Pakistan; (ii) there were then the Hindu refugees who wanted to overwhelm the province and "Bengalized" it. *The Assam Tribune*, in its editorial article—"Refugees", clearly articulated this sentiment of the Assamese elite and maintained :

Since independence, the attack is being carried on from two flanks. First, there are the Muslim immigrants whose love and attachment to Pakistan are as strong as ever. There is no evidence of a change of heart and yet they are finding it much easier to migrate to this province under the shelter of the secular state policy of the Government of India. Then there are the Hindu immigrants who apparently want to create a Bengal in this province.⁹⁶

It seemed to the Assamese elite that most of the refugees were not 'genuine' who came under the garb of refugees only to

engage themselves in business, contract and in some other services. They complained that these people had no intention to settle permanently in Assam by adopting Assamese language and wanted to remain as citizens of both 'Pakistan and Hindustan.'⁹⁷ In fact, the Assamese elite believed that these people had deliberately migrated to Assam from different areas of East Pakistan not because of any communal trouble there, but to take the benefit of better living conditions and due to other economic and political reasons.⁹⁸ They even suspected that the refugee problem was connected with the expansionist design of Eastern Pakistan, that is, League leaders' demand for inclusion of Assam into Pakistan.⁹⁹ It may, however, be noted that most of the Assamese leaders did not have objection to accepting the 'displaced persons' for whom it was impossible to remain in Pakistan, provided they agreed to settle permanently in Assam accepting the Assamese language and culture.¹⁰⁰ "The Assamese people would not have objected to absorb a reasonable quota of refugees", as *The Assam Tribune* put it, "on the understanding that these refugees will completely merge themselves in the province keeping aside their separate linguistic claims."¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰² Indeed, what they pleaded was that "Assam" must exist, and exist as the homeland of the Assamese people".¹⁰³ For this reason, *The Assam Tribune* demanded:

The Centre must not be blind to Assam's interest and must not adopt any policy that will ultimately lead to the annihilation of Assam. The danger point has almost been reached, and the Centre should not expect Assam to commit suicide with her eyes wide open.¹⁰⁴

Probably, in view of such pleas from the Assamese elite, the Indian Parliament passed the "Immigrants Expulsion Act"

on February 1950 to discourage Muslim immigration from the then East Pakistan. The Act provided for the removal of immigrants except bonafide refugees whose stay in Assam was undesirable politically. However, after partition, a huge influx of Bengalis from erstwhile East Pakistan created a new scare in the minds of the Assamese elite for their distinct identity. The new immigrants, particularly the Bengali Hindu peasants, artisans, petty traders and 'bhadralok' numbering 2,73,000 settled down in towns and villages at the time of the 1951 census.¹⁰⁵ It naturally aggravated the Assamese elite's apprehension of being swamped by the Bengalis and they felt that it would have "detrimental political consequences."¹⁰⁶ Thus in a memorandum addressed to Sri Prakash, the then Minister of Scientific Research and Natural Resources, Government of India, and President of Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee, the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha expressed its concern in the following manner :

The problem of Bengal refugees in Assam definitely means a vision of the creation of 'Brihattar Banga Samrajya' based on 'Bongalism' or Bengali language in which combined efforts of a powerful section of Bengali speaking old settlers of Assam, West Bengal, East Pakistan and also of the Bengali settlers in other parts of India, who think themselves more in terms of Bengali than Indian, can easily be seen from the trend of their mentality and movements. Behind the Bengali refugee relief movement as carried on by the Bengalis, and their persistent effort to rehabilitate them in Assam beyond her capacity, lies this motive aimed at disruption of the strength of the Indian Union for a sovereign Bengali.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the Assamese elite argued that the refugee problem involved not only the question of life and death of the Assamese people but also that of the safety, security and independence of the Indian Union. In fact, in the garb of the plea for 'the

strength of Indian Union', their inherent desire was to get rid of the Bengali refugees. It may, however, be noted that the Assamese leadership was not opposed to the entry of the refugees qua refugees but only to the Bengali refugees. For instance, the Jatiya Mahasabha expressed a preference for refugees from Panjab rather than from Bengal.¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, *The Assam Tribune*, in one of its editorials also pleaded that Assam should welcome a quota of refugees from Punjab.¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that while pleading for Punjabi refugees, Sukdev Goswami argued that being a frontier province, Assam needed stalwart people like Sikhs and Panjabis so that Assam herself could raise an army to thwart any possible aggressor.¹¹⁰ Moreover at the back of the mind of the Assamese elite, there may have been the idea that the number of Punjabi refugees who would have been able to come so far away would necessarily be small. They could be assimilated; and in any case, they would not have posed the threat of becoming the majority in the province. But on the other hand, the Assamese elite apprehended that since the Bengali population had already constituted a sizable section in the province, the new Bengali refugees would strengthen the cause of the Bengalis posing a severe threat to the Assamese language and culture. In view of this, *The Assam Tribune* criticised the policy of the Central Government regarding the refugee problem, and asked:

Has Assam no right to exist as the land of Assamese people? Is it the intention of the Government to turn the Assamese people into minority community in their own province and jeopardise their language, culture and their very existence? ¹¹¹

It, therefore, seems obvious that the Assamese elite were noticeably agitated over the issue of "refugee". Their anxiety on this issue was, however, not without any justification. In this connection, it needs mention that migrant population constituted the largest proportion of Assam's population. Thus out of Assam's total population of 9,044,000 in 1951, as many

as 1,344,000 constituting 14 per cent, were born outside Assam, compared with 6 per cent in the case of West Bengal and 5 per cent in the case of Bombay.¹¹² There was no significant emigration from Assam to counteract this massive immigration.¹¹³

From the evidence examined so far, it appears that throughout the long period, particularly since the beginning of the present century, the Assamese elite had been in constant fear and anxiety of being gradually dominated by the non-Assamese Indians, particularly the Bengalis, both culturally, economically and even politically. Secondly, the growing demand for Pakistan heightened the Assamese elite's nervous concern over their future political and cultural status. Unrestrained immigration from Bengal was increasingly being viewed as a calculated move to turn Assam into a Muslim majority province, so that she could qualify herself for inclusion into the East Pakistan. Even after the partition, these fears still persisted. And these factors obviously influenced the Assamese elite in the articulation of their attitude toward the federal polity in India when the Constitution was being framed.

VII

Over and above, the Assamese elite were very much concerned about the economic backwardness of Assam.¹¹⁴ It is remarkable that despite being potentially one of the richest provinces in the Indian Union, Assam found herself economically backward. The Assamese elite called it "a rich province with the poor people."¹¹⁵ Indeed, Assam possessed enormous economic raw materials such as crude oil, tea, timber, jute, coal, etc., which contributed a large share of revenue to the central exchequer and yet she remained one of the most undeveloped provinces in India. The successive Financial Enquiry Committees also admitted the economic backwardness of Assam. The Indian Statutory Commission in its report admitted that of all the Governor's provinces "Assam is the least developed."¹¹⁶ Moreover, Sir Otto Niemeyer in his financial report stated

that Assam had been "universally recognized as deficit province and must undoubtedly receive assistance."¹¹⁷ In fact, survival of a political system, after all, depends upon the strength of the socio-economic nexuses that grow in its parts. The economy of Assam had firmly been integrated with overall economy of the country. She had to depend heavily on the financial subventions of the Centre. The Assamese elite were not happy with the existing financial adjustment between the Centre and Assam. They even characterised this adjustment as "unscientific and inequitous"¹¹⁸ and alleged that it constituted a "grave injustice done to Assam."¹¹⁹

Thus, a section of the Assamese elite used to blame the Centre for the backwardness of Assam. As a cause of backwardness they thought that the Centre was taking too much revenues away from Assam; while the Government of Assam, on the other hand, did not get what they thought was, its 'legitimate' share of the duties on tea, oil, jute, etc. Even after independence, *The Assam Tribune*, in one of its editorials under the heading "Centre's Injustice to Assam" criticised the financial policy of the Central Government towards Assam and maintained that:

Despite her vast potential resources Assam is to-day as underdeveloped as she was during the British rule. Indeed, Assam's financial stringency has been responsible for holding up all her progress. The Centre is deriving benefit to the tune of 655 crores of rupees out of the excise and export duties on Assam's products like tea, petroleum, kerosene and Jute. As against this, Assam's revenue as revealed by the budget figures comes up to only about rupees 5 crores and 30 lakhs. It is, therefore, plain that the Centre gets more from Assam than Assam can manage to get from herself.¹²⁰

By and large, there was a widespread feeling among a section of the Assamese elite that they were being deprived by the Central Government of their 'legitimate share' for which they thought the Government of Assam failed to improve the economic condition of the people. Bishnuram Medhi, the then

Finance Minister of Assam in his budget speech stated that in spite of exhausting all sources of revenue, the provincial finance was "incapable of maintaining even the existing administration" and was "not sufficient to balance the budget",¹²¹ which had shown a deficit of about 5 crores of rupees. It was generally believed that it was due to this fact again, that Assam was not able to establish a university on a firm footing, a High Court, an Engineering College, an Agricultural College, a Veterinary College and other important Technical institutions which were highly essential for allround development of the province.

In addition to this "financial injustice done to Assam by the Centre," the Assamese elite felt a sense of insecurity from the point of view of what they called "economic exploitation" by the outsiders. It may be noted that the modern sinews of life such as employment, trade, business etc. were largely in the hands of the non-Assamese residents of Assam. The scope for government jobs was limited, the economic infrastructure for industrialization was grossly inadequate and land and forest were not adequately used for the economic development of Assam. Whatever employment opportunities were available, the educated Assamese middle class elite had to face keen competition from the non-Assamese and particularly from the Bengali elite. For this reason, naturally, stress and strain had developed among the Assamese elite.

As noted earlier, the British brought the outsiders (including the British Companies, the Marwaris, the Bengalis etc.) to serve as financiers, entrepreneurs, administrators and technicians. The local people were never happy with this development and there ensued clashes, some of which had political overtones.¹²² But the essence was economic, as the British policies led to the deprivation or even displacement of the natives, particularly of the local aristocracy.

The non-Assamese were having their earning from this area by engaging themselves in industry, trade and commerce which they did not fully reinvest in the area as could have been done ;

a considerable part of which they sent to their native homes. At that time, they might have considered it a security risk to reinvest. The result was that the economic growth of this region was slowed down and fresh employment opportunities which could have forged links between the entrepreneurs from outside and the local people did not develop. The tea companies which were largely in the hands of the foreigners did not give any direct benefit to Assam. Moreover, in the case of employment in the tea gardens, the Assamese elite thought that they were categorically deprived. At any rate, the non-Assamese middle class not only had much greater earnings, but their style of living stood in sharp contrast to that of the native people of the province; which in turn only helped to increase bitterness.

The perpetuation of economic backwardness of Assam even after independence may be largely attributed to the weak transport link with the rest of the country. The partition snapped the direct transport link between Assam and the rest of India; it made the rail and road link circuitous. This seriously affected the economic development of Assam. And low productivity in agriculture and the consequent prevalence of widespread poverty provided ideal breeding ground for ethnic and regional rivalries. The people of this region, particularly the Assamese elite, tended to blame the Central Government for Assam's economic underdevelopment. They began to think that the Central Government and the rest of India were not interested in their well being. There was also a lurking fear among the Assamese elite that the Parliament, having larger representation from bigger States, would control the economic lot of the small States like Assam and that the few representatives from Assam would have no impact on the decision of the Parliament. For this reason, the Assamese elite wanted to secure specific safeguard in the new Constitution which would enable them to control their own economic destiny.

In the following chapters (particularly in the Capters III, IV and V) an attempt has been made to examine how these

anxieties of the Assamese elite were articulated in their demand for a greater provincial autonomy while the Constitution was being framed.

REFERENCES

1. The upper classes, in general, did not relish the prospect of losing not only the powers and the privileges that they enjoyed in the past but also their former social status and position of influence under the new order of things which the alien rulers were going to introduce. (See, K.N. Dutta, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Gauhati, 1969, p. 4.)
2. *ibid*, p. 23.
3. The particularistic nature of the movement is apparent from the fact that upto 1920, the Assamese people fought against the British imperialism under the regional leadership although prior to this few delegates representing different parts of Assam and Assam Association attended most of the annual conferences of Indian National Congress. (See, Appendix III).
4. It may be noted that one of the Assamese patriotic songs composed by Lakshminath Bezbaruah is "O Mor Aponar Desh .." which used to be sung as an "Assamese national anthem."
5. The term "Assamese Nationalism" was frequently used by the Assamese leaders and writers. Several articles appeared in the newspapers and journals with the title of "Assamese Nationalism" and "Assamese Nationality." In an article one writer maintained: "For the consolidation of India, for the crystallization of Indian nationalism that is still in the making, "Assamese nationalism" is a factor to be reckoned with. If the British domination is humiliating and demoralizing, this Indian domination would be complete annihilation of Assamese nationalism. This is an eventuality you cannot ignore .." (See, Anonymous, "Assamese Nationalism: Indian domination would be complete Annihilation", in *The Assam Tribune*, December 13, 1940, p. 6; B.N. Chaudhury, "Assamese Nationality", *The Assam Tribune*, September 29, 1939.)
6. Omco Kumar Das who was an eminent Congress leader of Assam opines that there was a different sense of nationalism among a section of the Assamese elite prior to their joining the Indian National Congress. They felt that the British rule was for the welfare of the Assamese and the prosperity of the Assamese people could be attained only with the co operation of British rule. (See, Omco Kumar Das, "Asomat Swadhinata Samgramar Patani", (in Assamese) *Dainik Asamiya*, August 15, 1947).

7. *The Assam Tribune*, December 13, 1940. Amalendu Guha, who has done a pioneering work on pre-independence politics in Assam prefers to call this sentiment of the Assamese as 'Little Nationalism'. (See, Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977).
8. *Chetana*, Vol. III, 1920, p. 2.
9. *Deka Asom*, Vol. II, 1936, p. 2.
10. *ibid.*, Vol. III, 1937, p. 3.
11. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, 1936, p. 2.
12. *ibid.*
13. See, *Gazette of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Part VI, April 21, 1909, pp. 57-62, cited by Profulla Dutta Goswami. Manik Chandra Barua, (in Assamese) Asom Prakashan Parishad, Gauhati, 1977, Appendix-B, p. 106.
14. *Deka Asom*, Vol. IV, 1938, p. 1.
15. Assam, originally, meant the land which the Shans conquered and consolidated. In fact, the consolidation took place over the centuries following 1228 A.D. When the British after their occupation, constituted the new Province in 1874, they extended the name to the whole territory that came within its purview. (See, Hem Barua, *The Red River and the Blue Hills*, Gauhati, 1954, p. 54.)
16. Amalendu Guha, "Immigrants and Autochthones in a Plural Society: Their inter-Relations in the Brahmaputra Valley in Historical Perspective"; *North East India: A Sociological Study* (ed), S.M. Dubey, Concept Publishing, Delhi, 1977, p. 43.
17. *ibid.*
18. See Anonymous, "Assamese Nationalism", op. cit. n. 5. Moreover, it was complained that "an unholy, unwritten but all the same well-defined alliance was formed in Assam between all sections of non-Assamese elements, both rulers and the ruled to the detriment of Assamese national interest" (*ibid.*).
19. *The Census of India* (Assam), 1911, Vol. XII, Part—IA, pp. 71-72.
20. *ibid.*, 1931, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 49-50.
21. *ibid.*
22. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit, p. 212.
23. P.C. Goswami, *The Economic Development of Assam*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1963, p. 27. Also see speech of Omeo Kumar Das in *ALAD*, Vol. II, No. 20, p. 170, March 18, 1946 and Editorial article "Bhaganiya Samashya" in *Dainik Asamiya*, November 7, 1946.
24. Mohammad Waliullah, *Yuga Bichitra* (In Bengali), Dacca, 1967,

- pp. 420-1, cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 215.
25. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 102.
26. Mackenzie, A. *A History of the Relations of the Government with Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1888, p.7.
27. Editorial article "Asamar Pamuwa Samashya", *Avahan*. Vol. XI, October 1937.
28. A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, Calcutta, 1854, Appendix-D.
29. Harishankar Srivastava, *The History of the Indian Famine (1858-1918)*, cited by Kaustavmoni Baruah, "Foreigners in Assam and Assamese Middle Class", *Social Scientist*, June 1980, p. 45.
30. See, Editorial article "Bengali" in *Assam Bandhu*, No. 3, 1885, pp. 95-100 and "Amar Manuh", *ibid.*, No 4, p. 85, pp. 133-5. Also see, Anonymous, "Asamiya Aru Bengali" in *Mau*, January 1887, pp. 49-52 and "Tirutar Banki" *ibid*, December, 1886. pp. 1-2, Balinarayan Borah appears to be the author of these articles in *Mau* (cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 68.)
31. *ibid.*
32. A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, op. cit.
33. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 68. Gunabhiram Barua, enumerated three factors which were favourable to the immigration i.e. (i) cheapness and fertility of the land, (ii) attractive earnings for skilled labour and craftsman in view of local manpower shortage and (iii) the prevailing conditions of easy matrimony into local families (*ibid*).
34. It is interesting to note that as late as in 1939, even *The Assam Tribune*, which vehemently opposed the immigration from Bengal admitted that "the immigrants served four useful purposes: (i) they transformed large tracts of waste lands into fertile fields and increased government revenue, (ii) they introduced jute as a commercial crop in Assam, (iii) they made milk, vegetable etc., cheaper and (iv) they aroused the Assamese peasants from their age-old sleep and laziness and showed them the meaning of hard work. (See, "Weekly Comments", *The Assam Tribune*, September 1, 1939, p. 5).
35. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 206.
36. See, *Assam Banking Enquiry Committee Report*, 1929-30, Vol. 2, pp. 508-17.
37. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay, 1957, pp. 259-60. (Cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., pp. 258-59).
38. The Nowgong district Magistrate's office received a lot of complaints about encroachment on land ear-marked for the local Assamese people under the 'Line System'. The pencil drawn

- alignment of the line on maps were often tempered by the corrupt revenue staff. Towards the end of 1924, the local administration was found to be increasingly indulgent of such encroachment and corrupt practices. (See reply to Bishnu Bora, a member of legislative council, August 13, *ALCP*, 1923, Vol. III, p. 521 and Bishnu Bora's speech on July 23, *ALCP*, 1927, Vol. VII, Part II, pp. 1089-91.
39. *ALCP*, Vol. VII, July 23, 1927, Part II pp. 1084, 1091-3, and 1103 cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 207.
 40. Percentages are found out from the relevant census reports (See, Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 258). And the figures of Borpeta population is taken from Saadulla's speech in the Assam Muslim League Conference at Borpeta in April 1944, (See *The Assam Tribune*, May 5, 1944).
 41. Home Poll, File No. 119/46, (Poll) (i), National Archives of India (hereinafter *NAI*) cited in A.C. Bhuyan and S.P. De (ed), *Political History of Assam 1940-1947*, Vol. III, 1980, p. 262.
 42. According to 'Land Development Scheme' wasteland had to be distributed to grow more food. In fact, one of the results of the influx of the immigrant farm settlers was the improvement of the farming practices in the province. The new settlers revolutionised the whole agricultural system in Assam and converted the wild areas into prosperous agricultural regions. The introduction of jute, vegetable farming etc., as commercial crops in Assam has largely been due to the immigrants.
 43. Harendranath Baruah, *Reflection on Assam-cum-Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1944, p. 62.
 44. *The Assam Tribune*, October 24, 1941.
 45. *ibid.*, March 13, 1940. Further, it complained that "two special vans attached to the East Bengal Railway" were "daily bringing fresh hundred of land-hungry immigrants from Bengal" into Assam, *ibid.*, March 29, 1940, p. 4).
 46. *Assam Gazettee*, 1937, p. 307, cited by P. Das, "Assam Pamuwa Samashya aru Line Pratha" *Avahan*, Vol., XI, 1937, p. 1201.
 47. *Land Revenue Administration Report of Assam, 1939-40*, Government of Assam, Shillong, Appendix IV, p. 23.
 48. The Government of Assam adopted the policy of 'Line System' (as far back in 1920) which imposed restrictions on settlement in certain areas so as to protect the future interest of the indigenous population. According to this system, certain specified areas of the province were divided into three classes or lines: (i) Immigrants' line, (ii) Mixed line, (iii) Assamese line. But the execution of the provisions of the Line System did not work well, due mainly to the pro-Muslim League

policy of the Government of Assam from 1926 to 1944, with a break of one year in 1919 when there was a Congress coalition Ministry in the province. (See, *Report of the Line System Committee*, Assam Government Press, Shillong, 1938).

49. See, speech by Nuruddin Ahmed, March 16, *ALCP*, 1936, Vol. 16, p. 340. It may also be noted that the first conference of Assam Muslim League, held at Chagnari in November, 1939, rejected the Line System and demanded its total abolition. (See, *The Assam Tribune*, December 1, 1939).
50. Reply to B.C. Goswami, March 24, *ALCP* (1933), Vol. 13, p. 888.
51. Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 209.
52. *The Assam Tribune*, March 29, 1940.
53. Editorial articles "Asomar Pamuwa Samashya" (in Assamese) *Avahan* October, Vol. XI, 1937; "Bhaganiya Samashya" (In Assamese), *Dainik Asamitya*, November 7, 1946 and also see, Harendranath Baruah, "The Development Scheme: Position of indigenous people, *The Assam Tribune*, August, 29, 1941.
54. See, Speech of Beliram Das, March 15, *ALAD* (1946), Vol. II, No.12, pp. 99-100.
55. Quoted by Beliram Das in his speech in the Assam Legislative Assembly, See *ALAD*, (*ibid*).
56. In this connection Saadulla stated that "The original intention was to classify the population by religion as well as by communities. But funds were not found to be adequate for the double classification by the Government who ordered only the classification by communities." (See *ALAD*, Vol. II, No. 18, December 1, 1941, p. 1165).
57. *The Assam Tribune*, August 15, 1941.
58. Harendranath Baruah, *Reflection on Assam-cum-Pakistan*, op. cit., p. 62.
59. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, August 22, 1941.
60. *Assam Gazette*, Part VI-A, January 15, 1942.
61. *The Assam Tribune*, January 31, 1941.
62. See, Anonymous (An Assamese), "The Problem of Assam: Assamese-Bengali Question", *The Assam Tribune*, November 15, 1941, p. 8. Further this article noted that there was "a popular saying in Assam that once two Bengalis get into an office, in five years the whole office will be Bengalis, and the non-Bengalis put to flight." (*ibid*).
63. The eminent personalities of Assamese society during this period were Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1858) Moniram Dewan (1806-1858), Hem Chandra Barua (1835-1896), Bolinarayan Bora (1852-1927), Gunabhiram Barua (1837-1894) and few others.

64. It may be noted that during the years 1850-52 Anandaram Dhekial Phukan even used to publish a periodic law digest in Bengali. Moreover, his contribution to Bengali prose literature was a voluminous treatise on law and political philosophy—"Notes on law of Bengal", Vol. I, published in 1851. In fact, he made a pioneering effort towards the creation of a judicial and political literature in Bengalee. (See, Amalendu Guha, "Impact of the Bengal Renaissance on Assam : 1825-1875", *Journal of the Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. IX, 1972).
65. A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, *op. cit.*
66. *ibid.*
67. The effort of Assamese elite is borne out by the fact that speakers of the language increased from 21.6 per cent in 1921 to 31.4 per cent in 1931 and to 56.7 per cent in 1951 (S.K. Chaube, "Language Politics in Assam", *North Eastern Affairs*, Shillong, October, 1972).
68. Speech in Bengali, *ALAD*, February 16, 1938, pp. 66-71. Translated and cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Sawraj*, p. 259.
69. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, March 29, 1940.
70. See, Editorial article, "A Timely Warning", *The Assam Tribune*, April 4, 1948.
71. This view was expressed in a largely attended public meeting, organized by Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, held at Gauhati on August 23, 1947 (reported in the *Dainik Asamiya*, August 24, 1947). Also see, Harendranath Baruah, "Asomar Samasya ara Bhavichyat", (in Assamese) published in the form of a booklet by Monikanta Das, Member, APCC, Gauhati, 1945, p. 25.
72. Whether the British genuinely expressed this sentiment or did it in order to set the Assamese against the Bengalis, as a part of their policy of 'divide and rule', is however, difficult to guess. But it seems obvious that the British certainly took advantages of the situation of conflict between the Assamese and the Bengalis so as to ensure their imperialist interest.
73. *Census of India* (Assam), 1931, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 43-50. (Emphasis added).
74. *Census of India* (Assam), 1931, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 168-6

75. *ibid.*

76. The word 'Bengal' was subsequently responsible for false enumerations of Bengali population in the Census operation. Particularly, a large number of tea garden labourers whom the indigenous people called 'Bongali-Coolie' i.e., labourer from outside the province, were returned in the Census Report as Bengalis racially and their language as Bengalee language. For this reason the Census Report of 1931, notes that "the statistics of speakers of Bengalee in Upper Assam districts are unreliable" (See, *ibid.*).

77. *ibid.*

78. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, November 22, 1935. Even after the achievement of independence, in a largely attended public meeting at Calcutta held on August 20, 1948, under the auspices of the 'Bengali Sanmillan' in the University Institute Hall, the President of the meeting N. Rakshit averred that "If Bengalis' demand for annexation of Bengali-speaking areas of Bihar and Assam was not conceded peacefully, then the Bengalis would get their demand fulfilled by resorting to violent fighting against the established administration. Therefore, need of the present hour was to conserve the energies of the Bengalis and to have extensive military training and develop physical strength and expand business". (Reported in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, August 31, 1948).

79. This apprehension of the Assamese elite was expressed in the editorial articles : "Domiciled Samachya" (in Assamese), *Avahan*, Vol. VIII, 1939, p. 1073; "Asamiya Hindu-Muslim Bhai-Kakai" (In Assamese), *Dainik Asamiya*, August 20, 1947; "Bongali Pamuwa Bahuwa Dabi" (in Assamese), *ibid.*, April 19, 1948, and also see, Harendranath Baruah, *Asomar Samachya aru Bhavichyat*, op. cit.

80. See, "Weekly Comment", *The As sam Tribune*, September 1, 1939, p. 5.

81. *India*, Delhi, September issue, 1944 (emphasis added).

82. Broadcast by Pethick-Lawrence, Secy. of State for India, New Delhi, May 16, 1946, quoted by Md. Tayyebulla, *Karagarar Cithi*, Gauhati, 1962, p. 171.

83. Source : B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution*, New Delhi 1966, Vol. I, p. 288.

84. *Dainik Asamiya*, May 18, 1946.

85. See Memorandum entitled *A Note on Assam's Stand Vis-a-vis British Government Statement of December 6, 1946: Being An Appeal to Congress Working Committee, Members of All India Congress Committee, and Members of the Constituent Assembly*, Annexure-I, Published by Siddhinath Sarmah, General Secretary, Assam Provincial Congress Committee, Printed at New Press, Gauhati, Assam.
86. *ibid.*
87. *ibid.*, Annexure-II.
88. *ibid.*, Annexure-V.
89. Assam Governor's Secretariat, Military Secy's Office, Home Deptt, Misc. Branch, File No. HMI-67/46, (Assam Secretariat), cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 311. And also see, *Political History of Assam (1940-1947)*, Vol. III, op. cit, p. 357; *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, May 28, 1946; *Asamiya*, June 1, May 25, 1946.
90. See, *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, May 28, 1946.
91. *Asamiya*, May 25, 1946.
92. *ibid.*, June 1, 1946.
93. *ALAD*, Vol. II, No. 10, pp. 875-87, 1946.
94. *ALAD*, Vol. II, No. 10, pp. 785-87, 1946.
95. *Census of India (Assam)*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part I (A), p. 337.
96. *The Assam Tribune*, July 18, 1949.
97. This view was expressed in a letter to the Editor: "Shriju Chaudhury's statement", by Chandra Prabha Saikiani and Indu Prabha Baruah, Secretary, Assam Provincial Mahila Samiti, *The Assam Tribune*, August 2, 1949.
98. See Memorandum submitted to the Regional Director, Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of India, Camp: Shillong, by D.C. Baruah, Secretary, Goalpara District Association (Appeared in *The Assam Tribune*, May 27, 1949, p. 4).
99. See, Editorial article: "Asamor Atmar Akshya Samachya", *Dainik Asamiya*, April 13, 1948.
100. Letters to the Editor: "Chaudhury's Statement", op. cit.

101. *The ssam Tribune*, May 6, 1949.
102. *ibid.*, July 18, 1949.
103. *ibid.*, June 2, 1949.
10. *ibid.*
105. See, *Census of India* (Assam), Vol. 12, Part I—A Report, pp. 32-33 and 78. It may be noted that the total number of displaced persons (non-Muslims) who had migrated to Assam increased from 2,73,000 in 1951 to 6,28,000 by 1961.
106. *The Assam Tribune*, April 4, 1950.
107. *Memorandum submitted by the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha to the honourable Sri Prakasha, Minister of Scientific Research and Naturae Resources, Government of India and President, Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee*, Camp: Gauhati—July 4, 1951.
108. *ibid.*
109. *The Assam Tribune*, May 8, 1949.
110. See, Sukdev Goswami, "Refugees and Assam", *The Assam Tribune*, May 27, 1949.
111. *ibid.*, December 10, 1949.
11. *Census of India* (Assam), 1951, Vol. XII, Part II (A), pp. 111-35 and Vol. I, Part II (A), pp. 248-58.
113. Since the influx of outsiders into Assam has not ended yet, the anxiety of the Assamese elite for their existence is still alive: The recent movement on the issue of 'Foreign national' is the manifestation of this anxiety.
114. For detail see Chapter IV.
115. Sabhapati Abhivashan; Arthanaitik aru samajik sakha in (Assamese), *Asom Sahitya Sabha*, Seventeenth Session, Gauhati, 1937.
116. *Indian Statutory Commissiom Report*, 1930, p. 17.
117. *Indian Financial Enquiry Report*, 1936, p. 10.
118. *Assam Congress Parliamentary Party Annual Report*, 1948-49, Ch: 1, p. 1.
119. "The Memorandum submitted to the Government of India by the Government of Assam" as appeared in *The Assam Tribune*, October 22, 1947.

120. *The Assam Tribune*, June 11, 1949. Such feeling of the Assamese elite still holds good. Since the beginning of Seventies, it became more articulate. In an editorial, *The Assam Tribune* characterised the existing financial relationship as "Colonial-Type of Economy". (*The Assam Tribune*, November 19, 1973): In another editorial again *The Assam Tribune* called it "a step-motherly attitude of the Centre." (*ibid.*, February 8, 1975).
- 121: *ALAD*, Vol. I, 1947, p. 55.
122. Borpuzari, H.K., *Assam in the Days of Company*, Gauhati, 1963, Ch, X, pp. 2 10-11.

Federalism and Assam: Centrifugal and Centripetal Tendencies

In the previous chapter it was argued that Assam as a political unit became a part of India only during the British rule and in the wake of the imperialist rule, the doors of Assam were thrown open to the free flow of population from the rest of India. And at the same time, with the annexation of some parts of Bengal and north-eastern hill areas, the British gave birth to a greater Assam than had ever existed before. Consequently, Assam became heterogeneous in character. Of course, she had never been a homogeneous province.¹ At different periods of her history, Assam became a refuge for many people, mostly belonging to the Mongoloid stock and she had also attracted people from the rest of India. Thus there had always been some divergence of language, culture, religion and social custom among her population. However, a process of socio-cultural fusion towards the growth and development of a composite Assamese people and culture was started during the Ahom rule among the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. But under the British rule this process became weak leading to clashes of interests among the divergent groups of the province. Hence, like the unification of India, the unification of heterogeneous elements of Assam had also become a great problem. Sectional and caste patriotism had developed to such an extent that it was apparently impossible to constitute a unified force within the territorial jurisdiction of Assam, in the name of 'Assam' or 'Assamese'. The Assamese caste Hindu elite wanted an internal integration

among the heterogeneous elements² of the province. By and large, they were anxious for the integration of all the groups of people into the mainstream of Assamese culture. What they probably meant by 'internal integration' was the process of 'Assamization', so that the Assamese language and culture could become dominant in the region. Their basic quest was to strengthen the common Assamese identity within the broad framework of Indian society. On the other hand, the interests of other ethnic groups, particularly of the Tribals, the Ahoms and the Bengalis were particularistic. Most of them wanted to preserve their distinct identity within the province. They did not want to merge their culture completely with the Assamese caste Hindu culture and developed a non-integrative tendency. As a means of maintaining distinct identity, some of them demanded local autonomy on the basis of their respective ethnic identities within the small area where they used to inhabit.³ Sometimes this type of sectional as well as sub-regional patriotism became so strong among some sections of these people that this led them to demand a sovereign independent state outside the Indian Union for the sake of maintaining their ethnic identities. This separatist tendency became considerably stronger with the separation of Burma from India in 1937 and the growing cry for Pakistan as expressed through the Muslim League. But towards the late 'forties the centripetal forces became sufficiently strong capable of controlling the centrifugal urges of various groups of the province. Consequently, Assam became a part of India. In this chapter an endeavour has been made to examine the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies developed in Assam during the 'forties of this century which played a significant role in moulding the attitude of Assamese elite to the question of 'Federalism' when the Constitution was being framed.

II

Being a late-comer into the national mainstream, Assam in her relationship with the rest of India had her own legacy of emotional and psychological ambivalence. The feeling of a certain uniqueness marking Assam out from the rest of the

country led to a sense of social autonomy and even 'sovereignty' for each community living in the province. Different linguistic and ethnic groups of the province whether singly or jointly expressed strong sub-nationalist or centrifugal sentiment. These groups may broadly be categorised into three main divisions for the purposes of our discussion—(i) the people of Mongoloid stock, which includes the tribes and races of both hills and plains; (ii) those who articulated the 'Assamese nationalists' (in some sense sub-nationalists) sentiments through the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha; and (iii) a section of the upper caste Assamese intelligentsia who individually expressed their centrifugal sentiment.

The tribes and races of Assam (such as the Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasis, the Garos, the Mikirs, the Ahoms, the Kacharis, the Bodos, the Miris etc.) originally belonged to Mongoloid blood, who came to this region from the East and South-east Asia at different periods of history. In the past, these tribes and races maintained their separate kingdoms—free and independent for a long period. They never came under any foreign domination before the British annexation of this region with the rest of India. The Ahoms had ruled the mainland of Assam continuously for more than six hundred years which is indeed rare in the history of any part of India. But there were other territories on the peripheries of Assam which were ruled by the Nagas, the Khasis, the Kacharis and so on. These tribes were not prepared to live under what they considered to be the dominance of others. This was so because these tribal people had never been brought together under any central power prior to the advent of the British rule in this region. Some of these tribes and races had always been fighting for their distinct socio-political existence even during the period of the British rule.

The hill areas of Assam were the home of the tribal population, speaking various languages and dialects different from those of the plains. They possessed their own language and culture with different socio-political institutions. It may be noted in passing that the hill areas namely the Naga Hills districts, the Khasi Hills districts, the Mizo Hills districts etc., were not parts of Assam prior to the British occupation of

this region. Although the British incorporated these areas into Assam, they administered them separately from the plains of Assam and conceded traditional pattern of governance in the hills. For this obvious reason, when the Constitution was being framed, the people belonging to the hill areas of Assam became increasingly conscious of their distinct identity and tried to resist the imposition of Assamese language and culture on them.⁴ In effect, the centrifugal tendencies had developed to a greater extent in the hills than in the plains. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed in April 1945 with a view to uniting the multi-lingual Nagas and engaging themselves in social activities. Later on, within a year, this was reorganized with the name and style, the Naga National Council (NNC), a federation of various tribal councils of the Hill under the presidentship of T. Aliba Imti Ao. At the initial stage, it demanded autonomy within Assam and opposed both the 'Crown Colony'⁵, and the Grouping Plan under the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16, 1946. But suddenly in February 1947 it demanded an interim government for Nagaland initially for a period of ten years, after which the Nagas would be free to decide their own political status. This demand was formally placed before the Government in June of the same year. The NNC even gave an ultimatum to the Government of India on November 4, 1947, giving thirty days' notice for satisfactory settlement of their demands. Further, it warned the Government that if their demands were not conceded, the Naga people would not co-operate with the existing Government.⁶ But this movement for autonomy was, however, transformed into one for the establishment of a sovereign independent Nagaland after Angami Zapu Phizo became the President of NNC in November 1949. Later on it virtually transformed itself into a parallel Government for 'Nagaland'.

Like the Nagas, a section of the Lushais who called themselves 'Mizo' too expressed centrifugal urges considerably and some of them demanded a sovereign 'Mizo State'. The Mizo Hills district which was treated as "Excluded Areas" by the British, has its strategic importance as it lies along the border of Burma. During the period when the Indian Constitution

was being framed, there were two political organizations of the Mizos, namely the 'Mizo Union' and the 'United Mizo Freedom Organization' which came into existence in April 1946 and July 1947 respectively. Whereas the 'Mizo Union' was for the continuation of link with India on the basis of full local autonomy,⁷ the latter propagated secession of all contiguous Mizo areas from India and demanded their merger with Burma on the ground of racial affinity.⁸ It may be noted that the Mizo Union submitted a memorandum to the President, Constituent Assembly in the April 1947 urging for the consolidation of all Mizo areas into a single administrative unit and its self-determination within Assam.⁹ But later on, in 1949, it demanded the amalgamation of the contiguous Mizo areas of Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Cachar to form an autonomous greater Mizoram.¹⁰ In the subsequent period, however, the dominant elite of this Hill tended to produce rebellious psyche among the people even after the enactment of the present Constitution of India.¹¹

In 1946, the Khasi-Jayantia Political Association was formed with the initiative of the Tribal Chiefs (Siems). It demanded for a federation of the Khasi areas with adequate "cultural and political autonomy" within a "sovereign Assam".¹² In the Garo Hills, the Garo National Council (GNC) came into existence in March 1946.¹³ It also put forward the claims for an autonomous Garo region. The GNC, however, wanted to maintain its link with the province of Assam as well as the Central Government.¹⁴ Similarly in the Mikir Hills the 'Karbia Durbar', the first political organization of the Mikir people was formed in early 1947. It emphasised on the protection of local customs, consolidation of Mikir areas into a single administrative unit and an extension of the franchise.¹⁵

Thus it is amply clear that at the advent of independence, there had been a strong sub-regional and even a centrifugal urge among a section of the people of the hills. One of the reasons for this was that these hill tribes had very little scope of mingling with the people of the plains during the British rule. As mentioned earlier, the British administered them separately from the plains and did not interfere much in

their system of internal administration.¹⁶ In effect, this political demarcation and separate system of administration in the hills had always been a factor of division between the hills and the plains. Therefore, the people of hills could not think in terms of 'Assam' or 'Assamese identity' although, administratively, the hill areas were made a part of Assam. Thus socially, culturally and even politically, the hill people were not sufficiently integrated with the people of the plains and as such they (the hill people) could not assimilate with the mainstream of the culture of the plains. Whether this was done deliberately in consonance with the policy of "divide and rule", as many local historians claim,¹⁷ or it was due to a policy of not disturbing susceptibilities of the hill people, is difficult to assess accurately. It may, however, be argued, that although the British might not have made direct efforts to divide the people of the hills and the plains, indirectly their policy had this effect. As a result, the hill people were afraid of the plainsmen more than they were of the British. Rightly or wrongly, they even laboured under a suspicion that the rule of 'white people' in the hitherto "excluded areas" would be replaced by their 'more advanced' neighbours of the plains in free India.¹⁸ By and large, the hill elite believed that in a free India the plainsmen would be in an advantageous position to exploit them on a more permanent basis.¹⁹ This feeling of the hills was mainly shared by the newly emerged western educated hill middle class and the tribal chiefs (Siems). They thought that if the hill areas were completely integrated with Assam, they would lose their traditional privileges and socio-political dominance in the hills.

In addition to this, there were some other factors also which stood in the way of integration between the hills and the plains. The hills were not bound with the plains by any ties of religion and language. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries, through the help of the British administration, succeeded in converting a sizable section of the hill people to Christianity under the cover of certain philanthropic and welfare activities.²⁰ This made integration more difficult. At the same time, the people of the plains had miserably

failed to establish adequate political communication with the hills. This fact was even admitted by *The Assam Tribune* and in one of its editorials it maintained:

The plains people and their leaders have hardly made in the past planned efforts to develop closer ties between the two sections of the population or devoted any of their time to the problems with which the hill people are confronted.²¹

This attitude of indifference of the Assamese elite towards the hill people contributed to a feeling of fear and suspicion among the latter which were manifested in the demand of the Naga National Council.²² It seemed to them that the autocratic sway, under which they believed themselves to be groaning, would continue even after the end of the British rule. They feared that they would not get full scope for the development of hill culture on the lines of their own tradition. The cause of this fear was again admitted by *The Assam Tribune* thus: "The fault is entirely ours, the plains people's, for we have done absolutely nothing to earn their confidence to prove that we have no evil designs on our brothers and sisters in the hills".²³

It is, however, interesting to note that although the Assamese elite occasionally made themselves responsible for the fears and suspicions of the hill people, they at the same time alleged that this was mainly due to the result of a, as *The Assam Tribune* put it, "well thought out imperialist policy."²⁴ In fact, when the Assamese elite failed to influence the hill people, they felt that the British pursued a policy of deliberate segregation of the hill people from the people of the plains. Similarly, after independence, in 1950, Sriprakasa, the then Governor of Assam, also asserted that "during the British regime, the plains and the hills instead of being helped to unite, were kept apart from each other".²⁵ Such assertions made so very often by the Assamese elite and some other quarters, were, however, not without justification. As already noted, while the British may have made no direct effort to divide the people of the hills and the plains, it seems that they

took advantage of the existing differences between these people.²⁶ As most students of modern nationalism know, the operation of the state works as a cementing force in the development of the spirit of nationalism. But the state during the British period instead of performing this function helped to ensure that the existing spirit of distinctness and separateness was perpetuated. As the strength of the Indian national movement increased and the British realised that they might have to part with power, they naturally encouraged these sentiments in order to exploit the situation. Indeed, they (the British) gave the hill people assurances that at the end of the Second World War they would have an independent state managing its affairs in their own way.²⁷

It seemed to the leaders of Assam that influences had been exerted by the British on a section of the hill elite to induce their people either to join Pakistan or at least to remain separate from the plains; and a small group succumbed to these influences. Realizing the gravity of this situation, the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy said:

“We must consider the fact that there are some people in the hill areas of Assam now who want to be independent altogether and stand as a separate State, some who want to join Burma and some others who probably want to join Pakistan too.”²⁸

Thus, it was a hard task, particularly when the Constitution was being framed, for accommodating the separatist pulls of the extremist elements of the hill tribes under uniform constitutional arrangement. A section of the educated middle class of the hill areas were, however, in favour of integration with India but clearly with a large measure of local autonomy. As a result, the provision for a ‘Sixth Schedule’ had to be created in the new Constitution.

In the plains of Assam, the Ahoms²⁹ had expressed remarkable centrifugal urges. They had been the latest rulers of the Assam Valley and after six centuries of their rule in Assam, the British had taken over the country from them in 1826. Therefore, it was a natural inclination among the Ahoms

to get back their lost power and position. Not only did most of the dominant elite in Assamese society in the pre-British period come from the Ahoms, they also left a deep and indelible impress on Assamese society during the six centuries of their rule. In fact, they made formidable contribution in the consolidation of Assamese society and they were absorbed into the Hindu social structure. But it is strange that some of these people, after the advent of the British rule, insisted on retaining their distinct identity from the larger Assamese society. Mention may be made that they opposed the proposed scheme for tabulating the 'Ahoms' as 'Hindus' in the census operation of 1941 and demanded that the word 'Ahom' be retained in the Census Report.³⁰ Under the British administration this community became "backward" educationally, socially and even economically. As a result, unfortunately though inevitably the Ahoms failed to occupy prominent place in the British administration. Important positions were held either by the Bengalis or the Assamese caste Hindus. The Ahoms elite, therefore, thought that they were deprived of their "due share" of administrative jobs and other privileges under the British Government. Considering their contribution to the history of Assam and their number, they felt that they deserved much more than what they could achieve.³¹ Indeed, it appeared to them that from a position of dominance, they sank to the position of "backwardness." Rightly or wrongly, most of the Ahoms believed that their attachment to Hinduism was the root cause of their degradation.³² In order to remove the socio-economic backwardness of the Ahoms, they gradually began to organize themselves which culminated in the formation of the All Assam Ahom Association in 1893 (subsequently renamed as the "Ahom Sobha"). It stood for the preservation of distinct ethnic identity of the Ahoms. Although, the Ahoms adopted the Assamese language as their mother tongue leaving their original Tai language and contributed a great deal in the formation of a greater Assamese society, they did not want that the 'Ahom' identity should be completely submerged by the Assamese caste Hindu culture.

By and large, there developed a contradiction between the Ahom elite and the elite of the Assamese caste Hindus

regarding their power status in the society. As mentioned earlier, the Assamese caste Hindus became a dominant community in Assam both culturally and politically. When the national movement developed in Assam, the Congress organization came to be entirely dominated by the upper caste Hindus. Therefore, some of the Ahom elite characterised the Congress in Assam as the "League of the caste Hindus".³¹ In any case, the Ahom elite felt much anxiety for lack of their power and position. In effect, the Ahom Association led a unity move among the mongoloid communities of Assam and formed a greater alliance among them to counter the monopoly of the caste Hindus in the affairs of the province.³¹ As a part of this effort, the Ahom elite took active part in the formation of "All peoples' party" (popularly known as "Sarba Doll") on May 8, 1948 to fight against the Congress, which they believed, was an organization of the caste Hindus.³² For this purpose, they did not even hesitate to co-operate with the Muslim League.³⁶ They, however, asserted that the Ahom is an inseparable part of the larger Assamese society and the upliftment of the Ahoms would ultimately serve the greater interest of the Assamese society.³⁷ Thus while endorsing this view, they argued that "the rise of the Ahoms" was essential "for the progress of the Assamese people as a whole".³⁸ It, therefore, seems obvious that the Ahom elite wanted to maintain their distinct identity within the Assamese society regaining their dominant position in the province. As a measure of maintaining distinct identity and prosperity of the Ahoms, they demanded the recognition of Ahoms as the 'Minority Community'.³⁹ And more importantly, with the growing demand for Pakistan, they realised that the question of distinct Ahom identity was connected with the maintenance of separate identity of Assam as a whole. Eventually, they made a strong case for sovereign independent status for Assam and expressed considerable centrifugal sentiment.

The Ahom elite persistently felt that they had a glorious past and that during their rule, Assam had never been conquered by any foreign power and she maintained her sovereignty for a long time. Moreover, since geographically

she had remained isolated from the rest of India, emotionally, the Ahoms developed a sense of alienation from other parts of the country. These factors together with the separation of Burma from India in 1937, and the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, had inspired the Ahom elite to claim for a sovereign independent status for Assam as a means for the preservation of their distinct Ahom identity. In several meetings of the All Assam Ahom Association, both provincial and district levels, resolutions were adopted to this effect. For instance, in an executive committee meeting of the All Assam Ahom Association held on September 29, 1944 at Sibsagar it was resolved that:

In view of the peculiar position of Assam, both geographically and otherwise, and the great preponderance of the Mongolian races with their distinctive languages, cultures and religions in the population of the province, Assam without Sylhet has a legitimate claim for free and independent existence in the event of India being divided territorially into Pakistan and Hindustan zones and that Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah should leave the question of Assam without Sylhet to the people of the soil to settle.⁴⁰

A similar resolution was passed in a meeting of the executive committee of North Bank District Ahom Association held on September 28, 1944 at Lakhimpur which pleaded that "in the event of India being divided into Hindustan and Pakistan, Assam should be separated from India and constituted into a dominion on the basis of history, culture and nationality".⁴¹ It seems that these centrifugal urges of the Ahoms were not fundamentally different from those of the other groups and communities, particularly the tribals and the caste Hindus. Yet there was a difference of emphasis in their thinking. While comparing themselves with other communities, the Ahom elite felt that they had a better and more 'legitimate' claim to have dominance in Assam on grounds of history, tradition and culture. It is, however, interesting to note that a section of the caste Hindu elite also very often referred to the same history and tradition while expressing

their centrifugal urges, because it helped them to generate a consciousness of the past which is an important source of nationalism. It could, of course, be argued that the caste Hindus were not a part of the ruling group which created this history. And unlike the caste Hindus, the Ahoms and other Mongoloid people had not come to Assam from other parts of India. The Ahom elite, therefore, felt that they had a 'legitimate' claim to remain separate from the rest of India so as to maintain the distinctness of Assam which was formed under their impact.

Almost a similar particularistic sentiment was expressed by the tribal elite of the plains of Assam. Like the Ahoms, the plains tribals (such as, the Bodos, the Kacharis, the Miris, the Deoris and Muttocks etc.) had also contradictions with the Assamese caste Hindus. It may be noted that tribals of the plains were somewhat culturally less distinct from the Assamese Hindus than the hill tribes. This happened because of the relatively greater interaction between them and the caste Hindus through the centuries. One reason, of course, for this may have been that tribals of the plains did not live in any single contiguous area; indeed all of them were scattered over wide areas. The tribal elite, however, did not want that their distinct tribal identity should be completely submerged by the Assamese caste Hindu culture. It needs to be mentioned that the Assamese culture does not necessarily imply the culture of the Assamese caste Hindu alone, although they left an indomitable impact on the same. In fact, the Assamese culture is the result of a continuous process of socio-cultural fusion among diverse linguistic and ethnic traits for centuries. As is well-known, Assam is a meeting place of various ethnic stocks having diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The representatives of these stocks came to Assam from different directions at different periods of her history. In the course of time all of them contributed their respective shares towards the growth and development of a composite Assamese culture. The tribal communities of Assam did not lag behind in this process. Many of them even underwent a process of de-tribalisation through initiation into Hinduism and more importantly, through renunciation of their mother tongues in

favour of the Assamese language. By and large, these people had contributed significantly towards the Assamese nation-building process by assimilating themselves with the mainstream of Assamese culture.

Despite this fact, a section of the tribal elite strongly felt that they were markedly different from the Assamese caste Hindus. It is true that the Assamese caste Hindu had grown into quite a big and homogeneous community in the province. Even during the Ahom rule, they had held important positions in the bureaucracy. During the British administration also, because of their education, they were able to occupy a dominant position in the governmental and commercial undertakings. At the same time as noted earlier, this group became very powerful in the Congress organization and played a dominant role in the politics of the province.

On the other hand, the tribal elite realized that they remained economically, educationally and even politically much more backward than the Assamese caste Hindus.⁴² It seemed to them that the tribals were being exploited and neglected by the upper caste dominant elite of the province. Sir Andrew Clow, the then Governor of Assam (1942-46) also associated himself with this sentiment of the tribals and maintained that "the Assamese both caste Hindus and the Muslims professed solicitude for the tribes, but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathy with the tribes."⁴³ Thus it seems that the British did not fail to exploit the situation of conflict between the tribals and the non-tribals so as to ensure their colonial interest. In any case, rightly or wrongly the tribal elite believed that the Assamese caste Hindus were mainly responsible for their backwardness.⁴⁴ This feeling of deprivation among the tribals led them to form the All Assam Plains Tribal League in the thirties as a step towards bringing all the Mongoloid tribes and communities under a common political platform.⁴⁵ The tribal leaders realised the necessity of such an organisation to exert political pressure on the Government and the national political parties so as to fulfil their needs and aspirations. In fact, the Congress did not try to synthesise the interests of the caste Hindus with those of the plains tribals and to bring them within the mainstream of

the national movement. Moreover, no practical attempt was made to socialize the tribes in the emerging political culture of the state and to bring them into the mainstream of the Valley culture. In effect, it led the plains tribals to believe that, though they were the original inhabitants of the province, the Assamese aristocracy had dispossessed them of their original sights. As a result, the tribals apprehended that while the Bengali elite wanted to establish their dominance in Assam as a whole, the Assamese caste Hindus might do the same over the tribals both politically and culturally.⁴⁶

At the same time, it has to be noted that the tribal elite were not only afraid of the dominance of the Assamese caste Hindus, they were also apprehensive of the possible 'danger' from the non-Assamese Indians of the province. The cultivators, particularly from Bengal, very often they complained, had been allowed to occupy lands within the tribal belts. In fact, the tribal elite were critical of the immigration policy of the Saadulla Government which they characterised as a "policy of invitation" to landless peasants.⁴⁷ They felt that no efforts were being made either by the Muslim League or by the Congress to safeguard the interest of the tribals. It appeared to them that the increasing numbers of non-tribals in the tribal belts in particular, and non-Assamese Indians in the province in general, were posing a threat to tribal identity.⁴⁸ While being conscious of their distinct identity and anxious to preserve and develop their own socio-cultural heritage, some of the tribal elite even thought to make their homeland (Assam) a sovereign independent state outside the Indian Union, in the event of India being divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. As a matter of fact, a section of the tribal elite did not want that Assam should be a part of either Hindustan or Pakistan and they desired that she should remain separate, maintaining her sovereign status. They thought that if Assam became free, the influx of non-Assamese Indians particularly, into the tribal belt of Assam could be checked and more importantly, the tribals would be in a better position, within a sovereign Assam, to protect their interest. In view of this, in the middle of the 'forties, a feeling grew among some of the plains tribal te in favour of an independent political existence for Assam

as a means of safeguarding their distinct tribal identity. Thus Bhimbor Deori, the General Secretary of the Assam Plains Tribal League, in an official statement released to the press, emphatically demanded that :

“Assam proper and its hills should be constituted into a separate sovereign state. Assam and its hills should not be made a part or province of any Indian federation—Hindustan or Pakistan without the consent of its people.”⁴⁹

Endorsing this sentiment, Rabichandra Kachari, another tribal leader asserted that Assam, with her distinct racial and cultural identity from the rest of India, should fight for independence.⁵⁰ A similar view was also expressed by Sitanath Brahmachaudhury, (currently, the President of Asom Sahitya Sabha, 1981-82) president of the thirteenth session of the Kachari Sanmillan, a constituent body of the Tribal League, held at Sibsagar on May 4 and 5, 1945.⁵¹

So far, we have discussed about the particularistic sentiments of the Ahoms and other tribal communities of Assam (both in the hills and the plains). At this stage, it is important to note that although there were differences among these communities in respect of religious beliefs, languages and dialects, sub-regional pulls and allegiances, they felt much closer to each other due to their cultural affinities (fundamentally all of them belonged to the Mongoloid and the Tibeto-Burman culture distinct from the Aryans). Moreover, the basic problems that they were facing (such as the crisis of identity, the feeling of a sense of deprivation) were similar in nature. Therefore, they tended to unite together and make a common working arrangement in quest of their distinct identity. Thus, the “All Assam Tribes and Races Federation”⁵² was formed at Shillong in 1944 at an “enthusiastic get-together” of representatives of various tribes and races such as the Ahoms, the Kacharis, the Miris, the Deoris, the Khasis, the Garos, the Nagas, the Lushais etc. with a view to “securing political, economic, social and cultural welfare and advancement of various tribes of Assam by promoting active co-operation and social solidarity and unity among them”.⁵³

The growing publicity of the two-nation theory made the tribes and races of Assam more united and consolidated against the 'danger' created by the demand for Pakistan. They increasingly became more articulate and conscious of their distinct identity. Obviously, in the event of division of the *Nation*, Assam was to be a part either of Hindustan or Pakistan. But in this situation the tribes and races of Assam did not like to be a party either of the two and demanded a sovereign independent status for Assam as a means of safeguarding their distinct identity. Thus, the first convention of the "All Assam Tribes and Races Federation" held at Shillong from 21 to 23 March, 1945, unanimously resolved that:

In view of the fact that historically, Assam proper, with its hills, was never a part or province of India, and that its people, particularly the Tribes and the Races inhabiting it are ethnically and culturally different from the people of the rest of India, this convention is emphatically opposed to Assam proper with its hills being included into any proposed division of India—Pakistan or Hindustan and demands that it should be constituted into a separate Free State into which the Hill Districts bordering Assam be incorporated.⁵⁴

Their demand for a separate independent state appeared to them quite 'legitimate' because they believed that if the Muslims could claim a separate state on the basis of their distinct religious identity, the tribes and races of Assam could also definitely put forward a similar claim on the basis of their history, culture and distinct ethnic identity. Since they were not completely assimilated with the mainstream of Indian culture till then, they found no reason as to why they should become a part of the rest of the country. Moreover, it was very much in their mind that they were never a part of India prior to the British rule in this region.

In any case, the 'Tribes and Races' of Assam were not sufficiently organized, capable of asserting the demand for a sovereign independent Assam. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress in Assam was strong enough to check the

centrifugal urges developed among the tribals and the Ahoms. Moreover the prevailing political climate was not favourable for accommodating such a demand. Eventually, in the late 'forties, when the constitution was being framed they pleaded for adequate constitutional safeguards to preserve and protect their distinct ethnic identity. For this purpose, they even wanted their "real representatives" in the Constituent Assembly elected by themselves.⁵⁵ Jogendranath Hazarika, the President of the Assam Tribal Students' Association sent a telegraphic message to Maulana Azad demanding separate representatives of the tribals in the proposed Constituent Assembly.⁵⁶ The tribal elite apprehended that the representatives of the Assam Congress, though some of them might be tribals, would not safeguard their "just rights".⁵⁷ At any rate the leaders of the 'tribes and races' of Assam emphatically demanded that:

These communities must be assured separate political existence in the new Constitution by providing for them in the case of the hill tribes, local autonomy and in the case of others, separate electorate. They must be allowed to live their own life with their own customs and culture without any encroachment either by the Hindus or by the Muslims.⁵⁸

While demanding these special privileges to them in the new Constitution, they asserted the fact that the setting up of autonomous administrative unit among these tribes was "vital to the peace and tranquillity" of this region. As a matter of fact, they warned the Congress leaders that "a denial" of their "just rights" might bring "chaos and insecurity" to this "most vulnerable frontier of India".⁵⁹ Thus it appears that at the advent of independence, the Ahoms and the tribals both in the hills and the plains expressed a centrifugal sentiment and constituted a strong sub-regional force when the Constitution was being framed.

The separatist tendencies developed not only among the tribes and races of Assam, but also even among the 'Assamese sub-nationalists' to a considerable extent. The sentiments of this group were mainly expressed through the Asom Jatiya

Mahasabha.⁶⁰ As indicated earlier the Jatiya Mahasabha had been fighting to protect and preserve the distinct Assamese identity. The Jatiya Mahasabha strongly felt that the non-Assamese people who came to this province from other parts of the country, particularly from Bengal, posed a great threat to Assamese language and culture. Indeed, they considered this 'influx' a threat to the very existence of the Assamese. As a defensive mechanism against this threat, the Jatiya Mahasabha was adopting a policy of 'Assam for Assamese'. In a Memorandum submitted to the British Parliamentary Delegation, Ambikagiri Roychaudhury, General Secretary of the Jatiya Mahasabha, clearly maintained that "Assam for Assamese is the battle cry of all the true sons of Assam".⁶¹ In another memorandum to the Members of All India Congress Working Committee and All India Congress Committee, Roychaudhury unhesitatingly declared that the Assamese people were even prepared "to plunge the country in desperate struggle" for their "emancipation" and "existence", the consequences of which he thought, were never foreseen by the All India leaders.⁶² Thus sometimes, the feeling of regionalism or provincialism was transformed into a slogan of complete separation of Assam from India. Even after independence, in a meeting of Jatiya Mahasabha, Kamrup Branch, held on January 1, 1948, the president asserted that "Assam should come out of the Indian Union and become an independent country like Burma or any other country."⁶³ Moreover, some of the militant sections of the Mahasabha, in a letter to the editor of the *Shillong Times*, expressed the view that:

Assam's sovereignty was a fact of ages ago and it should be of future. There are many sovereign states in the world with lesser areas, population and potential resources. Assam is the home of brave martial races and tribes, whom the world has not seen in their full strength. In these days of national inter-dependence no state or country, however small or big, can have any reason for fear of her defence and Assam can perhaps be one of the strongest little states in the whole of East.⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that while putting forward the claim for a free independent status for Assam, this section of the Assamese people have always referred to as the 'brave martial races and tribes' who once ruled over Assam. But they themselves were not the descendants of these 'brave martial race' whom the caste Hindus' dominance had now relegated to a 'backward' status. In fact, with a view to serving their interest, they employed this technique of bargaining with the national elite. In this connection, perhaps another fact would not also be out of place. On behalf of the Jatiya Mahasabha Ambikagiri Roychaudhury in a telegram to Aliba Imti Ao, president of the Naga National Council, expressed the fullest sympathy with the Nagas' stand for self-determination.⁶⁵ It is however, debatable whether the Jatiya Mahasabha had a genuine sympathy towards the Naga demand for self-determination or it adopted tactics such as the indirect threat of secession, expression of anti-national feeling as a part of its strategy to press home its own demands.

In addition to this, some influential members of the upper caste Assamese intelligentsia who were not closely associated with the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, had also expressed a deep sense of centrifugal sentiment.⁶⁶ For instance, Jnananath Bora, a noted Assamese writer in a series of articles published in the *Avahan*, a popular language periodical, and in the *Dainik Batori*, an Assamese daily, asserted the feasibility and justification of a separate sovereign State for Assam.⁶⁷ In his article—"Kamrup Aru Bharatbarsha", Bora maintained that "the survival of the Assamese nation, the rejuvenation of its diseased life called for our readiness to separate Assam from India."⁶⁸ (Translated from Assamese). He articulated such separatist feelings, particularly in the event of the Second World War, when Assam was threatened of being attacked by the Japanese army. This section of the Assamese elite felt that but for the 'merger of Assam with India' the problem of defence of the former would not have arisen. They argued that the Assamese whom they called "martial people" had never been conquered by any foreign power till the advent of the British rule. It appeared to them that Gandhi and his Indian National Congress had reduced the militancy of the Assamese people.⁶⁹

Therefore, a section of the Assamese elite, sometimes thought that for the sake of the defence of their land, Assam must come out of the Indian Union. Indeed, they wanted to see a militant type of leadership developed in Assam distinct from Gandhian ideology. Thus, a section of the Assamese intelligentsia demanded the secession of Assam from India as a means of "saving the Assamese race from extinction".⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that some of them had even begun to conceptualise a model for the governance of their future free state of Assam. In this connection, G.S. Bhattacharyya, an Assamese intellectual and a provincial leader of the then CPI, in one of his articles maintained:

It can safely be said that it will be more or less a Russian Model in which there will be two Houses of Legislature. The Lower House will be elected through adult suffrage on the basis of communities and groups, and each of them will get representation proportionate to their population. The Upper House will be a House of communities. This will be constituted by representatives of different nationalities and tribes and communities.⁷¹

Statements, such as these, created an impression that in a free independent Assam, all the castes, communities and tribes would get adequate opportunities to take part in the state administration; under which different communities of the state would be in a position to maintain their distinct identities and to develop themselves according to their own genius. By and large, the above model of legislature indicated a measure of solution of the problem of ethnic multiplicity of the region.

In a bid to stake their claim to an independent status for Assam, this section of the Assamese elite had to reckon with the question of the economic viability of Assam and her capacity for growth. They thought that Assam possessed considerable economic resources to survive as a sovereign independent state. Thus Bhattacharyya asserted :

"As to plea of Assam proper being too small for statehood,

it may be observed that both in point of view of population and resources, Assam is in a much better position than any sovereign state in Europe or America.”⁷²

Whether this statement is factually accurate or not is a different matter, but the point is that a section of the Assamese elite was anxious for a sovereign status for Assam. It was very much in their minds that economically Assam yet remained a backward province in spite of her enormous economic potentialities. Hence they believed that her economic backwardness could be removed only if she became an independent state. On the other hand, they felt that if Assam remained a part of India, she would go into the economic grip of the Centre under the ‘smoke screen’ of a national government. Of course, for such a probability (and for the backwardness of Assam) they also made their own leaders responsible who were not able to assert themselves in order to gain for Assam her rightful claims. It had generally been alleged by a section of the Assamese elite that ever since the merger of Assamese leadership with the All India Congress, Assam Congress had become merely a follower of the latter and had very often ignored the interest of the Assamese people.⁷³ Sriprakasa, a non-Assamese Governor of Assam also associated himself with this sentiment of the Assamese elite and thus he maintained:

“For twelve years, I was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, but I do not remember during that period, any representatives of Assam herself asking even one question relating to this province or dealing with any problem pertaining to it. They seemed to be more interested in all-India questions than in themselves.”⁷⁴

It does not matter whether these remarks were accurate or not but such remarks made so very often by the non-Assamese were bound to evoke considerable resentment among a section of the Assamese people about the role of their leadership. At any rate, the Congressman in Assam naturally had to face criticism. Indeed, even during the period when the Constitution

was being framed, they were characterised by a section of the Assamese elite as "rubber-stamp" or "gramophones" to "endorse" or "echo" the decisions of "their all India bossess".⁷⁵ In fact, these Assamese elite, lost faith in the Congressmen of Assam and perhaps desired to see the development of a new leadership which would be independent of the All India Congress. They believed that Assam would one day lose her distinct identity, indeed she might even lose her very existence, if she continued her links with the All India Congress leadership which went against Assamese interest. By and large, this sort of thinking naturally led a section of the Assamese elite to urge for a separate and independent political existence for Assam.

Yet another group of Assamese intellectuals articulated the idea of sovereign independent political status for Assam on the ground of Assam's socio-cultural distinctness and historical background. They asserted that the Assamese, who constituted the dominant group in Assam, formed a sufficiently distinctive group from the point of view of language and culture. These, they thought, must at all costs be protected and preserved. They believed that the development of their language and culture could be fostered, if Assam was made a separate independent state. Dr. B.K. Baruah, a noted Assamese intellectual, in the course of his lecture at the Narayani Handique Memorial Historical Institute, Gauhati, stated:

"Culturally, racially and linguistically, every non-Assamese is a foreigner in Assam. In this connection, we must bear in mind that Assam from the very ancient times never formed a part of India. Mythology and legendary allusions apart, viewed in this perspective every foreigner who came to and resided in Assam for trade and other purposes after the occupation of the province by the British in 1826 A.D. might be treated as alien, if she wants to save herself from the grip of foreigners. An alien cannot be expected to take a dispassionate view of public affairs of our future free state."⁷⁶

Similar ambivalent separatist feelings were expressed in

some other public meetings too. In a 'crowded' public meeting held at Jorhat on May 22, 1947, a resolution regarding the establishment of a "sovereign republic of Assam" was unanimously adopted. The meeting further reiterated that "with the release of about twenty-five crores of revenue" which was annually taken away from Assam to "feed the top heavy centre" and "for the maintenance of the deficit district of Sylhet", Assam would be able to hold out as a strong independent Republic.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that Kuladhar Chaliha who was a veteran Congress leader and member of the Constituent Assembly also associated himself with these sentiments of the said public meeting. It seems that most of the time these sentiments were dormant and even Congressmen who were normally supposed to be nationalists, associated themselves with these feelings. Thus, sometimes, the regional political elite including the Congressmen exploited anti-centre and even anti-national sentiment for the purpose of serving their own interest in the game of power politics.

III

From the above discussion, it is evident that with the growing demand for Pakistan there developed separatist urges among the various groups of people in Assam. It is to be noted that as national sentiment developed in the country round the democratic right of self-determination, it gave rise simultaneously and significantly to regional, sub-regional and ethnic sentiments based on cleavages of language, region, race, tribes and the like. As such, in Assam the separatist feeling found expression in two main contexts—narrower as well as broader. In its narrower context it implied the feeling of distinctness among the various groups of people within the province which led to the conflict between the hills and the plains; the tribals and the non-tribals; the Ahoms and the non-Ahoms; and the Assamese and the non-Assamese etc. On the other hand, in its broader perspective, the separatist feeling implied the consciousness of regional identity which created the problem of integration of Assam with the rest of India. The excessive emphasis on ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities led to this consciousness. But sometimes, the urge for distinct regional identity

became so strong that it gave birth to the anti-national feeling among many of the elite of the province.

In this connection, it is important to reiterate the dilemma of the dominant Assamese elite in Assam. Originally, the members of this group came to Assam from other parts of India during the Ahom rule; due to their education and upper caste status, they gradually acquired position of prestige and power. After the end of Ahom rule and the rise of British power, however, they became the dominant community in Assam. But after attaining their dominant status, they feared lest they should lose their power and position. Indeed, their dominant position was being threatened by the middle class elements of the immigrant communities. Therefore, as a means of maintaining their dominant status, they sometimes even expressed their centrifugal sentiments. It is, however, surprising that while the dominant Assamese elite wanted to preserve and protect their socio-cultural identity, they did not seem to be happy when other groups also put forward similar claims for the protection of their respective identities. Rather, they wanted others to merge within the larger Assamese identity. Since most of the elite of other ethnic groups were also trying to preserve and protect their distinct identities, they naturally came in conflict with the dominant Assamese elite. In fact the non-dominant communities felt a sense of insecurity in the caste Hindu dominated Assamese society. This feeling of insecurity was to some extent responsible for the development of centrifugal urges among the non-dominant groups. In other words, it may be said that it was the dominant Assamese elite who widened instead of bridging the gaps between the dominant and non-dominant sections, and consequently, it led to the growth of particularistic urges in the latter. Hailing from the upper strata of society, the dominant elite ignored both horizontal and vertical dimensions of integration. No practical efforts were made either to close the elite-mass gap or to create elite homogeneity at the regional levels.

Under the circumstances, a vague and as yet nebulous centrifugal tendency developed among the various ethnic and linguistic elite of Assam which was, however, not sufficient to

materialise the dream of sovereign independent status for Assam outside the Indian Union. The British, of course, would not have given this option to Assam; indeed, Assam had only two options: either to join India or Pakistan. Of these, the dominant Assamese caste Hindu elite of Assam were naturally interested to remain with India. At the same time, perhaps, the new large state of India would not have also allowed Assam to secede from the rest of the country. In addition to this, there were yet some other factors which inevitably led to the development of centripetal urges in Assam.

In the first place, while it is true that the separatist tendencies had been developing among the different groups of the province, these had not developed due to the same cause; the causes were diverse in nature. As such, there was no common articulation of centrifugal urges among them. In other words, inter-sectional, inter-caste, and inter-tribal rivalries were so prominent that no unified force could develop for the fulfilment of their separatist urges. It is due to this fact that, although the centrifugal tendencies were in evidence, they were not as yet very much organized. In fact, there was no widespread movement, demanding sovereign status for Assam corresponding to the Indian national movement or even the movement led by the Muslim League.

Secondly, as stated earlier, with the growth of freedom movement in India, a strong sense of Indian nationalism developed. The Indian National Congress sought to instil a spirit of solidarity among the people of all parts of India by inducing in them a sense of common grievances and common heritage. The power of Indian nationalism became so strong in the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties of this century, that it was able to submerge the centrifugal tendencies developed in Assam. Even the dominant segment of the Assamese elite might feel that it was only as a part of the larger Indian national movement that they might be able to achieve the redemption of Assam. In other words, it was very well realized by most of them that since the British were a great power, no group, by its own effort, could alone fight effectively against the British imperialism in India.⁷⁸ Moreover, as the Congress was, at least ideologically and professedly, a non-communal organization

having a common goal, all sections of people had a chance to be represented in it, in order to contribute to the national effort of overthrowing the British imperialism. Thus although a section of the Assamese elite, and particularly the 'tribes and races', sometimes expressed a sense of extreme separatism, a section of the same elite at times had to make common cause with the Congress against the British. In the political climate of 1945-47, the force of the Indian National Congress in Assam was sufficiently strong to absorb 'Assamese nationalism' within Indian nationalism. The election of 1946 made the Congress to emerge at the strongest force in Assam and enabled it to control the fissiparous tendencies in the province.

Thirdly, in this connection, another factor which had an impact on the growth of centripetal feeling among a section of the Assamese caste Hindu elite may also be noted. We have mentioned above that unlike the 'tribes and races' the Assamese caste Hindus came to Assam from other parts of India, particularly during the Ahom administration and they were proud of their descent. Although many of them had lost their original links with the rest of the country, they still traced their origin to other parts of India. Therefore, there was a spontaneous inclination among this section of the people towards the broader ideal of Indian nationalism, although sometimes they expressed separatist urges, for socio-political reasons.

Finally, it may be argued that after the partition of the country centripetal tendencies were strengthened; indeed the emergence of Pakistan virtually submerged the separatist feelings among the Assamese elite. It created a new type of scare among them. Surprising though it may seem, while only a few months back they had felt so sure of their own strength and had asserted that Assam would be able to defend herself, they now feared possible Pakistani aggressive designs. The Assamese elite strongly believed that Pakistan would be a real danger to Assam's integrity and, therefore, Assam needed the protection of a stronger India.

It is true that after partition, Assam became strategically more important than it was before. The partition made Assam isolated from the rest of the country giving her one more

international border i.e., the border of Pakistan in addition to the common border with China and Burma which Assam already had. In other words, she had practically been surrounded by these three foreign countries. On the other hand, she was connected with the rest of India only through a narrow neck like a corridor of about thirty miles breadth which separated Sikkim from erstwhile East Pakistan. Eventually, the communication with other parts of India became very difficult. The Assamese elite, therefore, feared that it would be very easy for an enemy in a future conflict to penetrate into this small area thus isolating Assam from the rest of the country. Indeed, after partition, Assam was placed in an unenviable position and geographically, she became like a besieged island. The Assamese elite, therefore, became increasingly concerned about the problem of defence of Assam. This feeling of the Assamese elite was articulated by *The Assam Tribune* in one of its editorials thus:

Assam's position is the most vulnerable in the Indian Union to-day. She lies in the easternmost corner of India. Her link with the rest of the Indian Union is so precariously narrow that in the event of aggression from the West it will not be much difficult for the enemy to cut that off. We have no natural barriers to rely on against Eastern Pakistan.⁷⁹

Similarly, the *Dainik Asamiiya*, apprehended that the Muslim League of Pakistan had not yet given up the idea of inclusion of Assam into its fold.⁸⁰ It alleged that the Government of Pakistan had already begun to encroach upon some parts of grazing reserve areas of the bordering districts of Assam.⁸¹ The Assamese elite were, therefore, afraid of an attack from Pakistan. They feared that Pakistan and Burma might 'form an axis against India'. If any of these countries attacked India, Assam, they thought, would be the first victim. Thus Jogadish Chandra Medhi, an Assamese intellectual, in one of his articles stated:

If the attack comes from the North or the East alone,

Assam will no doubt be the theatre of warfare but the rest of India will remain connected with her and the Indian Union will be in a position to put her full force in defence. But if the attack comes from Pakistan her position is very delicate, she becomes immediately disconnected, and in that case, except the standing army, that may be kept by the Indian Union in Assam, she cannot expect to get further help either in shape of money or materials. If she is attacked simultaneously from both Pakistan and Burma i.e., if Burma and Pakistan form an axis against India, Assam's problem is terribly serious.⁸²

Moreover, in this connection, another fact may also be reckoned with. It is well known that there had already developed a sense of separatism among the hill people. Even after the creation of Pakistan, taking advantage of this, some foreign agents became active in rousing anti-Indian sentiment among a section of the hill people. In this respect, *The Assam Tribune*, in one of its editorials noted that some officers of Eastern Pakistan had entered in some parts of the hill areas of Assam in the guise of tourists in order to induce the hill people to start a movement for merging hill areas with East Pakistan.⁸³ Under such a situation, the Assamese elite naturally felt the necessity of a powerful India.

Over and above, the traditional upper caste Hindus Assamese elite were essentially conservative. They were afraid of the Communist uprising in Burma and China. They suspected that the Indian Communist Party had been trying to establish contacts with their counterparts in China and Burma.⁸⁴ A section of the Assamese elite, therefore, feared infiltration of the Communists in Assam. They were also worried that with the help of the Chinese and Burmese Communists, the Assamese Communists might seek to overthrow the socio-political system in Assam. Emphasising the gravity of this situation *The Assam Tribune* maintained:

China has gone under Communist domination and the conflict in Burma is continuing. There were even battles near the very borders of this province. On the top of all, there

is an incessant flow of the so-called refugees from Pakistan and their political outlook and allegiance are of doubtful character.⁸⁵

Thus, it is obvious that the emergence of Pakistan created a fear of a new dimension in the minds of the Assamese elite. These fears and anxieties contributed, to a great extent, to the development of centripetal urges among them and strengthened their sense of Indian nationalism. Even then, an under-current of distinctness and separatism remained fairly strong in Assam. Therefore, they exerted a strong regional pressure when the Indian Constitution was being framed.

REFERENCES

1. In this connection E.A. Gait remarked that—"though the process of Hinduization of the non-Aryan tribes went on from early times, the converts were very few and the province remained, therefore, a land of heterogeneous social strains with linguistic divergence." (E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1963, Intro., p. viii).
2. These heterogeneous elements mainly consisted of the tribes and races of both the hills and the plains, the Assamese, the Bengalis both Hindus and Muslims, the Marwaris and other immigrant communities.
3. After independence, most of their demands were conceded with the creation of new States and Union Territories such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The demand for a separate state namely 'Udayachal' for the Plains Tribals is still alive.
4. A section of the hill people preferred 'Hindi' rather than 'Assamese' as the State language. A resolution was adopted demanding Hindi as the State language of Assam in a Khasi Youth meeting held on December 7, 1947. (Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, December 10, 1947).
5. Towards the end of Second World War, when there was a discussion on the question of transfer of power, some British Civil Servants and other interested quarters began to toy with the idea of a 'Crown Colony' consisting of all the contiguous hill areas of Burma and Assam, (See R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem of India*, Part III, 1944, p. 164 and R. Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*. London, 1966, p. 110, cited by Amalendu Guha. *Planters'*

Raj to Swaraj, op. cit., p. 324).

6. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, November 21, 1947. In a press statement T. Aliba Imti Ao, President of the NNC, maintained : "The Naga National Council feels that unity at the cost of self-determination is the other name for slavery. My people would prefer death to surrender" (*The Assam Tribune*, November 24, 1947).
7. *Shillong Times*, May 16, 1947.
8. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, February 9, 1949. A strong anti-Assamese feeling was developed among a section of the Mizos. Even after independence, in a Memorandum submitted to the States Reorganization Commission, the 'United Mizo Freedom Organization' alleged that "the Assamese who happened to be the single majority community in the heterogeneous State try not only to dominate others in all affairs of administration of the state, but also try to impose their language on the non-Assamese. We feel that it is quite unfair to divide the hill people into so many administrative units which are not the same, while the Assamese carry on their imperialistic policy over the non-Assamese." (*Memorandum of the United Mizo Freedom Organization, Lushai Hills, submitted to the Secretary, States Reorganization Commission, New Delhi, on 28th May, 1954*).
9. Reported in the *Shilling Times*, May 16, 1947.
10. *ibid*, December 6, 1949.
11. On October 12, 1962 an organization named 'The Mizo National Front' came into existence with Laldenga and Lianzuala as its first President and General Secretary respectively. Of all the Mizo Organizations, the Mizo National Front is the most militant in its secessionist tendencies. This group demands a sovereign independent State for the Mizos. On October 30, 1965, 'The Mizo National Front' submitted a Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India. The Memorandum said: "The Mizos, from times immemorial lived in complete independence without foreign interference. Their administration was like that of the Greek City States of the past. Their territory or any part thereof had never been conquered or subjugated by their neighbouring States. The Mizos had never been under the Government of India. Therefore, the Mizos demanded the creation of Mizoram, a free sovereign state to govern itself to work for her own destiny and to formulate her own foreign policy".
12. Amalendu Guha : *Planters' Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 325.
13. D. N. Mazumdar: "A Glimpse of the Garo Politics", *North Eastern Affairs* (Shillong) Annual 1973, p. 10.
14. S. K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North East India*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 72.

15. *ibid*, pp. 71-72.
16. In this connection, it may be noted that the hill areas were kept excluded from all Constitutional Reforms until 1937. Under the Act of 1935 they were administered under two categories namely "partially excluded areas" and "excluded areas." The districts of Garo Hills, Khasi-Jayantia Hills and Mikir Hills were of partially excluded areas which could send representatives to the legislature and were placed under Ministers with Governor's discretionary control. On the other hand the Excluded Areas such as Naga Hills, Mizo Hills and North Cachar Hills remained under Governor's direct control.
17. In this connection Amalendu Guha asserts that "the official efforts were successful to the extent of nurturing the seeds of suspicion in the tribal mind against their more developed neighbours in the plains" (see Amalendu Guha *Planters' Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit., p. 324).
18. Participating in the debates of the Constituent Assembly on the provision of "Sixth Schedule", the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, the only representative of hill tribes, articulated this feeling of the hills and said: "When I speak in this House, I speak with a knowledge of the feeling of the hill tribes. The people of the hill areas are afraid of exploitation by the Plains". (CAD, Vol. XI, p.711.)
19. The Report of the Sub-Committee formed by the Constituent Assembly on North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas maintained that "the fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of their superior organization and experience of business, the hill people fear that if suitable provisions are not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, large number of them will settle down and not only occupy land but will also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions." (CAD, Vol VII, p. 109, Appendix 'C' Annexure IV).
20. The civilizing and social welfare work done by the foreign Christian Missionaries amongst the tribal people, though commendable in itself as a highly philanthropic work, had nothing in it, nor could it be expected to have anything, for giving them true ideal nationalism and patriotism in the larger Indian context.
21. *The Assam Tribune*, December 4, 1947.
22. T. Aliba Imti Ao, President of Naga National Council, in a press statement said "If the separatist policy of the British rulers created the background of the present discord, the unsympathetic attitude and the deliberate negligence of the Assam Government and the Governor is responsible for this crisis." (*The Assam Tribune*, November 24, 1947).
23. *The Assam Tribune*, October 28, 1947.
24. *ibid*, December 4, 1947.

25. Sriprakash, "Assam—The Frontier Province", *The Assam Tribune*, January 26, 1950.
26. In this connection, we may refer to the speeches of Mr. Disraeli, a British Parliamentarian who asserted that "Our empire in India was indeed founded upon the old principle of divide et impera (Divide and Rule), but that principle was put into action by us not with any Machiavellian device, but by merely taking advantage of the natural, and if I may use the expression, spontaneous circumstances of the country in which we were acting a part". (*Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. C XLVI 1857).
27. Reminding this fact, Gopinath Bordoloi, a member from Assam in the Constituent Assembly said: "The hill tribes were led to believe that the entire hill areas would be constituted into a province and put under some responsible Governor. You might possibly have read in the papers that the plans were hatched in England in which the Ex-Governor of Assam evidently took part to create a sort of kingdom over there." (*CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 1014).
28. *CAD*, Vol. IV, pp. 663-64.
29. The "Ahom", a tribe of Shans in Northern Burma came into the plains of Assam in 1226 A.D. and established their kingdom comprising in course of time the whole Assam Valley. It is this group which gave to Assam its modern name and had identified themselves with the Assamese. In fact, they were the representatives of the great Tai race of the Mongolians who now inhabit the vast regions of South-East Asia.
30. See *Sibsagar Zila Ahom Sabhar Karyya Bivaran* (Booklet in Assamese) December 2, 1940, p. 14. cited in A.C. Bhuyan and S.P. De (ed), *Political History of Assam*, op. cit., p. 295.
31. A.C. Bhuyan and De (ed), *Political History of Assam*, op. cit. p. 294.
32. See, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, *Gohain Baruah Rachanavali*, (in Assamese) Gauhati, 1971, p. 934.
33. *Presidential Address*: (In Assamese, printed in a booklet form), *All Assam Ahom Sabha*, Golden Jubilee Session, Sibsagar, 12 & 13 February, 1944.
34. *Forward*, Calcutta, April 27, 1935, cited in *Political History of Assam*, op. cit, p. 296.
35. The "All Peoples' Party" was formed with the representatives of Tribal League, Muslim League, Ahom Sabha, Hill Tribes and Teaf Garden communities. See, *Sadou Asom Ahom Sabha Aru Sarba Doll*, (In Assamese, A Booklet Published by Ghana Kanta Gogoi, Secretary, All Assam Ahom Sabha, Dibrugarh, February 1, 1949).
36. *Gohain Baruah Rachanavali*, op. cit., pp. 944-5. It may also be noted that Muhammad Saadulla, leader of the Muslim League, was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the "All Peoples' Party" which was formed at the initiative of the Ahoms.

37. This view was reflected in a speech of Padmanath Gohain Baruah, on the floor of the Assam Legislative Council (See, *ALCP*, Vol. V, April 10, 1913, pp. 67-72.)
38. See Statement of Radha Kanta Handique, one of the then leading personalities of the Ahom community, in *The Assam Tribune*, April 25, 1941.
39. See "All Assam Ahom Association: Memorandum on the Ahoms as a Minority". A Booklet published by S.N. Buragohain, on behalf of the Ahom Minority Rights Sub-Committee, Jorhat, July 2, 1941.
40. *All Assam Ahom Association: Proceedings of the Executive Committee*, (Manuscript and translated from Assamese), Sibsagar, September 29, 1944. A similar sentiment was expressed by Padmeswar Gogoi, a representative of the Ahom Association, in the inaugural session of the *All Assam Tribes and Races Federation* held at Shillong on 21st March, 1945. In his inaugural speech Gogoi asserted: "Geographically Assam is naturally protected and detached from Hindustan proper. Ethnically Assam is a Mongoloid tract which will naturally afford the best opportunity for the growth of a homogeneous and compact society amongst the free indigenous races and tribes of the land. Historically and politically she has a tradition behind, which is unique and glorious in the history of the Far East and bears eloquent testimony to the fact that Assam can never be a digestible part of India now or in future. Therefore, Assam should be separated from India and constituted into a sovereign state." (See, Padmeswar Gogoi "Future Status of Assam" (A Booklet) published by Rameswar Bora, General Secretary, All Assam Ahom Association, Jorhat 1945).
41. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, October 6, 1944. It may be noted that in the late sixties of the current century, a section of the Ahom elite demanded a separate state comprising three Ahom populated districts of Upper Assam. (See, Memorandum demanding a separate Autonomous unit of Upper Assam Districts, submitted to the Home Minister of India, on behalf of the "All Assam Ahom Association", August 2, 1967), and *Memorandum demanding a separate state or a Federating Unit comprising three Upper Assam Districts of Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur, to the Prime Minister and Home Minister, Government of India, on behalf of the Ahom Tai Mongliya Rajya Parishad*, New Delhi, April 17, 1968.
42. The Assam Provincial Communist Party argued: "Can you deny that the caste Hindus, the most advanced community of Assam, have so far more or less neglected the tribal interest? It has been admitted by all that the tribes have been very much backward, but can you deny the fact that neither the Swarajists nor the Jatiya Mahasabha nor Congress upto 1936 had any special tribal interest included in

their platform ? But if the Assamese caste Hindus and the Congressmen claim that they have done their best to help the tribes, then how do they explain that even to-day only about 2 p.c. of the plains tribes are literate, they have only 40 graduates in all, there is not a single High School in the entire Mikir Hills, there are as yet only 11 (eleven) tribals (plains) in Assam Civil Service, there is not a single tribal in Education, Excise, Public Works and Agricultural services. The tribal peasants are even today the poorest and the landless are growing among them than the Assamese Hindus .. It is now significant that while sometimes back they demanded small reforms under British rule, and yesterday they demanded full dominion status under the British Crown, today some of their most influential leaders have started thinking in terms of complete independence, vide Bhimbor Deori's latest statement." (See *Whither Assam ? Drifting to Civil War ? : An Urgent Appeal to All parties and Political Workers of Assam*—published by Assam Provincial Organizing Committee, "Communist Party of India", Gauhati, December 8, 1944.)

43. Nicholas Mansergh, (ed) *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol. VII, 1978, pp. 18-40, cited in *Political History of Assam*. Vol, III, p. 311, op. cit.
44. See, *Demand of the Tribal Communities of Assam: A Memorandum* issued by the Conference of leaders of Tribal communities of Assam, Shillong, July 1946, p. 2.
45. *Asamiya* (editorial), March 23, 1940.
46. These fears and anxieties were reflected even as late as in 1972. In a Memorandum of the 'Plains Tribal Conference' (PTC), it was alleged: "The plains tribals have been systematically and in a planned way uprooted from their own soil, and the step-motherly treatment towards them by the administration dominated by the Assamese speaking people, has reduced them to the status of second class citizens in the state." (See, *Memorandum to Bharatratna Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India*, New Delhi, by the Tribal Council of Assam, October 22, 1972).
47. See Bhimbor Deori's speech in the Assam Legislative Council, *ALCP* Vol, I, February 26, 1940, p. 103.
48. It may be noted that 'Tribal Patriotism' is still a living thing in Assam. On May 20, 1967 the Plains Tribal Council in one of its Memoranda to the President of India demanded the "(i) protection of their land, (ii) check on the exploitation by non-tribals, (iii) conservation of their language, culture and customs, (iv) prevention of political domination by the non-tribals (v) right to grow according to their own genius", etc.
49. *The Assam Tribune*, November 23, 1944.
50. Reported in the *Asamiya*, May 5, 1945.

51. *ibid*, May 19, 1945.
52. Later on it was renamed as "Central Organization of the Assam Tribes and Races."
53. Padmeswar Gogoi, *Future Status of Assam* op, cit.
54. Resolution No. 4, adopted in the first convention of the All Assam Tribes and Races Federation, Shillong, March 21-23, 1945. See, '*Future Status of Assam*' op. cit. (It also appeared in *The Assam Tribune*, March 28, 1945, p. 3.)
55. *Demands of Tribal Communities of Assam* op. cit.
56. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, July 6, 1946, p. 2.
57. Thus the leaders of the tribal Communities complained : "In the Constituent Assembly caste Hindus should have got two seats as their due, but instead have secured four seats. The Tribal Communities who should have got 4 seats in the Constituent Assembly, owing to their helpless position in the legislature, have failed to secure even one seat. The two Tribal men elected to Constituent Assembly from this Province on Congress party ticket were elected with caste Hindu votes and so they can have no right to speak for any of the Tribes in Assam. In fact, their election has been secured with the object of defeating the just rights of this big block of population in the new Constitution". (See, *Demands of the Tribal Communities of Assam*, op. cit).
58. *Demands of Tribal Communities of Assam*, op. cit , p. 2 : the leaders of the Tribes and races of Assam who took active interest in these demands were—Surendranath Buragohain, (Ex-Minister, Government of Assam), Binode Kumar J. Sarwan, MLA, P.M Sarwan, M.A , MLA, Karka Doley Miri, MLA, Mody Marak, MLA, Mavis Dunn, (Ex-Minister, Government of Assam), H. Lyngdoh, General Secretary, Khasi Jaintia Political Association, A.S. Khongohai (Advocate) Convenor and Secretary, Conference of Tribal Communities of Assam, Shillong.
59. *ibid*, p. 4.
60. In the first chapter, we had argued that the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha played an important role in creating a strong sentiment of Assamese sub-nationalism. Here we shall mainly deal with the centrifugal expression of this group.
61. *Memorandum submitted to the British Parliamentary Delegation by the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha* on January 29, 1946, in continuation of the telegram, Gauhati dated January 28, 1946, (Manuscript).
62. See, "Case of Great Assamese People and of their Homeland Assam: Memorandum on behalf of the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha" to the Members, All India Congress Working Committee and All India Congress Committee, New Delhi, dated the 9th June, 1946; The

Jatiya Mahasabha was even planning to organize a strong Assamese volunteer troop named "Atmarakahmii Vahini" to protect the existence of the Assamese (See, Ambikagiri Roychaudhury, *Dekadekeriir Ved*, (in Assamese) 2nd edn., Gauhati, 1958).

63. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, January 4, 1948.
64. *Shillong Times*, August 7, 1947. In a bid to emphasise the distinctness from India and Pakistan, they were even prepared to have a truncated Assam. This is evident from the fact that the Jatiya Mahasabha wanted to leave out a portion of the Goalpara district which constituted the chief link of Assam with the rest of India. In order to achieve this objective the Jatiya Mahasabha went even so far as to suggest that "the southern part of Dhubri subdivision might properly be detached and transferred to East Pakistan." (See, *The Assam Tribune*, July 17, 1947, p. 3.)
65. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, January 3, 1948.
66. The National Anthem—"The Jana Gana Mana..." received strong disapproval in Assam because of the fact that the name of 'Assam' was not put in the body of the Anthem. As a mark of protest, all the Assamese artists boycotted the very inaugural ceremony of the All India Radio Station, Shillong and Gauhati on 1 July, 1948. (Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, 2 July, 1948).
67. See, Jnananath Bora, "Kamrup Aru Bharatbarsha", *Avahan*, 3rd issue, 1936; "Asom desh Bharatbarshar bhitrat thakiba kiya?" "Avahan", 2nd issue, 1938; and "Asom desh aru Congress", *Dainik Batori*, October 24, 1937, etc.
68. *ibid.*
69. Jnananath Bora, "Kamrup Aru Bharatbarsha", *op. cit.*
70. This sentiment of the Assamese intellectuals was communicated to Nehru when he came to Assam in November, 1937, by Nilmoni Phukon and Ambikagiri Roychaudhury. They presented a memorandum to Nehru on behalf of the "Asom Samrakshini Sobha" in which among other things they stated: "... as a means of saving the Assamese race from extinction, a considerable section of the Assamese intelligentsia has even expressed their minds in favour of the secession of Assam from India". (Memorandum presented to Nehru at Rongia on 28 November 1937, File No. p.4 (i)—1937, AICC Files, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Cited by Amalendu Guha, *Planters' Raj to Swaraj*, *op. cit.*, p. 257).
71. G.S. Bhattacharyya, "Pakistan and Assam", *The Assam Tribune*, November 10, 1944.
72. *ibid.*
73. A section of the anti-Congress Assamese elite asked: "Can the Congress Party, which aims at socialism, assure economic freedom to the poor and humble labouring people of Assam? It can be

observed that from the end of the British rule all the sources of income derived from trade and commerce and from scientific and improved methods of cultivation are lying in the hands of non-Assamese people. There is no doubt that the Assamese people have lost this confidence in the leaders of the Congress Party of Assam. Though it has taken the name—'Assam Congress Committee', yet it is a committee of the immigrants like Hindustanis and Bengalis. Without the patronage of these people Assam Congress cannot survive even for a year." (Translated from Assamese); See, *Asome Bichare Ki?* (In Assamese), a booklet published by Jatindranath Deori, on behalf of the Avijan Prachar Sangha, Dibrugarh, August 25, 1947.

74. Sriprakasa, "Assam: The Frontier Province", *The Assam Tribune*, January 26, 1949.
75. See for example, Kedarnath Goswami, "Assam's Rubber-Stamp Leadership", *The Assam Tribune*, January 8, 1948. Goswami also alleged that "No wonder that with this mentality of utter dependence and serenity Assam has failed to take her rightful place in All India Affairs. Her Congress administrators have failed to achieve anything praiseworthy even within the precinct of the province." (*ibid*).
76. Reported in *The Assam Tribune*, July 20, 1947.
77. Reported in the *Shillong Times*, May 30, 1947.
78. Obviously, Assam could not achieve her 'independence' without the independence for the rest of India.
79. *The Assam Tribune*, December 26, 1947.
80. *Dainik Asamiiya*, October 15, 1948.
81. *ibid*.
82. J.C. Medhi, "The Defence of Assam", *The Assam Tribune*, November 30, 1947.
83. *The Assam Tribune*, December 26, 1947.
84. Muhammad Saadulla, a member from Assam in the Constituent Assembly, highlighted this situation thus: "Assam's position is that of a sentinel on the east and north-east boundaries of the continent of India where dark and menacing clouds of Communism are rising." (*CAD*, Vol. XI, pp. 733-34.).
85. *The Assam Tribune*, July 21, 1949.

Federalism-I: Division of Powers

In the last chapter we argued that in the event of Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, a section of the Assamese elite felt that Assam should become a sovereign State. However, after the partition this feeling of the Assamese elite underwent a change and Assam became a part of India. Despite this fact, the feeling of 'provincial patriotism' remained a continuous factor even among the Congressmen, although their prior loyalty was towards the Indian National Congress. This was reflected in their attitude to the federal aspect of the new Constitution which was then being envisaged. It is generally assumed that there was near unanimity in the country as a whole and in the Constituent Assembly, for a strong and a highly centralized federal system. While this may be true to some extent, this may not have been the case in all the regions of the country. We propose to discuss here the attitude of the Assamese elite on this question. It would be an interesting point to examine whether and, if so, under what circumstances and regarding which provisions relating to federal structure of the proposed Constitution, the Assamese elite put forward pleas for changes. In this chapter we shall deal mainly with the attitude of the Assamese elite towards the proposals regarding the division of legislative and executive powers between the centre and the states.

II

When India achieved freedom, it was a foregone conclusion that she would be a federal state. The only question that remained unsettled was whether India would have a strong or a

weak federation.¹ And this question boils down to the division of powers between the centre and the federating units. Even at the risk of repetition it may be mentioned that prior to the partition, the trend of opinion was towards a larger measure of autonomy to the provinces. Thus according to the Cripps and the Cabinet Mission proposals, all the subjects, other than foreign affairs, defence and communication were to be vested in the provinces. Even the residuary powers were to belong to the provinces. This trend was essentially a concession to Muslim susceptibilities. The centrifugal forces were stronger because of the enormous power of the Muslim communalism. After the partition, however, the position from this point of view was radically transformed; there was now no really strong organized centrifugal force in India. But nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the strong urges for regional autonomy existed, albeit in an unorganized and inarticulate form in the minds of Assamese elite.

When the question of 'Division of Powers' between the centre and states came up for consideration in the Constituent Assembly, the members from Assam demanded that the centre should not take away all the more important powers from the provinces which might weaken them. Indeed, they wanted to limit the powers of the centre. They asserted that if too much power was vested with the centre, the provinces might 'try to break away' from the centre. Thus in an interesting speech Kuladhar Chaliha argued:

"If you suspect the provinces and take greater powers for the centre it will only lead to undesirable results. You are doing something which will have a disintegrating effect and will accentuate differences instead of solving them. If you take too much powers for the centre the provinces will try to break away from you."²

It is, therefore, evident that the Assamese elite wanted to make the provinces stronger by vesting more powers in them. Indeed, they wished that the Constitution should leave to the provinces a larger sphere of jurisdiction in which they (provinces) are legally free to act independently of the central

control. In fact, they believed that this was essential as a measure of erecting a strong defence of the federation against disruptive forces. It was felt that if the component units were not satisfied with the quantum of autonomy, they might think in terms of breaking away from the centre. Hence, the Assamese elite threw their weight behind a concept of federation in which the centre's powers would be limited, precisely defined and the largest possible measure of autonomy accorded to the units.

The Assamese elite had expressed a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the proposed scheme of 'Division of Subjects' into three lists: Central, Concurrent and State. *The Assam Tribune* characterised the scheme as 'unbalanced distribution of powers'.³ What the Assamese elite wanted was that the Central list should not be so large as to reduce the provinces to the position of municipal or local bodies.⁴ It has to be borne in mind that behind these pleas of the Assamese elite there had always been an under-current of thinking along particularistic lines. In effect, the Assamese elite wanted certain changes in the scheme of distribution of subjects in the three lists in order to safeguard what they believed to be 'legitimate Assamese interest'. Some of the special Assamese interests about which the Assamese elite felt strongly were—(i) protection of Assamese people from the socio-political and economic dominance of the non-Assamese outsiders; (ii) preservation of distinct Assamese identity; and (iii) prevention from what they called the 'economic exploitation' and 'step-motherly treatment' of the Centre. This emerges very clearly from the speeches of the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly. For example, in a speech Omeo Kumar Das made a case for certain changes in the distribution of subjects:

"I must bring to the notice of this House a fact in which my province is interested. In the List of Subjects enumerated in the Federal List of subjects, I find 'Migration' and 'Naturalization'. To my mind it appears these two subjects should be put in the Concurrent List or language so altered as to permit the province to give scope of action in these two subjects."⁵

When a member clearly wants the State to have a say on subjects such as 'naturalization' and 'migration', he betrays anxiety about the influx of outsiders to the province. During that period the mass migration from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into Assam had begun to alter the demographic complexion of the province.⁶ According to the Census Report of 1951, out of total refugee influx of 274, 455 into Assam after partition as many as 272, 075 came from East Pakistan.⁷ In view of this fact, the Assamese elite wanted that the state should have a 'scope of action' in subjects like 'Migration' and 'Naturalization'. The ostensible reason for this was, as Das put it :

"If Assam which is the homeland of Assamese people cannot be protected, I think I have no justification to come to this House. Assamese people have a culture distinct from the people of other provinces. Assamese people have a language which is a separate language and which though Sanskrit in origin has got Tibetan and Burmese influence and *we must protect the Assamese people.*"⁸

Thus, it is evident that the Assamese elite wanted certain constitutional safeguards for protecting themselves from the dominance of outsiders. While emphasising the need for protection of Assamese language and culture, they particularly apprehended that these would be swamped by the Bengali.⁹ Since the British had, *inter alia*, given an official status to the Bengali language in Assam for a considerable period (1873-1937) and also since the Bengalis constituted a sizable section of population in the province, there was some justification for this fear.

The Draft Constitution placed the subject 'Economic and Social Planning' in the Concurrent List. But the anxiety of the Assamese elite was that if the subject 'Economic and Social Planning' was put in the Concurrent List, the State would not be able to take the final decision in matters of planning. The Assamese elite, therefore, were afraid of what they called the possible 'encroachments' of the Centre and wanted that the subjects relating to 'Economic and Social Planning' should be

included in the State List. This anxiety was reflected in a speech of Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, when he asserted that:

“Whenever there is any conflict between Lists II and III, the legislation which is proposed by the Centre will prevail. In that case by admitting this entry, are you not exposing the State to an interference by legislation passed by the Centre in the ordinary normal working of the state in the matters of social and economic planning? All the subjects which have been mentioned in List II in one way or the other lead to economic planning and the result of having economic planning in List II and to have another entry there in order to give jurisdiction to the Centre to interfere with such economic planning is, I think, most unwise.”¹⁰

The provincial patriotism among the Assamese elite was mainly accentuated by the sense of Assam's economic backwardness. There were causes for persistent anxiety with regard to regional economic imbalance in India. What, however, could not be properly understood by the Assamese elite was that this was a natural corollary of the capitalist way of economic development which India, being a colonial and semi-feudal country, had to pursue.¹¹ Ignoring this reality they went on complaining that Assam did not receive fair treatment from the Centre in financial allocation. Upto the close of nineteenth century, the Assamese elite were not aware of economic development taking place in a few other areas of the country. Once they came in touch more intimately with the rest of the country as a result of political communication, administrative unity and the national movement, they became increasingly conscious of the relative backwardness of Assam, even within an underdeveloped country such as India. One common characteristic of the dominant elite of a semi-feudal society in such circumstances is to blame others for their own predicament

Thus since the inauguration of the provincial autonomy in 1937, it became a normal feature in Assam to criticise the financial policy of the Central Government towards Assam, both outside and inside the floor of the Legislative Assembly.¹²

The main plea of the Assamese elite was that the major sources of revenue of the province such as tea and oil had been allocated to the Central Government leaving very few elastic sources of revenue for the province.¹³ And the province was given very little by way of grant or loan to compensate for the loss of her major sources of revenue. Such grants were felt inadequate to meet the expenditure on the urgent developmental activities of the province. The Assamese elite thought that Assam could not establish a University, a High Court, an Engineering College, a Veterinary College and other educational institutions of her own due to insufficiency of funds.¹⁴ Thus *The Assam Tribune* maintained : "Assam's financial position became so precarious that she could not afford any institution or scheme which could bring about cultural and economic advancement of the province."¹⁵ For this reason, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury demanded that "the economic and social planning of a province or State must be left entirely to the state Legislature itself".¹⁶ Indeed, the Assamese elite not only wanted larger grants or loans from the Centre but also some amount of control over the more important items of their resources and of revenues, enabling them to undertake some plans for the socio-economic development of the province.

The question of residuary powers was the bone of contention in the field of Indian politics since the operation of the Act of 1935 which for the first time provided for a federal system of government in India. This issue was important, because the vesting of residuary power to some extent, determines the character of a federation. The protagonists of provincial autonomy were demanding that residuary powers should be vested in the provinces while those who favoured a strong centre were of the view that these powers should be vested in the centre. Prior to 1947, the Congress on principle had conceded that the residuary powers should be vested in the provinces. This was intended to be a conciliatory gesture to regional sentiment but, more particularly, to Muslim sentiment. This position, however, underwent a change due to the partition of the country. The Congress leadership now wanted that the residuary powers should be vested in the centre. But it seems that the Assamese elite were not happy

to weaken the provinces by vesting the centre with residuary powers. This new form of 'Paramountcy' of the centre however, aroused considerable resentment among the Assamese elite. This sentiment was reflected in one of the editorials of *The Assam Tribune* which maintained that:

The present tendency on the part of the Constituent Assembly is to rob the provinces of autonomy as far as can be done. The first resolution of the Constituent Assembly defined the status of the federating units and wanted to leave the residuary powers with them. It is true that this resolution was adopted as a concession to Muslim League demand and in the changed political circumstances residuary powers are to be left to the centre so that we may have a strong Union Government. But it should be borne in mind that India is going to have a federation and not a unitary type of government. It cannot be denied that India presents very few characteristics of homogeneity and cannot therefore, be integrated simply by a stroke of pen or show of hands of the majority.¹⁷

The strong desire of the Assamese elite for a relatively powerful provincial government was brushed aside by the central leadership; they vested the residuary power in the centre. It seems that while the Assamese elite did not want a powerless centre, at the same time, they were critical of the policy of strengthening the centre to a point that the units became too weak. Although, *in retrospect*, it seems that this view was erroneous, there was a strong feeling at that time that the centre was being made very strong and the units very weak. But it is interesting to note that while criticising over centralization, the Assamese elite were also at pains to show that they did not want a weak centre. For instance, *The Assam Tribune* pleaded that we must not unnecessarily deprive the units of powers to which they are legitimately entitled and which can be left to them *without jeopardising the safety of the Union*".¹⁸ Such statements were, of course, made very often by the Assamese elite. Their main plea was that the centre should not be made stronger 'at the cost of the provinces.' Thus Omeo Kumar Das argued:

"I cannot understand the logic, why after taking up this position of vesting the centre with residuary powers, the members of this House have taken up a different attitude towards the states. I feel to-day that in our anxiety to strengthen the Centre we may be adopting the policy of strengthening the Centre at the cost of the provinces. But we should not weaken the provinces."¹⁹

The obvious implication of such speeches of the representatives of the Assamese elite was that they did not see any contradiction between these two basic positions i.e., strong centre and strong province. How can we have at the same time both a strong centre and strong states? After all, power is a problem of relative differential. It is, therefore, surprising that the Assamese elite demanded a strong provincial government but did not clearly advocate a weak centre. In any case, under the proposed scheme of distribution of subjects in the three Lists, the centre, they thought, would be sufficiently strong to control the provinces. And they believed that the enormous powers of the centre would lead to the "annihilation" of the provincial autonomy.

The protestations of the Assamese leaders, however, failed to produce any serious ripples in the Constituent Assembly and a quasi-federal constitutional arrangement was finalized. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, with a sense of despair, expressed the resentment of the Assamese elite as follows:

"We have nearly come to the end of these Lists I, II and III, and what do we find ? What we find is that the position of the States is no longer States or provinces but they have been reduced to the position of Municipal and other local bodies. All the powers have been taken away either in the List I or List III. No power is left to the provinces."²⁰

Moreover, the Assamese elite were critical of the provisions of the Draft Constitution relating to the legislative competence of the Union Parliament. The Draft Constitution strengthened the Union Parliament with overriding legislative powers in respect of the subjects enumerated in the Concurrent list in

addition to the central list of subjects. And the Union power was to prevail in the event of a conflict between the Union and the State Laws. Even the legislative jurisdiction of Indian Parliament sometimes could also be extended to matters enumerated in the State List. Thus, with regard to matters in the State List, if the Council of States passed a resolution supported by two-thirds of the members present and voting that the matter had acquired national importance, the Parliament could pass laws on that matter.²¹ But the Assamese elite desired that the Union Parliament should not be empowered to interfere in the legislative sphere of the state. They demanded the complete legislative competence of the provincial legislature in order to frame laws within its jurisdiction without any interference from the Central Legislature. While discussing these provisions of the proposed Constitution the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy maintained.

“The amendment of any law relating to a province should be left to the provinces instead of to the Union. The power to amend the provincial law must lie in an autonomous province. We do not want that any provincial power should be limited by any Fundamental Rights or any of its powers to be taken by the Union of India.”²²

It is, therefore, evident that the leaders of Assam did not want the Union Parliament to extend its jurisdiction to the sphere of State Legislature. In other words, they wanted to limit the powers of the Central Legislature. Similarly, Article 3 of the Draft Constitution which empowered the Parliament to determine the boundary of a state was objected to by the Assamese elite. For example, while protesting against this Article Rohini Kumar Chaudhury argued:

“It gives to the Central Legislature the power to alter the name of a State, to change, increase or diminish the boundaries of a state without any previous consent of the state. What I say is, if at this stage we give the idea to the states that it will be open to the majority of the Central Legislature at any moment they think fit to take one part

of a state and tag it on to another province, or to saddle it with an unprofitable part of a province, that will be most unwise thing. After all you must not ask your host to give up his bed for you, merely because he has allowed you shelter".²³

It is apparent that the past experiences of the Assamese leaders might have been responsible for the development of this attitude among them. While in 1946 the Grouping Scheme (according to the Cabinet Mission Plan) was about to be imposed on Assam, they had to fight tooth and nail against such an imposition.²⁴ The proposed Article 3 aroused a fear among the Assamese elite that if the Parliament was made supreme in this respect, Assam might be tagged on to other states or she might be truncated into pieces according to the wishes of the Central Government. They believed that the hill areas of Assam which became a part of Assam administration as late as during the British rule, might be taken out of Assam in course of time. After all, demands such as separate state for Nagaland and local autonomy for other tribal communities had already begun to gain momentum when the Constitution was being framed.²⁵ But as already explained in the first chapter, the Assamese elite sought to establish a greater Assam integrating all the heterogeneous elements of the region into a harmonious blending and wanted to develop a composite Assamese culture on the ashes of the different sub-cultures of the region. The Assamese elite, therefore, strongly criticised Article 3 of the Draft Constitution which empowered the Union Parliament to increase, diminish or alter the boundaries of the state.

In this connection it may also be noted that the Assamese elite were very much concerned about the question of Assamese Bengali tension which we have already discussed in the first chapter. They were apprehensive of the fact that as there was a continuous increase of Bengali population in the province, the areas with a Bengali-speaking majority might, in due course, be tagged on to West Bengal, or alternatively some parts of Bengal might be tagged on to Assam leading to her demographic imbalance. By and large, they felt that it involved the question of the existence of a distinct Assamese identity. Above all, the

Assamese elite feared that the Parliament which would have dominant representation from bigger provinces might ignore the views and sentiments of the small provinces like Assam.

III

The governor of a state in India is the head of state administration. The issue that confronted the constitution-makers was whether the governor was to be responsible to the people of the state or was to be an agent of the central government or was he, as ultimately transpired, to have a dual role. In this regard, two issues viz., (i) the method of choosing the Governor, and (ii) nature of relationship between the chief minister and the governor became very important because, these were to be a factor in determining the nature of our federation. Inevitably, therefore, it was one of the most important questions engaging the attention of the framers of the Constitution.

The Constituent Assembly, which began its proceedings in 1946 with the idea of setting up a minimal federation with a weak centre, suddenly went to the other extreme and tried to establish a maximal federation with a very strong centre. As mentioned earlier, this was mainly due to the partition.²⁶ And as such the provisions of the Constitution with regard to the office of the governor bear the stamp of this changed atmosphere in which the Constitution was framed. In July 1947, the Constituent Assembly approved a report on the principle of a model provincial Constitution, framed by the Provincial Constitution Committee, which provided for a governor, who was to be elected directly by the people. But after the partition, the Special Committee meeting on April 10 and 11, 1948, came to the conclusion that an elected Governor would be 'completely useless' and it recommended that the governor should be directly appointed by the President.²⁷ The Special Committee thought that the presence of two persons elected to the positions of the governor and the chief minister might lead to a series of embarrassing situation and serious conflicts.

In any case, Article 131 of the Draft Constitution which related to the method of choosing governors came up for discussion in the Constituent Assembly on May 30, 1949, when Brajeswar Prasad²⁸ moved an amendment proposing that the

governor should be appointed by the President 'by warrant under his hand and seal'.²⁹ This view, Brajeswar Prasad admitted, ran counter to the accepted principle of provincial autonomy, federalism and democracy.³⁰ The proposed amendment, however, evoked a considerable volume of discussion until it was adopted finally.

Naturally the House was divided into two groups on this particular issue. The protagonists of strong Central Government, such as Brajeswar Prasad and Dr. P.S. Desmukh advocated for the nomination of the governor by the President. Brajeswar Prasad had even wanted to establish a unitary system of government.³¹ They desired to make the governor more or less an 'agent of the centre'.³² On the contrary, the protagonists of provincial autonomy, particularly the members from Assam and Orissa, objected to the nomination of the governor by the central authority. In fact, the Assamese elite demanded the retention of the earlier proposal (adopted by the constituent Assembly in July, 1947) to elect the governor by means of universal adult franchise. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, for example, in a rather forceful speech, objected to the nomination of the governor by the President and asked:

"Are you going to give powers to the President to select governors in that manner so that he may, contrary to the interest of the province, select a man who will look down upon the interest of the province and consider the question of the whole of India? Do you want that you should have a man there who will closely watch the working of the provincial ministry, so that they may not at any time go against Centre?"³³

It is, therefore, evident that the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly expressed their disapproval of the principle of appointed governors and considered it a negation of the principle of provincial autonomy. It was argued that a governor nominated by the President from a different province might not have any knowledge of the province to which he was appointed. In a province like Assam, having enormous special problems (such as the conflict between the Assamese and

the non-Assamese, the Tribals and the non-tribals, the Hills and the Plains etc.) the Assamese elite felt, a Governor appointed from outside might not possess adequate knowledge of these problems for their effective solution.³⁴ As such, they thought that it would not be possible for a nominated non-Assamese Governor to serve the interests of the people of the province. Referring to the pledge that the Governor would have to take while assuming office, Chaudhury maintained that the Governor would say that he would "devote" himself "to the service and well-being of the people."³⁵ Being an outsider, the Governor, he thought, would not, through no fault of his, be able to "act in the best interests of the people of that province of whom he knows absolutely nothing".³⁶

It seems that these arguments were not without justification; but in reality the Assamese elite concerned more about the dominance of the centre over the provincial government. In other words, they feared that the governor appointed by the central authority would be used for the interests of the dominant group at the centre rather than the provinces. The Assamese elite, therefore, wanted a governor chosen by the people of their own province by means of universal adult suffrage. And they characterised the principle of appointment by the President as a "betrayal of democracy". For instance, Muhammad Saadulla asserted that the very idea of a nominated governor was inconsistent with the principle of democracy. He argued :

"We want that India should be a secular democracy, a republic engendering the idea of the citizens' right to have a say in the administration of the country. The elective principle gives that right to the citizens to have a say in the appointment of even the ruler of his province."³⁷

The point about democracy was, however, added for the purpose of emphasis; it was more of an emphasis in the interest of Assam. In fact, the Assamese elite desired to have a Governor from among their own people. Even the *Dainik Asamiya*, a language daily, in one of its editorials publicly demanded an "Assamese Governor."³⁸ In demanding an

elected Governor, the Assamese leaders were, however, concerned about the functioning of the Indian political system at that time and they resented the fact that their interests were being neglected under the existing system. They resented the fact that while people from outside were appointed to various positions in Assam, no Assamese found themselves in an important position in other states. In a pithy and ironical speech Rohini Kumar Chaudhury asked:

“Is there any able man in Assam? If there was any able man, he would have found a place either in the ministry or in any governorship of a province. If there was any able man in the province of Assam, he might have found his way to a place outside India, either in an Embassy or in some such post. There are eminent judges in India and those judges have decided that there is not a single person in Assam who is able either to act as a governor or be appointed in the ministry or in an embassy.”³⁹

Thus, very often the Assamese elite complained that Assam had no representation in the central ministry or in senior ambassadorial positions. That is why they thought that if the governor was elected by the province itself, in that case at least that post would go to them. In fact, it may also be assumed that some of them might have aspired to be the future governors of Assam. It seems that the Assamese elite were interested in fringe benefits and not so much concerned about the core issues dealing with the welfare of the masses. It was wrong to believe that the basic problem of the Assamese masses could be solved with the appointment of a few members of Assamese middle class in the important positions of central government or elsewhere.

However, in order to achieve their objectives, the Assamese leaders not only pleaded emotionally for an elected governor but also put forward certain logical arguments. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury with his forceful speeches argued that “a Governor who is nominated by the centre can afford to be unpopular in the provinces where he is acting as the governor.”⁴⁰ As a result, he maintained that “there is bound to be friction”.⁴¹ Further

he asserted that while "in a particular province where the premier is all very powerful, he might be able to get things done in his own way but it may not be so in other provinces".⁴² With a similar vein, Muhammad Saadulla, visualised the conflict between a popular ministry and centrally appointed governor as follows:

"How do we assume that the cabinet in a province will be of the same political party as the governor who is appointed to that province? Then the conditions will be worse confounded. The governor under instructions from the centre will try to run the administration in a certain way, while the cabinet of a different political party would try to run it in their own way."⁴³

Thus the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly persistently argued that in order to avoid tension between the state chief minister and the governor, the latter should be elected by the provinces themselves. While arguing against the principle of appointment of the governor by the President, the Assamese elite felt that a governor appointed by the President would generally be a representative of the party in power at the centre. Since the President, who was supposed to appoint the governor was supposed to act on the advice of his ministry, it was legitimate to assume that the governor would seek to protect the interest of the majority party in Parliament. In other words, the governor would be guided by party leanings. In view of this, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury persistently visualised the conflict between the centre and the states. He argued:

"Can you expect that the governor who is selected by the Congress Party will act in harmony with the ministry of the province, the premier of which belongs to another party? Will there not be more occasions for frictions? Then how can you assume that for all time to come the Congress Party, or a particular party shall remain in power not only at the centre but also in the different provinces?"⁴⁴

From all these speeches of the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly it seems obvious that they did not realise that there could be greater conflict between an elected governor and an elected ministry. In fact, they failed to understand that a popularly elected governor was bound to feel that he was a better representative of the people than his ministers. Besides, the Assamese leaders failed to see that under a system of election also, the chief minister and the governor might come from different political parties. It is, therefore, curious that ignoring this aspect of the problem, they expressed a sense of anxiety lest the centre might be tempted to use the governor as its 'agent' against the states. Of course, it is true that the conflict could arise in either of the two cases. The framers of the constitution perhaps thought that the system of nomination would minimise the conflict between the state chief minister and the governor.

After the battle for an elected governor was lost, members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly under no circumstances wanted that a governor appointed by the central government should occupy a key position in the state administration. They intended to give an upper hand to the chief minister over the state administration. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury who was vocal on this particular issue vehemently objected to Article 143 of the Draft Constitution which provided that the governor would have to act in two capacities viz. (i) on the advice of the ministers and (ii) in the exercise of his discretion. Citing his own past experience, he argued against the giving of discretionary powers to the governor as follows:

"I know to my cost and to the cost of my province what acting by the governor in the exercise of his discretion means. It was in the year 1942 that a governor acting in his discretion selected his ministry from a minority party and that minority was ultimately converted into a majority."⁴⁵

The Assamese members in the Constituent Assembly were afraid, if in spite of such experiences, the governor appointed

by the centre is given to act in his discretion, he might misuse his power in the interest of the party in power at the Centre. And the discretionary powers of the governor would make him more powerful than the premiers of the states. Moreover, Chaudhury asserted that there was a contradiction between those two categories of governor's powers and he maintained:

Will the ministry be competent to advise the governor in matters where he can exercise his discretion? There may be cases where the ministers are competent to give advice to the Governor but the Governor does not accept their advice and does something which is unpopular.⁴⁶

Thus, the Assamese elite believed that in a dispute between the ministers and the governor about the competence of the former to advise the governor, the governor's voice would prevail. Chaudhury, therefore, pleaded that "if a governor instead of acting on the advice of his ministers, acts in a different way" the ministers should have the right to prosecute him in a court of law and "to say before a court what advice they gave to the governor."⁴⁷ At any rate, the Assamese leaders were anxious to limit the powers of the governor and wanted that the governor should function in accordance with the advice of the ministers.

Above all, the Assamese representatives in the Constituent Assembly wanted certain changes in Article 147 of the Draft Constitution which had spelt out the relationship between the governor and the chief minister of the state. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury thus criticised clause (I) of Article 147, according to which it was made obligatory on the part of the chief minister to communicate to the governor all decisions of the 'Council of Ministers' relating to the administration of the affairs of the state and proposals for legislation. He maintained that "all information *should not be* communicated to the governor except those relating to the administration of the state which affect the exercise of the right, power and discretion of the governor."⁴⁸ Chaudhury asserted that the "governor has *absolutely nothing to do* with all other things."⁴⁹ Similarly, opposing Clause (II) of the same Article which dealt with

the right of the governor to ask for information he argued:

“What is the business of the governor to call for any information? What can he do after getting the information? The governor has no business to poke his nose into the affairs of the state which are entirely the consideration of the ministry.”⁵⁰

It is, therefore, obvious that the Assamese leaders did not want that the governors appointed by the centre should interfere in the state administration. And they were anxious to make the chief minister more powerful in the sphere of administration of the state. By and large, they advocated for a decentralized federation and therefore wanted to limit the powers of the governor. Thus Rohini Kumar Chaudhury proposed an amendment of the Draft Article 147(II) as follows:

“The governor may call for any information relating to the administration of the affairs of the state and such information shall be furnished to him if in the opinion of the chief minister such information is necessary for a proper exercise of the duties of the Governor.”⁵¹

This amendment was however rejected. But the anxiety expressed in these speeches of the Assamese leaders shows that they had a suspicion that the centre might use its ‘agent’, the governor, for its own interest jeopardising the interest of the province. In retrospect, it can be said that their fears and anxieties were not entirely without foundation.

At this stage, it might perhaps be interesting to mention that the question of an appointed governor was not even raised by the Assamese elite when the model of provincial Constitution was discussed in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1947. One obvious reason for this was that the original draft had itself provided for the governor to be elected through a system of universal adult franchise. But as mentioned earlier, due to the changed situation, mainly caused by the partition, the Constituent Assembly had to give up the

idea of a federation of autonomous provinces and instead chose to make India "a Union of States." Consequently, it decided to create a strong centre which radically altered the provisions with regard to the Governor.⁵² As this change took place all of a sudden, the Assam Legislative Assembly and the leaders of the Assamese Press could not protest against the principle of appointed governor immediately.⁵³ In any case, from the discussions of the Model Provincial Constitution in Assam Legislative Assembly in 1947, it appears that the acceptance of the principle of *elected* governor was unanimous⁵⁴ (i.e., including the Congress members).

From the above discussion, it clearly emerges that an elected governor with full knowledge of local condition, the Assamese elite believed, would only be able to safeguard the interest of Assam. But if a governor was to be nominated by the central authority, they warned, the centre would have greater control over the states which might affect the working of responsible ministries there. And if a particular political party did not remain in power both in the centre and in the states, they assumed, the prime minister at the centre might have his/her "own axes to grind." By and large, they apprehended that the governor appointed by the centre would be used for the interest of the dominant group at the centre ignoring the interest of the small states like Assam. It, therefore, seems that the Assamese elite tried to synthesize the American system of a directly elected governor with the British system of cabinet government. In any case, their plea for an elected governor clearly indicates that they advocated for a decentralized federation. In fact, they wanted such a federal arrangement in which the provinces could remain free from the control of the centre. In other words, they pleaded for a strong provincial government and a weaker central authority. Thus it is evident that the members, who represented Assam in the Constituent Assembly, expressed strong particularistic and regional sentiment when the Constitution was being framed.

IV

Although the Assamese elite did not go so far as to demand

a dual system of judiciary on the American model, they felt the need for an independent judiciary. As is well known, an independent judiciary, free from the pressure of the central executive and legislature, is essential for a federal system. Perhaps for this reason, the Assamese elite were interested in the independence of the judiciary. Of course, members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly did not much react on this issue. But the issue nevertheless, attracted the Assamese Press. A section of the Assamese elite felt that as most of the provisions of the Draft Constitution, relating to the Legislative and executive spheres, were heavily weighed against the provinces, there remained only the judiciary to protect their interest from the control of a domineering centre. In view of this, what they wanted was that the judiciary should be free from the control of the Parliament so that the former might safeguard the rights of the state. Thus, *The Assam Tribune* maintained:

An independent judiciary is the safety valve in our Constitution. We can under no circumstances allow its functions to be allotted to the Executive. Another necessity which the fathers of our Constitution must not lose sight of, is that our judges must be independent of political influence and political control.⁵⁵

It, therefore, seems that a section of the Assamese elite emphasised the need for judicial supremacy in India. In fact, it may be assumed that the main reason for their desire to have an independent judiciary was to protect the states from possible 'encroachments' of the Parliament which might have an adverse effect on the interests and rights of the different units of the proposed federation. There had been a growing apprehension among the Assamese elite that certain big provinces might "try to encroach upon the jurisdiction of other provinces through the help of the centre."⁵⁶ The Assamese elite were also apprehensive about some of the fundamental rights, such as the right of a citizen to settle at any place and to pursue a profession, business or trade anywhere in India. *The Assam Tribune*, therefore, demanded that "the Fundamental Rights

should not be made a pretext to rob the federating units of some of their powers."⁵⁷ It is remarkable that while pressing all these claims the Assamese elite were concerned more about the interests of Assam. Thus, *The Assam Tribune* maintained that "a province like Assam which has hardly a voice at the centre even to-day, should specially take stock of the situation."⁵⁸

V

From the above discussion it seems obvious that there had been an anxiety in the minds of the Assamese elite that in a federation with strong centre, the big units of the federation would be at an advantageous position. They believed that under the proposed Constitution the Union Parliament was made sufficiently strong in which there would be domination of representatives from the bigger units of the federation. And as a result, the interest of small provinces like Assam, they felt, might not be well protected. *The Assam Tribune* clearly expressed this apprehension in one of its editorials:

In a federation in which centre is unduly strong it is the small provinces like Assam and Orissa, which have to suffer. Their representation in the Central Legislature is small and therefore, they can hardly influence the cause of central policy.⁵⁹

This fear, however, was not without reason. Right upto 1949-50, the Assamese leaders had not been able to make any impact on the central government. They felt that the interests of Assam would go by default due to the lack of Assamese representation in the central government. This lack of representation, they thought, was reflective of the negligence of the national leaders towards Assam. *The Assam Tribune* articulated this feeling as follows:

The huge central establishment at Delhi is conspicuous by the absence of Assamese personnel. The central political field is practically closed to our politicians and nobody wants to think of an Assamese in the Central Cabinet. Very often unpopular governmental actions or appointments in this province transpire to have been made at the

behest of central authorities who are too far away to be influenced by the public opinion here. Therefore, it is only just and inevitable that the people of this province should grow nervous at the present tendency to sacrifice all centrifugal consideration to build up a strong centre.⁶⁰

It is, therefore, evident that one of the reasons for the anxiety among the Assamese elite regarding a strong central government was that in a strong centre the voice of the big provinces would always count more and the interest of the smaller provinces might be ignored. For this reason, they wanted to limit the powers of the central Legislature. This is, however, not to suggest that the Assamese elite completely ignored the necessity of a strong central authority. What they generally pleaded was that the centre should not be made strong "at the cost of the provinces." In fact, they advocated for what they called an "equitable" and "balanced" distribution of powers between the centre and the states in order to provide what *The Assam Tribune* characterised as "Stable equilibrium between the centrifugal and centripetal forces."⁵¹ By and large, they wanted a "proper co-ordination and not unbalanced distribution of powers"⁶² between the Centre and the States. This sentiment was clearly expressed by the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy in one of his speeches:

While I fully appreciate the attitude expressed by Dr Ambedkar and others as regards the strengthening of the centre, I have to express that my views are very strong against the unbalanced strengthening of the centre at the cost of causing weakness to the component parts thereof. It will be like the picture of an unbalanced man with a very big head but with bony lean limbs. Such a head in that very condition will not be able to stand.⁶³

It, therefore, seems that the Assamese elite did not completely ignore the need for a strong central government. They held the view that the central authority must be sufficiently strong to hold the subordinate units together, but just that strong and no more. At the same time, however, they wanted that these units must also be strong and have a large functional

areas of jurisdiction capable of asserting themselves in the pursuit of their exclusive sphere. By and large, they wanted a moderately powerful centre in which provincial governments could function according to their own genius. For this reason, they strongly urged that the creation of such a centre should not involve an undue or excessive sacrifice of local autonomy. In other words, the main plea of the Assamese elite was that while they admitted the need for a strong centre, this should not be taken to mean the "annihilation of the federal principle." Instead of going in a round about manner, this sense of provincial loyalty was justified by *The Assam Tribune* in a clear and succinct manner: "The very principle of a federation" it argued, "is dependent on provincial patriotism and it will be foolish to ignore such a reality."⁶⁴ What they really desired was that the provinces should voluntarily surrender some parts of their powers to the centre which were of national importance, such as defence, foreign affairs, communications etc., but in return, they did not want any control or interference in the provincial affairs by the centre. Thus it appears that the Assamese elite seem to ignore the fact that the strength of a federation depends upon the capacity of the central government to internalise the tensions of the society and to bring about a fair balance between the centripetal and centrifugal forces through their harmonious blending. But the Assamese elite believed that the strength of the centre could be ensured by an "equitable distribution of powers" between the centre and the States. Therefore, they repeatedly pleaded that for the strength of the centre, it was necessary to endow the states with adequate powers in large areas of action.

References

1. The nature of a federation very much depends upon the relative strength of two types of forces—Centrifugal and Centripetal. Indeed, every federal constitution is the result of a synthesis of these two forces. Of course, there may exist urges which may not be converted into demands in any organized form. When we,

therefore, talk of the relative strength of the forces of unity and distinctness, we really refer to the relative strength of the organized forces.

2. *CND*, Vol. VIII, p. 919.
3. *The Assam Tribune*, June 20, 1949. Moreover, *The Assam Tribune*, maintained that the Union Powers and Union List of our new Constitution are swelling like snow balls. Consideration of security, uniformity and strength have become overriding and provincial autonomy has become a skeleton. We see no reason why the Centre should claim exclusive jurisdiction over a very wide range of subjects. Indeed, a better alternative to division of jurisdiction of the subject in a federation would be to clearly provide that in all matters both the centre and the unit would have powers but at a different level. (*ibid.* September, 1949).
4. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 951.
5. *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 95
6. See Chapter 1, pp. 25-32.
7. *Census of India* (Assam), 1951, Vol. XII, Part I(A), p. 357.
8. *CAD*, Vol. V, p. 100 (emphasis added).
9. See, Chapter I, pp. 38-47.
10. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 951.
11. Due to their semi-feudal mentality, the Assamese elite could not understand that the uneven economic development could not be checked within a capitalist economic structure even though the provision for decentralised planning was made in the new constitution.
12. For this point see, Chapter IV.
13. *Dainik Asamiiya*, March 13, 1948.
14. *ibid.*, March 14, 1948.
15. *The Assam Tribune*, December 24, 1949.
16. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 951.
17. *The Assam Tribune*, December 6, 1948.
18. *ibid.*, November 22, 1948 (emphasis added).
19. *CAD*, Vol. V, p. 100.
20. *ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 951.
21. This was Article 226 in the Draft Constitution and became Article 249 in the Constitution.
22. *CAD*, Vol. III, p. 416.
23. *ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 446-47.
24. See, Chapter I, pp. 48-50.
25. This fear and anxiety of the Assamese elite has come true with the

creation of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh in spite of their strong opposition. It is, however, interesting to note that the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy who was a member from Assam in the Constituent Assembly representing the hill areas of Assam also did not support the paramountcy of the Parliament in this respect. Perhaps, he could not foresee the fact that the Article 3 of the Constitution would not ultimately enable the Parliament to create the Hill States.

26. In August 1947, India became an independent country but at the cost of a partition. This removed the Muslim League as an important factor from the Indian political scene. Secondly, the problem of native Indian States was also successfully tackled. These developments removed the two most powerful centrifugal forces which were demanding a weak federal government. On the other hand, the communal riots and refugee influxes which followed in the wake of Independence, underlined the need for a strong Central Government. Consequently, the Constituent Assembly gave up the idea of a federation of autonomous provinces and instead chose to make India a 'Union of States'. They decided to create a strong Centre, and radically altered the provisions with regard to the Governor. As a result, the mode of appointment of the Governor, his functions, his powers and his role underwent a significant change.
27. *Minutes, Select Document IV, I(iii)*, p. 409 (see, also *Munshi CAD*, Vol. VIII, pp. 452-53).
28. A member from Bihar in the Constituent Assembly.
29. *CAD*, Vol. VIII, p. 426.
30. *ibid.*
31. *ibid.*, pp. 417-18.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*, pp. 437-38.
34. In this connection Rohini Kumar Chaudhury expressed the apprehension that "In a province like Assam the Governor of the province must exercise very important rights and he will have to work hard and if you send a Governor who does not know anything of the tribal people, who does not know their customs, manners etc., and the miserable condition in which they live and if he simply goes and look them in amazement there will be terrible consequences." (*ibid.*, p. 427)
35. *ibid.*
36. *ibid.*
37. *ibid.*, 456-57.
38. *Dainik Asamiya*, July 21, 1947.
39. *CAD*, Vol. VIII, p. 129.

40. *ibid.*, p. 499.
41. *ibid.*
42. *ibid.*, p. 438.
43. *ibid.*, p. 456.
44. *ibid.*, p. 437.
45. *ibid.*, p. 421
46. *ibid.*, p. 498.
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.* (emphasis added).
49. *ibid.* (emphasis added).
50. *ibid.*
51. *ibid.*
52. The Constituent Assembly had, in fact, rejected the proposal for an elected Governor and substituted for it a Governor appointed by the President. This was done besides other reasons, "in the interest of all India unity and with a view to encouraging centripetal tendencies" and to make it "necessary that the authority of the Government of India should be maintained intact over the provinces." (*ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 426.)
53. It may be mentioned that as the Articles concerning the States were hurriedly discussed and passed in the Constituent Assembly in less than four days (from May 30 to June 2, 1949), the Assamese Press and other elite in Assam could not form any opinion on this issue.
54. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 1244, 1947 (emphasis added).
55. *The Assam Tribune*, November 28, 1948. Further, in regard to the appointment of the judges, *The Assam Tribune* pleaded: "It is undesirable, in the interest of the independence of judiciary, that the executive should be given the sole power of appointing judges. Nor should we favour the plan suggested by some in the Constituent Assembly, that the confirmation of two-thirds majority of members of both Houses of Parliament should be made necessary. The legislature, dominated usually by party consideration and political emotions, should have nothing to do with the appointment of the judges." (*ibid.*, May 29, 1949.)
56. *ibid.*, December 5, 1948.
57. *ibid.*
58. *ibid.*
59. *ibid.*, November 19, 1949. Moreover, *The Assam Tribune* in a similar vein maintained that : "The anxiety on the part of the big provinces to centralize everything raises suspicion on the part of a small unit like Assam that her place in the Indian Union may not turn out to be dignified." (*ibid.*, November 22, 1948.)

- 6 . *ibid.* In this connection Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, in an ironical speech, said that "not a single man from Assam and Orissa has been found to fill up a seat in the Indian Government. Assam and Orissa are the two provinces, where not a single man has been found fit to hold the high offices in the Railways or Post and Telegraphs or even in the Imperial Secretariat which still remains its imperial character (see, *CAD*, Vol. V, p. 205).
61. *The Assam Tribune*, June 20, 1949.
62. *Dainik Asamiiya*, February 29, 1948.
63. *CAD*, Vol. VII, p. 328.
64. *The Assam Tribune*, December 6, 1948.

Federalism-II: Distribution of Financial Powers

In the last Chapter we discussed the attitude of the Assamese elite towards the division of legislative and executive powers between the centre and the states in the proposed Constitution for India. This Chapter will deal mainly with the distribution of financial powers. Finance is an important aspect of government in general, and federal government in particular. In a federation, both the central government and the regional governments have to be given independent and adequate sources of revenue for the discharge of their respective functions. For this reason, when the federal principle was first conceived, financial autonomy and allocation of elastic sources of revenue were deemed to be of utmost importance for the states. This issue, therefore, naturally, assumed considerable importance in the minds of the Assamese elite, because at that time Assam was passing through a financial stringency. And a section of the Assamese elite felt that this was due to 'unjust financial treatment'¹ by the previous imperial government and even by the national government of India. The Assamese elite were anxious to change this situation and wanted adequate provisions for financial resources for Assam in the new Constitution. Two basic factors were important in the articulation of the demand of the Assamese elite for adequate financial resources. First, as this study will reveal, the Assamese elite had not been happy with Assam's financial relationship with the centre since the operation of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, 1919, and particularly, since the

introduction of provincial autonomy under the Act of 1935. Secondly, the partition of the country created manifold problems in Assam which required larger financial resources.

Although with the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1937 some financial assistance and powers had been given to the provinces, Assam remained dependent upon the centre. In fact, at that time, Assam faced serious financial difficulty. In this connection, the Financial Award of Sir Otto Niemeyer is noteworthy. In the year 1936, Sir Otto Niemeyer had recommended a grant of Rs 47 lakhs and an annual subvention of Rs 30 lakhs to Assam.² In addition to this, he assigned 2 per cent of the divisible central pool of income-tax together with a share of the jute export duty.³ But it seems that these recommendations could not fulfil even the minimum requirement of the Government of Assam. In fact, the Otto Niemeyer Award, the Assamese elite assumed, brought a "great economic calamity" to the province for the entire decade of 1937-1947. *The Dainik Asamiiya*, articulated these sentiments of the Assamese elite when it asserted that Assam had been the "victim of discrimination in Otto Niemeyer Award."⁴ In a similar vein, *The Assam Tribune* in one of its editorials complained:

Under the Otto Niemeyer Award her (Assam's) financial position became so precarious that provincial autonomy introduced under the Act of 1935 became almost a farce. She could not afford any institution or scheme which could bring about cultural and economic advancement.⁵

One of the basic reasons for the disappointment of the Assamese elite with the Sir Otto Niemeyer Award was that Assam produced petrol, kerosene, tea, jute, etc., and contributed more than Rs 90 crores to the central exchequer in the shape of excise duty during the period 1937-1947.⁶ But, on the other hand, she was left to run the new Constitutional Scheme under the Government of India Act 1935 with a central subvention of a 'trifling sum' of Rs 30 lakhs. Incidentally, the amount granted to each of the provinces of North-West Frontier

and Sind was one crore and one crore and five lakhs of rupees per annum respectively.⁷

Another factor which accentuated the disappointment of the Assamese elite with the Otto Niemeyer Award was that in calculating Assam's share of income-tax, the Central Government had not taken into account the fact that a large part of Company income earned in Assam had been assessed for income-tax purposes outside the province, thus leading to a reduced share for Assam from the income-tax pool. Indeed, most of the tea companies registered in India had their agency offices in Calcutta. Clearly these companies paid their income-tax in Calcutta and, therefore *The Assam Tribune* complained that Assam did not get its "legitimate" share of income-tax paid by these companies in Calcutta.⁸

This was the situation of pre-partition period. The partition of the country necessitated an adjustment in financial arrangement which, particularly effected the scheme of distribution of both income-tax and jute export duty. In regard to income-tax, only a minor adjustment was made in favour of Assam. Accordingly, the share of Assam was fixed at 3 per cent instead of 2 of the divisible provincial pool. But as regards the jute duty provincial share was reduced from 62.5 per cent to 20 per cent. The Government of Assam immediately lodged an emphatic protest against this post-partition decision of the central government. Bishnuram Medhi, the then Finance Minister of Assam, characterised this new financial settlement as "complete lack of appreciation of the difficulty of the province" and "a violation of the spirit of the financial settlement."⁹ Indicating the effect of this new financial arrangement, Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Premier of Assam, in a press statement maintained:

"Retrenchment of over a thousands temporary hands, amalgamation of allied departments, reduction of Secretariat, a cut in the salaries of ministers and abandonment of most of the nation building projects are among the

measures contemplated by the Assam Government to avert an 'impending financial collapse' following the decision of the Government of India to reduce the grant to the province substantially."¹⁰

It may, however, be mentioned here that Assam was given some grant for post-war reconstruction. But the Assamese elite felt that the post-war grant by the centre was not sufficient to meet the costs of reconstruction. What made the Assamese elite to feel all the more resentful was that after the partition there was, what Medhi called, "drastic cut" in post-war grant: this was fixed only at Rs 160 lakhs, while Assam had expected a grant of about Rs 8 crores.¹¹ The Assamese elite, therefore, criticised the financial policy of the central government towards Assam, both inside and outside the Legislative Assembly. However, it appears that they did not make sufficient efforts to find new ways of expanding either their economy or their revenues. Neither did they think of any alternative device for their economic development and for augmenting their resources. But they tended to depend upon the help of the centre and went on insisting on what they called 'legitimate share'. Defending their position they argued that "we have reached the limit of taxation and there is hardly any new sources which may be tapped to augment our resources."¹² It seems that by sources of income they only meant the various sources of taxation. They could think neither of any new sources of taxation, nor any other method of raising money by planned development. Nor indeed did they think of greater efficiency in government as a means of effective saving.¹³ But the Assamese elite put the blame on the centre for what they characterised as its "step-motherly treatment"¹⁴ to Assam in the matter of finance. They, therefore, went on persuading the central government to give them adequate financial help. But they did not succeed in this effort and felt a sense of deprivation. This, along with the bitter experience of financial relations between the centre and

the province ever since the introduction of provincial autonomy, led the Assamese elite to demand financial autonomy in the new Constitution which was then being framed.

Secondly, the Assamese elite's demand for larger financial resources had to be seen in the context of the manifold problems created by the partition requiring immediate attention in addition to the need for reconstruction to offset the damages caused by the Second World War. The partition snapped Assam's direct road link with the rest of India necessitating greater transportation charges for her exports and imports. At the same time, lakhs of Hindu refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan had been pouring into Assam imposing an extra burden on her. The Assamese elite thought that there was also infiltration of 'subversive elements' from outside the country. So, the Government of Assam had to maintain a stronger police force. All these naturally required additional funds. The Assamese elite, therefore, felt that the partition of the country had not only accentuated the existing financial problems affecting Assam's economy in more than one respect but had also created problems beyond the financial resources of the province to tackle. Thus Bishnuram Medhi, the then Finance Minister of Assam, stated: "It is practically beyond the capacity of the province to shoulder the entire burden of expenditure involved in meeting the various difficulties caused by the partition of India."¹⁵ 'Above all, as a 'backward' province, there had always been some permanent problems such as the development of various tribal communities both in the hills and the plains, expansion of education,¹⁶ particularly technical education; adequate government service etc. The magnitude and complexity of these requirements for development and for existence as a strategic frontier province had made Assam demand a larger share of resources.

II

Now, it would be interesting to examine how the Assamese elite articulated their urge for greater financial autonomy on the floor of the Constituent Assembly. From the evidence available

to us, it appears that the Articles of the Draft Constitution which determined the financial relationship between the centre and the states evoked considerable resentment among the Assamese elite. We have already argued that in the context of division of legislative and executive powers between the centre and the states, the views of the Assamese members in the Constituent Assembly were very much against an unbalanced strengthening of the centre at the cost of the component units. And they compared the proposed Indian federation with the picture of "an unbalanced man with a very big head" but "bony and lean limbs."¹⁷ Naturally, therefore, they were critical of the pro-centre financial provision in the Draft Constitution. Thus the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy maintained:

"In the matter of finance this draft is very unsatisfactory, particularly in reference to smaller provinces. It does not give a fair deal to the provinces. Poor provinces like Assam and Orissa have reasons to be particularly disappointed. Those provinces should not be weakened financially."¹⁸

The Assamese elite expected that the financial provisions in the new Constitution would bring an end to, what they called, "unscientific and inequitous" financial adjustment between the centre and the provinces. As the trend was towards a strong central government, they found that the same policy of centralization was adopted in matters of finance in the new Constitution. The Assamese elite felt disturbed that no major change had been conceived for a more 'just' financial settlement between the centre and the state. Omeo Kumar Das expressed this sentiment and argued:

"We should not weaken the provinces. After all it is the provinces which have to carry out the dynamic programme of the Congress. The financial settlement which was the outcome of this anxiety to strengthen the centre, to bring about financial stability at the centre only, with the units starving for funds to carry out the nation building programme still holds good today and I do not find any

change of outlook. The same policy of strengthening the centre at the cost of the provinces still holds good today.¹⁹

In most of the speeches of the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly, there was a sense of ambivalence in their attitude. At that time, they were happy, indeed anxious, to be a part of India, but they did not want that the provinces should become weak. It was, however, curious that they also wanted a strong central government while at the same time advocating clearly for stronger provincial government. They expressed the fear that weaker province would weaken the centre that "even one weak limb of the body will make the whole body weak."²⁰ Therefore, they wanted that "if India is to live and prosper, the States which are its component parts should function as healthy organs of the body politic of India."²¹ While articulating this sentiment, the Assamese elite were very much concerned about the economic backwardness of Assam. They thought that under a strong provincial government they would be in a position to remove this backwardness. In their bid to demand larger economic share, they very often asserted that the removal of economic backwardness was essential not only to satisfy the people of this frontier region of India, but also for the sake of national interest.²²

The financial distribution of powers in a federal constitution is one of the important indicators of the strength or otherwise of a federal government. The question of subsidies had not yet arisen when most of the older federal constitutions were framed. This is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon arising out of the positive functions of the states. Now since about the thirties of this century, federal grants-in-aid have become a normal feature of most federations. Their extent, however, mainly depends upon the bargaining capacity of the state leadership. But the Assamese leadership had hitherto failed to get a fair deal from the centre since the inauguration of provincial autonomy. Therefore, Assam was facing 'chronic financial difficulty'. The Assamese elite did not find any way out except to make a plea on the floor of the Constituent Assembly to insert certain provisions,

in the Constitution which would facilitate adequate financial resources for Assam to cope with the new need of the state. They were, therefore, anxious that the question of sharing of resources between the centre and the state should in no case be left to the decision of future Commissions, Committees or even to the Indian Parliament. They wanted that these financial relations should be clearly spelt out in the Constitution itself. In fact, they desired that the Constitution should clearly indicate that a certain definite percentage of the excise and export duty on tea, petrol and jute should be given to the producing states by the Union Government.

With this point of view, the Assamese elite were critical of the financial provision in regard to centre-state relations in the proposed Constitution, as laid down in Article 253(ii), 254 and 255 of the Draft Constitution. Article 253(ii) of the Draft Constitution would prevent the Government of India from giving any kind of help to the provinces unless this was done by the Parliament. Article 254 also provided that the parliament would formulate a policy in regard to the distribution of jute duty among the provinces. Similarly, Article 255 gave sole authority to the parliament to give grants-in-aid to those provinces which were in deficit. These Articles in the proposed Constitution evoked considerable resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. They wanted that the sharing of proceeds contemplated in the clauses should be obligatory and not dependent on legislation by parliament. Ironically, however, the main thrust of their argument was not on the basic issue of greater state autonomy but rather on the special claim of the province of Assam which had been facing financial difficulties on account of her general economic backwardness and increased expenditure "in *policing* the hilly border areas."²³ Robini Kumar Chaudhury, however, moved an amendment to the Articles 253 (ii) and 254 of the Draft Constitution which he called as 'my beloved amendment'. This amendment demanded:

"That for Article 254, the following be substituted:

'254. Notwithstanding anything in Article 253 of this

Constitution.

(a) sixty-two and a half per cent or such higher percentage as may be prescribed of the net process in each year of any export duty on jute or jute products, and

(b) seventy-five per cent or such higher percentage as may be prescribed of the net process in each year of any export duty on tea, shall not form part of the revenues of India but shall be assigned to the states in which jute or tea, as the case may be, is grown in proportion to the respective amounts of jute or tea grown therein.”²⁴

The obvious implication of this proposed amendment, as stated above was that the Assamese elite desired to have a definite percentage of share of excise duty on tea and jute mentioned in the Constitution instead of leaving it to the decision of the Parliament. They saw no reason why the question of export duty on tea and oil (mainly produced in their province) should not be treated in the same way as has been done in the case of the export duty on jute. The Assamese elite felt that this was done due to a complete lack of concern about the interest of Assam. As the Rev. J.J. M. Nichols Roy argued:

“I want to say that the provisions of Articles 253 and 254 cannot be appreciated by us. If the excise and export duties on tea and petroleum are allotted to us which give about eight crores of rupees annually from Assam alone to the coffers of the Government of India, we shall have enough resources to finance our development schemes all round. Why should not this export duty be given to Assam, at least the largest share of it, every year? Assam is kept under the system of eternal doles from the centre. Is it because Assam does not have a strong voice in the centre?”²⁵

It was obvious that while claiming a larger share of export and excise duties on Assam's products, the leaders of Assam all the time argued that she was not poor in resources but poor in her financial returns. They believed that this poverty had been forced upon her by “man-made laws” and the “inequity of the Central Government.”²⁶ Indeed, Assam, though a small

State in terms of population, the Assamese elite felt, was one of the biggest contributors to the Central exchequer. Thus Omeo Kumar Das maintained:

“My province, Assam, has been the source of contribution to the central exchequer to the extent of nearly rupees eight crores annually in the shape of excise and export duty on tea and petrol. But the subvention that was given to Assam was only rupees thirty lakhs. I do not find any change in the outlook to-day.”²⁷

Thus the particularistic sentiment of the Assamese elite arose out of an acute anxiety about the existing financial difficulties of Assam. The Assamese leaders felt disturbed that Assam was facing “chronic financial difficulty” despite her enormous resources. Unfortunately, however, these resources were not being fully exploited for the prosperity of the province. In effect, it seemed to them that Assam remained one of the most backward provinces in India. Naturally, therefore, the Assamese leadership were deeply concerned about the future economic development of the province. They persistently asserted that some positive clauses should be envisaged in the Constitution enabling Assam to realise her ‘due share’ of export duties on jute, tea and petrol. In view of this, Bishnuram Medhi, the then Finance Minister of Assam demanded the modification of Articles 253(ii) and 254 of the Draft Constitution. He pleaded:

“In laying our claim for substantial share of the export and excise duties, etc., I think I am voicing not only the view of the Honourable members of this House but also of the people of Assam. We reiterate our demand for appropriate provision in the Draft Constitution, specially under Articles 253 and 254, for allocation of 75 per cent of the excise duty on petrol and kerosene, 75 per cent export duty on tea, and 62.5 per cent of the export duty on jute for distribution among provinces in which they are produced.”²⁸

It is, therefore, evident that the Assamese leaders seriously felt that Assam had greater claims to excise duties on the products such as tea, oil and jute which were mainly produced in Assam. This claim, they thought was legitimate, because, Assam had to make a lot of sacrifice for those products. For instance, among other things, the government of Assam had, in the beginning, given a special concession to the tea plantation²⁹ in the matter of land revenue in order to encourage tea industry. While Assam lost land revenue, it also did not get other revenues such as excise and export duties which were appropriated by the central government. The Assamese elite, therefore, apprehended that the process which had enabled the Central Government to collect and appropriate these taxes, had caused "irreparable drain" on natural wealth and resources of the province. It was asserted that the most legitimate utilization of these revenues would have been to use them for the development of the province.³⁰ Not only were these feelings and sentiments held by the representatives of Assam in the Constituent Assembly and the Assam Legislative Assembly, these were also voiced by the leaders of Assamese Press in general. Thus, *The Assam Tribune* maintained:

Our claims for at least 75 per cent of export and excise duty on tea grown in Assam and 75 per cent of excise duty on petrol and kerosene produced in Assam cannot be said to be extravagant to meet our basic needs.³¹

The principle of grants-in-aid in lieu of a share in export duty, might, they pleaded, be very well extended further to help Assam which was finding herself virtually in a 'state of bankruptcy'. But the Article 255 of the Draft Constitution did not give any power to the Government of India to give grants-in-aid to the deficit provinces, unless the same had been approved by the Parliament. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury thus argued that the Article was mainly permissive, making it possible for the Parliament to sanction grants to the States.³² He apprehended that the interest of the smaller States like Assam would be

ignored in a Parliament which, by virtue of their numerical strength, would be dominated by the representatives of the bigger provinces. The Parliament would thus become an "arena for tussle among various States" for a share of resources and grants-in-aid from the centre.³³ The Assamese elite had the understandable anxiety that Assam, being a relatively small State, might find it difficult to get her point of view accepted in the national Parliament. After all, in the Parliament, bigger States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan etc., would have much larger representation than small States like Assam and Orissa. Consequently, States which would have a larger number of members in the Parliament would be able to pull strings and get what they wanted. In view of this, the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy pleaded that:

We should not bind the power of Parliament to make law regarding this. Parliament may easily help a place like Rajasthan and encourage the people of that State and give them more financial help.³⁴

Thus it is evident that the Assamese leaders feared the dominance of the Centre over the States and the greater influence of the bigger States in the Parliament. Muhammad Saadulla, a member of the Drafting Committee, who participated in the debates as the representative from "the very benighted province of Assam",³⁵ opened his speech with the observation that the adoption of the Articles relating to the distribution of revenues and grants-in-aid implied a "death sentence upon all hopes and aspirations of the province."³⁶ With the rejection of Assam's claims to a share in the revenue which her products gave to the Centre, he saw hope only in adequate grants-in-aid being made available under the provisions of Article 255. Even that hope, he felt, had been shattered as under the Article the whole thing had been left to the decision of the Parliament. He concluded on a note of pessimism and bitterness that the Centre would not give sufficient financial help to Assam.³⁷

In addition to these, the Assamese elite wanted certain changes in the Expert Committee's Report on financial provisions relating to divisible provincial pool of the income-tax. The Expert Committee recommended that the whole income-tax, including corporation tax and income-tax on federal emoluments, should be shared between the Centre and the States except to the extent of the tax attributable to centrally administered areas. The Expert Committee suggested that the provincial share should be fixed at sixty per cent and allocated among the provinces in the following manner: twenty per cent on the basis of population and thirty-five per cent on the basis of collection, the remaining five per cent being used for mitigating hardships that might arise as a result of the application of the other two criteria.³⁸ But the Assamese elite were not satisfied with this basis of allocation. Muhammad Saadulla raised certain objections to the Expert Committee's suggestions which he characterised as "unjust and iniquitous."³⁹ His main plea was that combination of the criteria of population and collection, with appropriate weight to individual provinces as basis for distribution, gave too much weight to provinces like Bombay and West Bengal;⁴⁰ because, from the point of view of population, at that time Assam was one of the least populated provinces in India.⁴¹ Therefore, if twenty per cent of the divisible pool of income-tax was divided on population basis, Assam would have got a very little sum. And similarly, if thirty-five per cent was given on the basis of the place of collection, Assam would suffer because, the place of collection in the case of Assam, for reasons already mentioned, was Calcutta. As such, the income tax on the products of Assam's tea would be paid to the West Bengal Government. Naturally, therefore, the major portion of the sixty per cent would go away from the province.

But some of the Assamese elite had no real objection to the distribution on the basis of 'population'. What they really objected to was the locus of *collection* rather than the origin of

income being made the basis of distribution. They wanted to ensure that Assam, and not West Bengal, should get the share of income-tax from income which was generated in Assam by the companies located in West Bengal. Bishnuram Medhi in one of his speeches in the Assam Legislative Assembly pleaded:

“Sixty per cent should form the divisible provincial pool of the income-tax and it should be distributed on the following basis: (I) 20 per cent should be distributed on the basis of population, (II) 35 per cent should be distributed on the basis of *origin or locus of income*, (III) 5 per cent should be distributed as a balancing factor to mitigate the hardship to individual provinces.”⁴²

But having got no positive responses to these pleas, the Assamese elite felt a bitter sense of disappointment. On a note of pessimism Muhammad Saadulla said: “Ours has been a cry in the wilderness; our voices are never heard at the Centre. However hoarse we may cry and however much our Premier tries, we do not get a hearing.”⁴³

It is worth mentioning that while pleading for all these modifications of the proposed financial provisions, the Assamese elite were deeply concerned with the problems created by the partition of the country. As we mentioned above, after the partition, Assam became strategically important. And this factor, naturally, reinforced the long standing demand of the Assamese elite for greater financial resources. Thus Gopinath Bordoloi argued:

“After partition we are cut off from India, and though most of the linking works is done under the provision of central grants, a lot of provincial expenditure had also to be incurred. All the four hundred miles of border areas verge on Pakistan, China or Burma and the border with Pakistan runs through hills. The entire economy of these hill areas was disturbed and these poor people in the border areas,

particularly the hill people, have to depend entirely upon supplies from the province of Assam instead of Sylhet or Mymensingh as it formerly used to do. The necessity, therefore, of linking these areas with road communications has become very imperative and Assam Government had to undertake the work.”⁴⁴

From the remarks of Bordoloi, it appears that his argument for financial assistance was not merely based on emotion or sentiment but on certain rational grounds. The Assamese leaders thought that if the border areas were not developed and not connected with the rest of the province, the people of these areas might go under the influence of Pakistan. And they argued that the economic condition of the people of these areas deserved special attention. It may be noted that Muhammad Saadulla, a Muslim League leader of Assam, also associated himself with this feeling. He summarised the situation as follows:

The people on the southern slope of Khasi Hills used to get their foodgrains and means of livelihood from the district of Sylhet which now forms a part of Eastern Pakistan. Unless foodgrains can be made available in sufficient quantities in that area, as also in other areas of the district, those people may ultimately look up to Pakistan as their saviours.⁴⁵

It is well known that the tribal people of the border areas of Assam had very little connection with the rest of the country during the British rule. And they remained socially and economically much more backward. As a result, these people did not have much sympathy for the rest of India. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, therefore, pleaded:

“You have now to convert those tribal people and educate them in the new nationalism of India. They are in India, but they have not been able to feel that we have any connection with that part of India. What steps are you going to

take to let them feel it ? If you are going to take any step then you must give more finance.⁴⁶

Thus, the Assamese elite felt that there was an urgent necessity to integrate the tribal people into the mainstream of Indian national life. Otherwise, they were afraid, Assam would form either a part of Pakistan or she might be taken over by some Communist power of Asia. We are not concerned with the question whether the Assamese and even the Indian political elite were justified in considering the Communists as a threat to Assam and India. But what is true is that they did consider them to be a threat to the security of the Indian political system. After the partition, the Communists were very active in this strategic frontier of India. Bishnuram Medhi reported on the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly that soon after the imposition of a ban on the Communist organization in Burma, there was an infiltration of these so-called 'undesirable elements' into Assam, who found an easy shelter with their friends and sympathisers in this State.⁴⁷ The leaders of Assam were, however, disturbed by these developments. Thus Muhammad Saadulla maintained:

"Assam's position is that of a sentinel on the East and North-East boundaries of the vast continent of India where dark and menacing clouds of Communism are rising and collecting to the panic and chagrin of all the civilized world. Just as the strength of a chain lies in the strength of its weakest link, Assam must be kept up to the standard of civilized government; her people must be kept happy and contented as otherwise there is a fear of Assam becoming the favourite hunting ground of Communism."⁴⁸

The Assamese elite, therefore, felt that it was necessary to make the unit strong as a measure of strengthening the federation. They did not want that Assam should be a weak link of the chain. However, the underlying motive of such arguments was to make Assam financially viable. *The Assam Tribune*, which by and large represented the views of the Assamese elite, articulated this sentiment and asserted:

Assam, we are afraid, will fall an unwilling victim to fissiparous or disruptive forces unless the Centre soon becomes keenly alive to Assam's need. Assam is bordered on one hand by Pakistan and on the other by Burma which is passing through turmoil. It is in the interest of the integrity of India as a whole that Assam should not lack adequate funds to meet her needs.^{4e}

In order to meet this so-called 'danger of Communism', the Assamese elite pleaded, the government of Assam had to maintain a strong provincial police force to guard against the danger of disruptive forces within the state and/or infiltration of foreign Communists. But at the same time they argued that the evils of Communism could not be resisted with the police force alone. What was more important, they believed, was a two-pronged attack: (i) to raise the standard of living of the people and (ii) to involve the people in the process of self-government. Inevitably, this also needed adequate finance. As Gopinath Bordoloi put it:

"If we want to root out the evils of Communism it can never be done with the police force alone. We have to take recourse to ameliorative measures to raise the standard of living of the people and give them training in sort of self-government, that can be done only by having a much more per capita expenditure on the people than the province is able to give today from its finance."^{5a}

By and large, the Assamese elite made repeated use of the powerful argument that Assam was a border State. They reminded the central leadership that a grave threat would appear if the people of this region were not satisfied. Assam had to be lifted from its backwardness if the danger of Communism and the threat from the borders was to be warded off. Gopinath Bordoloi persistently attempted to convince the national leaders about these feelings and sentiments of the Assamese elite. He asserted:

"I am no less an appreciator of the overriding needs of the

centre; mine is a frontier province and I should realise it more than any other man. But after all Assam is India also, it is a very important part of India today on account of the frontier; and therefore if you wanted that it should function as a province, it should have a level of administration which should at least be able to stand in such a manner as you could keep the people contented.⁵¹

These arguments of the Assamese leaders, of course, were not without justification. But the fact remains that they were much more concerned about the interest of Assam than the rest of the country.

From the evidence so far examined, it seems that the Assamese elite took a peculiar posture in their demand for larger share of economic resources. In the context of their demands they mainly put forward three basic arguments: First, the centre was benefiting out of Assam's resources while she did not get her due share. Hence, she remained backward in spite of her enormous natural wealth. Secondly, since Assam was a frontier province, the compulsion of defence imposed certain responsibilities on her. Third, the Communists were already active, and were exploiting the sad state of affairs in the state. This situation necessitated adequate financial resources for the protection and development of this backward strategic province, failing which the government of Assam, the Assamese elite felt, would not be able to effectively ward off the threat from the disruptive forces from within and outside the country. Further, they argued that the security of Assam was intimately connected with the larger question of the security of the rest of the country; hence, she deserved special treatment from the point of view of her financial position.

But, when the Assamese elite found that their demands were ignored, some of them even used the 'technique of blackmail' in their speeches delivered in the Constituent Assembly and the Dominion Parliament of India.⁵² Indeed, there was a veiled threat of secession in their speeches. Thus Rohini Kumar Chaudhury maintained:

“Are you going to have Assam or not ? If you want to retain Assam, if you want to protect the frontier of India, then you must bestow more care and thought on that province and improve that province. If you do not want to leave Assam alone, give her its proper share. Even for your own self-interest, even for your protection, you should think of us. India is one body politic and if one finger of that India is rotten, the whole India will rot in the long run.”⁵³

These arguments of the Assamese elite were primarily intended to ensure that the centre should agree to give larger grants and considerable financial autonomy to Assam. Therefore, their plea that “Assam is India” and “this is a question of all-India interest”⁵⁴ were all full of significance. The Assamese elite wanted to tell the central leadership that by ignoring the interest of Assam they would also in some sense be jeopardising the interest of the rest of India. But, as a matter of fact, this featured more as an argument. In reality, they were much more concerned about the safety of Assam than the country as a whole. It is quite evident from the pleadings of the Assamese elite that their primary loyalty was to their own region and only secondary to the nation as a whole. For instance, they very often expressed the fear that “if Assam is invaded by her neighbours and reinforcements were not promptly rushed there from the rest of India, she will very soon cease to be a part of India.”⁵⁵ In fact, what the Assamese elite essentially wanted was the consolidation of Assam’s regional interests particularly, the interest of the dominant Assamese elite, and for the protection of these interests they looked up to a greater and stronger India. For this reason, they did not entirely ignore the importance of a strong Centre. *The Assam Tribune* articulated this sentiment clearly:

Though we cannot object to the establishment of a strong central Government, provinces comprising the Indian Union must enjoy a larger amount of autonomy than under the government of India Act of 1935 and this is possible only if they are placed beyond financial worries.⁵⁶

Thus it appears that the Assamese elite faced a dilemma. They needed a strong centre capable of facing external threats. At the same time, their whole history, coupled with their experience of centre-state relations, made them crave for greater regional autonomy. Indeed, they wanted a strong centre as well as a strong provincial government simultaneously. This duality of approach in their thinking arose out of the existing socio-political and economic condition of Assam. They sincerely felt that if Assam's financial stringency continues through the "step-motherly attitude" of the centre, there could be no hope for an improved standard of administration and economic development of the province within a measurable distance of time. And, as Assam failed to evoke any sympathetic response from the centre for a long period, the Assamese elite thought it wise to make a plea to incorporate certain special provisions in the new Constitution which would enable her to enjoy greater financial autonomy.

REFERENCES

1. *Dainik Asamiya*, March 13, 1948.
2. *Indian Financial Enquiry Report*, 1936, p. 7.
3. *ibid*.
4. *Dainik Asamiya*, March 13, 1948.
5. *The Assam Tribune*, December 24, 1949.
6. In a Memorandum submitted to the Central Government, the Government of Assam complained that: "It is abundantly clear that the Niemeyer Award has not given Assam her due, but has rather jeopardised her position as an autonomous province. On the other hand, the Central Government has been enabled under the Award to raise the substantial revenues from incomes earned in the province and products raised within her borders. Thus the centre raises in the shape of Excise duty on tea (5.68 crores); petrol (1.44 crores); kerosene (24 lakhs); tobacco (7 lakhs) and income-tax (1.43 crores); about rupees 10 crores a year while the provincial government derives about Rs 132 lakhs (6.4 lakhs as royalty from mines, 16 lakhs as land revenue from gardens plus 39 lakhs by agricultural income plus 68 lakhs as share of central income

tax and jute export duty) only from the same tax based either as a share of the central pool or independently." (*Memorandum submitted to the Government of India by the Government of Assam*, October 21, 1947.

7. *Indian Financial Enquiry Report*, 1936, p. 10.
8. *The Assam Tribune*, October 22, 1947.
9. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 19, 1949.
10. *The Assam Tribune*, November 16, 1949.
11. *ALAD*, op. cit., p. 20.
12. *The Assam Tribune*, March 13, 1948.
13. It is interesting to note that *The Assam Tribune*, which usually criticised the centre, sometimes also criticised the financial policy of the Government of Assam. Thus in one of its editorials, *The Assam Tribune* maintained: "The tempo of the expenditure on development schemes speaks loudly of the inert and inefficient administrative machinery over which our present Ministry sits. The Government has failed hopelessly in renovating the administrative machinery to suit the dynamic requirement of the present situation. The centre may allot funds, and we may not be able to spend them however willing we may be. Moreover, the Finance Department is rather unwilling to spend, the department is orthodox in its character." (*ibid.*)
14. *Dainik Asamiya*, March 13, 1948.
15. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 43, 1947.
16. It may be noted that there was a long standing demand of the Assamese elite for the establishment of a University, a High Court, a Veterinary College and other technical institutions.
17. *CAD*, Vol. VII, p. 328.
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 94.
20. *ibid.*, Vol. VII, 328.
21. *ibid.*
22. *Dainik Asamiya*, August 26, 1947.
23. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 226 (Emphasis added).
24. *ibid.*, pp. 252-53.
25. *ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 227.
26. *ibid.* Vol. IX, p. 265.
27. *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 95.
28. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 20, 1949.
29. In the case of oil it may be said that the oil industry in Assam was a cent per cent British enterprise. Therefore, neither the people of Assam nor their Government gained very much from this industry which was being run 'to fill the pockets of investors abroad'. So it was the feeling of the Assamese elite that Assam had been com-

pletely deprived of the advantages from the industries on her land.

30. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 20, 1949.
31. *The Assam Tribune*, July 18, 1949-A similar sentiment was expressed in an editorial of the *Dainik Asamiya*, March 13, 1948.
32. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 290.
33. *ibid.*
34. *ibid.*, p. 259.
35. *ibid.*, p. 259.
36. *ibid.*
37. *ibid.*, pp. 260-61.
38. *Report of the Expert Committee on Financial Provision of the Constitution*, Section 55 and 56, 1947.
39. *CAD*, Vol. VII, p. 392.
40. *ibid.*
41. The Census Report of 1941 estimated at 102 lakhs only.
42. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 19, 1949 (emphasis added).
43. *CAD*, Vol. VII, p. 393.
44. *ibid.*, Vol. IX, pp. 226-27.
45. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 17, 1949.
46. *CAD*, Vol. XI, p. 734.
47. *ALAD*, Vol. I, p. 17, 1949.
48. *CAD*, Vol. XI, p. 734.
49. *The Assam Tribune*, June 11, 1947.
50. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 227.
51. *ibid.*, p. 228.
52. See *IPD*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1222, 1950.
53. *CAD*, Vol. IX, pp. 243-44. It is interesting to note that the 'veiled threat of secession' is not a new phenomenon in the speeches of Assamese elite in the Constituent Assembly. This was also reflected in the speeches of Assamese representatives in the *Council of States*. For example, on March 5, 1947, Khan Bahadur Karamat Ali maintained: "If Assam were a sovereign State having nothing to do with the Centre, her financial position would have been quite different from what it is now. Now, she has chance, whatever, may be the Constitution, she will claim fair treatment, if this is denied, she will know what to do... It is no wonder that there is a strong section of people in Assam, both Hindus and Muslims, who warn both the Congress and the Muslim League that unless they agree to listen to the legitimate demands of Assam and give them their due share they will refuse to join hands with any of them in the new Constitution.

Assam has suffered long and she has learnt bitter lessons. Neither high command she will fear nor soft words she will yield to. Give her legitimate dues or leave her alone.” (See *CSD*, Vol. I, p: 291, 1947).

54. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 265.

55. *ibid.*, p. 269.

56. *The Assam Tribune*, October 22, 1947: (Further, *The Assam Tribune* argued that “too much centralization will make a small province like Assam a lame-dog of the Indian Union.” *ibid.*, March 12, 1949.)

Federalism—III: Miscellaneous Issues. Citizenship, Emergency Powers and Election Commission

This chapter deals with some issues, such as, the principle of citizenship, emergency powers of the Centre and Union Electoral Machinery which also determine the character of a federation. The main reason for selecting these issues for our discussion is that, these aroused considerable interest among a section of the Assamese elite. Particularly the question of citizenship greatly exercised their mind and it was publicly discussed in Assam when the constitution was being framed.

In a federal system, there are two ways of dealing with the problem of citizenship. One method is dual citizenship as it happens in classical federations such as the United States of America and Canada. In these federations an individual has two citizenships—one of the centre and other of the units. Under such constitutional provision, an individual cannot retain the citizenship of many units of the federation at a time. It becomes obligatory on the part of the individual concerned to acquire citizenship of a particular unit where he wants to reside permanently and to surrender his original citizenship of the other unit, if any. It, therefore, naturally imposes certain restrictions on the free settlement of individual moving from one unit to another. In the second type of federation, provision is made only for single citizenship. It does not make any difference between the citizenship of the unit and the centre. In such

a case, an individual can settle permanently in any part of the country without acquiring citizenship of the unit concerned. Thus, the basis of citizenship clearly is one of the various variables which determine the character of a federation.

It is difficult to venture a guess as to what the shape of citizenship would have been, if India had not been partitioned. But once partition came, India tended to be a federation with a strong centre in order to curb fissiparous tendencies and bring diverse elements together. Accordingly, the framers of the Constitution felt that the adoption of the principle of single citizenship was essential in the interest of national integration. If dual citizenship had been created, they apprehended, centrifugal tendencies would have got greater impetus. Consequently, the principle of dual citizenship as an element of federalism did not receive much attention from the members of the Constituent Assembly. Almost all the discussions relating to the question of citizenship took the form of the qualifications of an Indian citizen rather than on the principle of citizenship as a feature of federalism.¹ But here our discussion will be mainly confined to the principle of citizenship and an attempt will be made to examine the attitude of the Assamese elite towards it.

Essentially, as indicated above, the very essence of a classic federation is dual citizenship, that is, a citizenship of the whole union and a citizenship of the unit. Each one of them, generally makes one entitled to a certain set of rights, exclusive of, but not contradictory to, the other set. Unlike the federations of the U.S.A. and Canada, Indian federation does not provide for dual citizenship. Article 5 of the Draft Constitution provided for single citizenship for the whole of India, with an easy-process of its acquisition. In other words, it left no scope for separate citizenship for the federating units. And, Article 6 of the Draft Constitution empowered the Indian Parliament to make 'further provision' regarding the acquisition and termination of citizenship. This conception of citizenship evoked strong resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite.² The Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, one of the most articulate organizations of a section of the Assamese elite, pleaded for a provision of

dual citizenship in the new Constitution of India on the American model, i.e., an all-India or Federal citizenship and a provincial or State citizenship.³ It argued that India is a sub-continent with different regional, linguistic and racial, if not national, groups of people having different and distinctive traditions and culture. So, the conception of citizenship in the new Constitution, the Assamese elite asserted, must be consistent with the protection and development of those distinctive regional and cultural interests.⁴ Thus, in an appeal to the members of the Constituent Assembly the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha suggested:

The provinces or states should be given full autonomy and their local people special rights and privileges in the shape of a provincial or state citizenship as distinct from the federal or union citizenship.⁵

If this was not done, the Jatiya Mahasabha asserted, there were 'bound to be clashes'⁶ amongst the different provincials belonging to different linguistic and cultural groups leading to the detriment of the entire body-politic of the federation. The focus of its argument was that there were two types of citizenship—cultural and political. The former emphasised heterogeneity and the latter homogeneity. In a country of the size of India, while seeking political unity, it was necessary to recognize cultural diversity. It was, therefore, not surprising that a section of the Assamese elite wanted to maintain Assamese sub-nationalism on the basis of their cultural identity, which was not really opposed to the Indian nationalism, by suggesting the principle of dual citizenship. In a bid to emphasise this, they even went to the extent of arguing, as *The Assam Tribune* did, that "the idea of common citizenship is *foreign to a federation* in which there must be state citizenship as distinguished from national citizenship."⁷ This, as every student of federalism knows, is not always the case. However, the theoreticians of Indian nationalism were aware of the diversity of Indian society. Nationalism in India could not take a cohesive form as it did in some European societies. This

was nothing peculiar to a large and diverse society such as India's. In fact, India had always exhibited, 'unity in diversity.' Therefore, the urge for maintaining provincial identities in some form was inevitable.

The Assamese elite, however, apprehended that common citizenship would not sufficiently safeguard the provincial identity of Assam. The provision of dual citizenship, they felt, was of utmost importance to a state like Assam which possessed certain peculiar features unlike other states of India. The question of citizenship received increased importance due to the rapid and large scale increase of non-Assamese population into the province.⁸ Indeed, it appeared to the Assamese leaders that the non-Assamese people threatened the very existence of what they chose to call the 'Assamese nation'. The increase of population in Assam, however, took place either through natural increase or through immigration. The former was not a serious problem in the case of Assam; the real problem was the influx of people from outside. As we indicated in the first chapter, immigration into Assam had been from various parts of the country. People had come to Assam (1) from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Tamilnadu as tea garden labourers and other manual labourers; (2) from Eastern Bengal as settlers on agricultural land, clerical staff in factories and government offices and small traders; (3) as skilled labourers from Punjab; (4) as businessmen from Rajasthan, U.P. etc., and (5) as live-stock farmers from Nepal. Thus, immigration assumed alarming proportion by the twenties of this century. So rapid and large was the immigration that C.S. Mullan, a British Census Commissioner, commented in his Census Report of 1931 that immigration was "likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than the Burmese invaders of 1820 the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization."⁹

During the late thirties and early forties a new element emerged leading to large scale immigration. After 1926 the provincial government of Assam was mostly dominated by the Muslim League. The Assamese elite were convinced that the Muslim League Ministry led by Muhammad Saadulla adopted

a deliberate policy of encouraging East Bengal Muslims to come to Assam with the design of increasing the ratio of Muslim population in Assam.¹⁰ They further believed that this was done in order to perpetuate Muslim League's power in Assam if not to make Assam a part of the proposed Pakistan.¹¹ In fact, tremendous increase of Muslim population in the province posed a great threat to the dominant position of the Assamese Hindu elite.¹²

Besides, the Bengali Hindu immigrants in Assam alone constituted a sizable part of her population and since the Muslim immigrants also happened to be Bengalis linguistically, they, combined with the Bengali Hindus, constituted a still larger Bengali population. The increase of Bengali population in the province appeared to be a 'threat' to the socio-cultural and even political identity of the Assamese elite. After the partition of the country in 1947, the streams of Bengali refugees¹³ into Assam further reinforced this 'threat'. Even suspicion grew among the Assamese elite that infiltration and immigration into Assam had been carried out with the ulterior motive to make Assam a part of 'Greater Bengal' or Pakistan.¹⁴

In view of these, a section of the Assamese elite considered the question of citizenship as the 'question of life and death' of the Assamese people. *The Assam Tribune* and other articulate sections of the Assamese people harped on the theme of citizenship in respect of immigration and refugees who had migrated into Assam. They felt that the refugees and immigrant population were not making such a serious problem in any other province in India except Assam. The Assamese elite, therefore, pleaded to get necessary provisions adopted in the Constitution in the light of Assam's peculiar conditions in order to safeguard her 'future political destiny'.¹⁵ *The Assam Tribune* thus asserted:

The states must have the power to define the conditions of the acquisition of domicile in accordance with their own peculiar problems. An Indian citizen cannot automatically claim all the *civil and political rights* throughout the Indian

Union. The right of an Indian citizen will be exclusive of the rights of domicile in a particular state.¹⁶

The obvious implication of such arguments of the Assamese elite was that if the determination of citizenship right was not vested with the provinces, their political power might pass into the hands of the immigrants under adult franchise; and they might cease to be a dominant group in Assam. For this reason, the Assamese elite were very much concerned about the grant of citizenship to every category of people. But it seems that they were prepared to allow a certain number of the immigrants to come and stay, assimilating the Assamese culture, but not to influence the political framework and power structure of the state. The Assamese elite apprehended that if the citizenship right was extended en block to the immigrants, then the Assamese people would be dispossessed of their political position within the state in course of time. Further, they believed that the principle of single citizenship might encourage more immigrants into the state. Already a large part of the trade and business was in the hands of the outsiders. Besides, they (non-Assamese) occupied important positions in the professions and services. The Assamese elite wanted to expand their share in business, profession and government jobs. (In fact, they wanted to insulate themselves from outside competition.) If this was not done, "the Assamese people," *The Assam Tribune* said, "will be relegated to the position of drawers of water and hewers of wood in their own home."¹⁷

The Assamese elite, therefore, sought, to receive certain reservations regarding the application of citizenship right in the case of Assam.¹⁸ In fact, they did not want that all categories of people should be allowed to enjoy the right of citizenship in Assam. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury argued:

"If you wish to govern a province properly you should always try to see that the balance of the population is not so much disturbed and you should see that you do not give citizenship to persons whose presence in that province would

be undesirable and prejudicial to the interest of the dominion of India.”¹⁹

It is remarkable that the Assamese intelligentsia justified their claim for a dual citizenship from the point of view of national unity. It would not be possible, they argued, to achieve Indian unity by antagonizing the distinct sociocultural and regional groups. Thus the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, in a plea for dual citizenship, maintained:

Dual citizenship will be a source of strength rather than weakness to the Union or federation. Such provision will also remove the legitimate fears of smaller and weaker linguistic, cultural and racial units about domination or suppression by other.²⁰

It seemed to the Assamese elite that the new Constitution did not preclude the scope of exploitation within the country by sections of Indians belonging to stronger units upon other Indians of the weaker units. Therefore, they emphasised the need for the protection of smaller linguistic, cultural and racial units even for the strength of the federation. If they were not adequately safeguarded, the Assamese elite thought, a sense of dissatisfaction would develop in them. Consequently, they might think in terms of disunity rather than unity. Hence the Assamese leaders argued that a single citizenship would be an incentive to the subversive and disintegrating forces. The ostensible reason of this desire for dual citizenship was, as *The Assam Tribune* put it, “to provide a stable equilibrium for centrifugal and centripetal forces.”²¹ Ambikagiri Roychaudhury, the general secretary of the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, in an official statement published in *The Assam Tribune*, expressed the apprehension that while the provision of the Constitution relating to citizenship would not help to win over the Assamese people, it would give “a spur to the activities of the fifth columnists and those having fissiparous tendencies.”²² He clarified his stand further as follows:

“Assam being strategically the most important frontier bastion of the Union, at least in the interest of the security of India from Pakistan on the one hand and the Burmese and Chinese communist elements on the other, the Assamese people should have been given the fullest measure of contentment by the provision of the new Constitution. That is why, the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha timely suggested the inclusion of provisions for dual citizenship in the Constitution.”²³

Thus in a bid to stake for dual citizenship, the Assamese elite even went to the extent of arguing that since Assam was a border state, the “fullest measure of contentment” should be ensured to her people, otherwise some of them might go either under the influence of the Communists, who were found to be active in the neighbouring countries, or ‘subversive elements, infiltrated to Assam from Pakistan. This, in turn, they thought, would further jeopardise the integration of India. But it seems that they utilised this argument more as a ‘pressure tactics’ than what they actually felt, in order to convince the national leaders about their ‘legitimate’ claim for a dual citizenship as a means of safeguarding Assamese identity.

By and large, while stressing on unity, the Assamese leaders thought it worthwhile that the central leadership must not forget that different nationalities in India based on distinct language and culture were real entities of Indian federation, and measures to protect them from extermination were certainly not incompatible with the ideal of national unity. “A fully centralized government,” *The Assam Tribune* argued, “which does not take any notice of different cultures and languages, can never be placed on sure foundation in this country.”²⁴ “The very basis of a federation,” *The Assam Tribune* said, “is a desire for union without unity.”²⁵ Undoubtedly there was some logic in these arguments. In fact, the Assamese elite felt insecure of their distinct identity on the basis of Assamese language and culture within the broad framework of Indian federation.

The basic problem of safeguarding the Assamese identity was somehow to control and limit, if not altogether stop,

immigration to the province. A strong Central Government having absolute control over the issue of citizenship implied in sense that the state alone could not restrict immigration. The Assamese elite, therefore, sought to check both immigration and refugee influx by suggesting the idea of dual citizenship which is a peculiarity of classical federations. If the state could control immigration to some extent, they thought, the Assamese language and culture could be preserved. Connected with this was the problem of political power. The Assamese elite felt worried lest the influx should also transform the character of the political power in Assam. In fact, they apprehended that if no distinction was made between the State citizenship and the citizenship of the Union, the non-Assamese people might dominate over the Assamese culturally, economically and even politically.

III

The Articles 275 to 280²⁶ of the Draft Constitution relating to emergency powers of the Centre also evoked a lot of resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. The Drafting Committee intended to give the Centre full power to control and direct all aspects of administration and legislation throughout the country in the event of a national emergency. It may be noted that Article 276 of the Draft Constitution empowered the Union Government to issue directions to State Governments as to the manner in which their executive authority would be exercised during the period of emergency. Further, it had also empowered the Union Parliament to make laws on State Subjects and even to alter the provisions of the Constitution relating to the distribution of certain heads of revenue between the Centre and the States in an emergency.²⁷ Apart from these, Article 278 dealt with the powers of the President according to which he could intervene in the affairs of a state if, either on the basis of a report of the governor or otherwise, he was satisfied that a situation had arisen in which the Government of the States could not be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

The Assamese elite were naturally critical of these provisions of the Draft Constitution as these went against the spirit of provincial autonomy. They were apprehensive of the fact that in the name of an emergency, inroads might be made by the centre into the autonomy of the federating units. Kuladhar Chaliha characterised the emergency provisions as 'drastic' and maintained:

"It will have the effect of completely dislocating a province. In fact, I think Assam will be the first casualty. If you have the power to suspend the Constitution, then how will the provinces function? Under the pretext of this provision probably you will take all the finances to the Centre and we will have nothing left to the provinces. What will happen under this provision? On a certain date the Communists of Burma might come into the Eastern Frontier. Then under that pretext, an emergency will be declared and you will take all the powers."²⁸

Thus, it appears that the Assamese elite were worried about the loss of their autonomy during an emergency. Under the plea of emergency, they thought, the centre might go against the interest of the provinces. More importantly, the leaders of Assam held the view that such provisions of emergency, were not in keeping with the spirit of democratic federation. "It was neither in conformity with federation," they asserted, "nor was it likely to be administratively beneficial or even practicable." Muhammad Saadulla visualised the adverse effects of these provisions and argued :

"This will lead to a conflict often times between the centre and the provinces and instead of breathing an atmosphere of independence, freedom and liberty, we will be subject to the utmost interference from the centre and the President who is bound to go against the very peace, tranquility and contentment of the people."²⁹

The same feelings and anxieties were also voiced by the

immigration to the province. A strong Central Government having absolute control over the issue of citizenship implied in a sense that the state alone could not restrict immigration. The Assamese elite, therefore, sought to check both immigration and refugee influx by suggesting the idea of dual citizenship which is a peculiarity of classical federations. If the state could control immigration to some extent, they thought, the Assamese language and culture could be preserved. Connected with this was the problem of political power. The Assamese elite felt worried lest the influx should also transform the character of the political power in Assam. In fact, they apprehended that if no distinction was made between the State citizenship and the citizenship of the Union, the non-Assamese people might dominate over the Assamese culturally, economically and even politically.

III

The Articles 275 to 280²⁶ of the Draft Constitution relating to emergency powers of the Centre also evoked a lot of resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. The Drafting Committee intended to give the Centre full power to control and direct all aspects of administration and legislation throughout the country in the event of a national emergency. It may be noted that Article 276 of the Draft Constitution empowered the Union Government to issue directions to State Governments as to the manner in which their executive authority would be exercised during the period of emergency. Further, it had also empowered the Union Parliament to make laws on State Subjects and even to alter the provisions of the Constitution relating to the distribution of certain heads of revenue between the Centre and the States in an emergency.²⁷ Apart from these, Article 278 dealt with the powers of the President according to which he could intervene in the affairs of a state if, either on the basis of a report of the governor or otherwise, he was satisfied that a situation had arisen in which the Government of the States could not be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

The Assamese elite were naturally critical of these provisions of the Draft Constitution as these went against the spirit of provincial autonomy. They were apprehensive of the fact that in the name of an emergency, inroads might be made by the centre into the autonomy of the federating units. Kuladhar Chaliha characterised the emergency provisions as 'drastic' and maintained:

"It will have the effect of completely dislocating a province. In fact, I think Assam will be the first casualty. If you have the power to suspend the Constitution, then how will the provinces function? Under the pretext of this provision probably you will take all the finances to the Centre and we will have nothing left to the provinces. What will happen under this provision? On a certain date the Communists of Burma might come into the Eastern Frontier. Then under that pretext, an emergency will be declared and you will take all the powers."²⁸

Thus, it appears that the Assamese elite were worried about the loss of their autonomy during an emergency. Under the plea of emergency, they thought, the centre might go against the interest of the provinces. More importantly, the leaders of Assam held the view that such provisions of emergency, were not in keeping with the spirit of democratic federation. "It was neither in conformity with federation," they asserted, "nor was it likely to be administratively beneficial or even practicable." Muhammad Saadulla visualised the adverse effects of these provisions and argued :

"This will lead to a conflict often times between the centre and the provinces and instead of breathing an atmosphere of independence, freedom and liberty, we will be subject to the utmost interference from the centre and the President who is bound to go against the very peace, tranquility and contentment of the people."²⁹

The same feelings and anxieties were also voiced by the

Assamese Press *The Assam Tribune*, for example, characterised the provisions on emergency powers as 'a retrograde step' as it reproduced section 83 of the Act of 1935, although in the meantime the political situation had completely changed. The purpose of those provisions during the British period, *The Assam Tribune* observed, was political;³⁰ and its object was to ensure that the Constitution was not used in such a way as to compel the British Government to part with more powers than it was prepared to give the people of India. But in free India, the Assamese elite felt, there was no such need, as there was no possibility of such an antagonism. The Assamese leaders, however, agreed that the duty of the central government was to see that the government of the province was being carried on "in accordance with the provisions of the constitution." But the Drafting Committee, they complained, was thinking "not of peace and tranquillity of the country, but of good government in the provinces."³¹ In effect, *The Assam Tribune* apprehended that:

If the central government is dominated by one party and a few unit governments are run by another party, then it might be possible for the centre under pretext of emergency to ride rough shod over the units.³²

Thus the Assamese elite were convinced that the provisions of the Draft Constitution, relating to emergency powers of the centre, would reduce provincial autonomy to a farce. Under these provisions, they believed, the centre would encroach upon the jurisdiction of the states according to its own convenience so as to serve the interest of the dominant group at the Central Legislature. Therefore, they felt agitated against this 'paramountcy' of the Centre. By and large, their chief anxiety was, lest the Union Government should take away all the important powers of the provinces under the pretext of emergency.

IV

The provision of a single 'Electoral Machinery' for the

country as a whole, is yet another indicator of the nature of a federation. The concept of uniform electoral machinery, naturally therefore, drew the attention of the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly. It may be noted that the original idea was to have separate Election Commissions for the States and the Union with their respective jurisdictions.³³ Accordingly, the State Election Commission was to have independent authority in the sphere of preparation of electoral rolls and determination of qualification of the voters within the State. But subsequently, when the Article 289 of the Draft Constitution came up for discussion in the Constituent Assembly on June 15, 1949, this Article was substituted by a new Article which made comprehensive provision for a 'Central Election Commission' to be in charge of all central and state elections. The new Article laid down that the Central Election Commission would be responsible for the conduct of all elections to Parliament and Legislatures of every state.

The Assamese representatives in the Constituent Assembly were critical of this amendment. They held the view that it would be an infringement of the rights of the Units if such an overriding authority was given to the Union in matters relating to elections, particularly to the State legislatures.³⁴ Indeed, they wanted that the Election Commissions appointed for the states should be as independent as the Central Election Commission. In a bid to emphasise on an independent Election Commission for the states, they even went to the extent of arguing that the provisions for a centralized election machinery indicated a tendency of moving "away from the idea of federation"³⁵ leading to "undesirable result." In this connection, Kuladhar Chaliha, for example, argued:

"This Election Commission would not be able to realise the feelings of the people of different parts of the country. How can a man in Madras understand the feelings and sentiments of a man in Assam or Bengal? You are doing something which will have a disintegrating effect and will accentuate differences instead of solving them. If you

suspect the provinces and take greater powers for the centre it will only lead to undesirable results. I submit this thing (powers on Election Commission) should not be taken out of the provinces.”³⁶

Thus it appears that a uniform electoral policy, the Assamese elite felt, would not be suitable throughout the country as a whole, because the problems of various regions are characteristically different from each other. Particularly unlike any other States of India as noted earlier Assam had a peculiar demographic composition of its population belonging to diverse linguistic, ethnic, cultural, religious and sub-regional groups. Due to this fact, the Assamese elite perhaps thought that the question of (i) representation of diverse elements to the State Legislature and (ii) right of franchise to be granted to them had acquired special consideration. But under a centralized election machinery, the provincial government would have little say in the preparation of electoral rolls which might not protect the interest of the Assamese elite. In fact, they apprehended that if there was a single Election Commission for the whole country, all categories of people in Assam (including the immigrants) would enjoy equal right to exercise their franchise which would affect the political interest of the Assamese elite. Hence, a single electoral machinery for the whole of India, they argued, was a negation of the principle of provincial autonomy and democracy.

V

All these unitary trends in the proposed Constitution caused persistent fears and anxieties in the minds of the Assamese elite lest they should cease to be a dominant group in the province. After the partition, as already indicated, the centripetal forces had been gaining upper hand, so much so that there was justified fear that provincial autonomy would be jeopardised leading to a threat to the interest of the dominant group in Assam. It was a settled fact that India was going to have a federation of the Canadian type in which residuary powers were to be left to the centre. It seemed to

the Assamese elite that in a federation of this type, the big units like Rajasthan, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would be in an advantageous position to dominate over the central Legislature; on the other hand, a small unit like Assam might find herself lost in it. What they really believed was that under the proposed Constitution the weaker units would be "pushed to the wall to the gradual extinction" of their distinct character and culture, besides being relegated to the position of 'have nots' economically. For these reasons, they cogently argued Assam's case for a weaker federal centre and larger quantum of provincial autonomy. In fact, their basic intention was to make their province a prosperous one with the Assamese people as the dominant group in the province.

REFERENCES

1. Perhaps for this reason the members from Assam in the Constituent Assembly could not adequately focus the sentiment of the Assamese public in regard to the principle of citizenship.
2. See, *Dainik Asamiya*, February 29, 1948; and Presidential address *Sodou Asom Ahom Sabha*, Borpather Session (Dibrugarh), March 27, 28, 1948 (Printed in a booklet form).
3. *A Plea for Dual Citizenship: Appeal to the Members of the Indian Constituent Assembly*. A booklet published by *Asom Jatiya Mahasabha*, Gauhati, July 22, 1949.
4. In order to mould the public opinion in this direction, the Jatiya Mahasabha organized a public meeting at Gauhati on April 4, 1948. (Reported in the *Dainik Asamiya*, April 5, 1948).
5. *A Plea for Dual Citizenship*, op. cit.
6. *ibid.*
7. *The Assam Tribune*, March 23, 1948 (emphasis added).
8. See, chapter I, pp. 25-29.
9. *Census Report of India (Assam)*, 1931, Vol. III, Part I, p. 49.
10. Harendranath Barua: "The Development Scheme: Position of indigenous People", *The Assam Tribune*, August 29, 1941.
11. Harendranath Barua, "Reflections on Assam-cum-Pakistan", op. cit.
12. See chapter I, pp. 33-38.
13. The Census Report, 1951, put the number of refugees in Assam at 2,74,455. [*Census of India (Assam)*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part I(A), p. 357].

14. In a letter to the Editor, *The Assam Tribune*, Bhuban Chandra Dutta, a member of the Assamese gentry from Jorhat expressed this feeling and maintained: "This infiltration was carried on for a long time to include Assam in 'Greater Bengal' and the influx has become greater in recent months. The dream of including Assam in Pakistan may be materialised in the near future if special provision in the Constitution of India regarding the rights of franchise cannot be provided for Assam." (*The Assam Tribune*, April 9, 1948).
15. *ibid.*, June 9, 1948.
16. *ibid.*, May 31, 1948 (emphasis added).
17. *ibid.*, April 1, 1948. Further, *The Assam Tribune* maintained that "Assam is facing a crisis as never before. The stage is fully set to deprive the Assamese people of their political rights. It is right time for Assam's representatives in the Constituent Assembly to act firmly to save the country." (*ibid.*, April 9, 1949.)
18. On the floor of the Constituent Assembly, Kuladhar Chaliha said: "We have been receiving telegrams from Assam that we are leading towards ruin. Probably every member here has received them from Assam, saying that we should apply this principle with a little reservation, that this definition of citizenship should be applied with a little reservation in Assam, and that this Constitution should take note of this." (*CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 642.)
19. *ibid.*, pp. 414-15.
20. *A Plea for Dual Citizenship*, *op. cit.*
21. *The Assam Tribune*, March 23, 1948.
22. *ibid.*, November 28, 1949.
23. *ibid.*
24. *ibid.*, March 23, 1948.
25. *ibid.*, October 17, 1947.
26. *Select Document*: III, 6, Article, pp. 587-88.
27. *ibid.*, III, 4, pp. 280-281.
28. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 515.
29. *ibid.*, p. 733.
30. *The Assam Tribune*, October 19, 1949.
31. *ibid.*
32. *ibid.*
33. *Draft Report*: *Select Document* 11, 4 (iii), p. 130.
34. *CAD*, Vol. VIII, p. 919.
35. *ibid.*, p. 915.
36. *ibid.*, p. 919,

Conclusion

It is generally believed that during the period when the Constitution was being framed, there was a consensus and even near unanimity in the country in favour of a strong central government. Thus, Granville Austin, one of the leading specialists on the study of Indian Constitution, has asserted that in the Constituent Assembly there was a "relative absence of conflict between the centralizers and the provincialists."¹ And even other scholars² who have worked on India's Political system and constitution seem to ignore the fact that there was a powerful but unorganized group in the Constituent Assembly who was in favour of more powerful provincial governments. These scholars seem to have arrived at this conclusion on the basis of an analysis either of the final voting on various Articles of the Draft Constitution or of the speeches of the prominent leaders of the Constituent Assembly.

This study, however, has come up with data which indicate the existence of another trend in the Constituent Assembly, i.e., a trend in favour of larger powers to the units. Though it is conceded that none of the top leaders of the Congress was in favour of a strong *states' rights principles*, it does not follow that the Constituent Assembly as a whole was in favour of a strong Centre. Indeed, there were many members from some states who were in favour of stronger provincial government. Of course, it is true that the groups in favour of powerful provincial government were not sufficiently organised.³ They, therefore, failed to press their point of view effectively. But nevertheless, this tendency in the direction of a larger share of power for states existed, albeit in an unorganized form. This study shows that the present centrifugal tendencies and urges for larger regional autonomy in some regions of the country are not new. There was already a fairly strong sense of provincialism and even centrifugal tendencies in some areas of the country while the Constitution was being framed. In the

post-independence era, things have changed only to the extent that the latent and inarticulate but fairly widespread regional feelings have been able to find greater expression and articulation. This study has, of course, been confined only to an understanding of the attitude of the Assamese elite towards federal polity in India. In the late forties, when the Constitution was on the anvil, the Assamese elite exerted their influence in favour of a strong provincial government and relatively a weak central authority.

Ever since the British occupation, there had been a continuous flow of non-Assamese Indians into Assam from other parts of the country, particularly from Bengal. The Bengali immigrants happened to be both Hindus as well as Muslims. As such, immigration created two major socio-political problems in Assam: (i) provoked the Assamese-Bengali tension on linguo-cultural question and (ii) increased the numerical strength of the Muslims in the province threatening the dominant position of the Assamese caste Hindu elite. Thus, the Assamese elite found themselves in constant fear and anxiety of being gradually dominated by the Bengalis both culturally and politically. Secondly, the Muslim immigration began to be viewed as a calculated move to turn Assam into a Muslim majority province so that she could qualify herself for inclusion into the erstwhile East Pakistan. Even after the partition the unabated stream of refugees further accentuated the fears and anxieties of the Assamese elite about their distinct identity.

Besides, the history of financial relationship with the centre had, from Assam's point of view, been far from satisfactory. It had been marked by a constant and long-standing sense of grievances. Whether real or perceived, the feeling of having suffered from injustice and neglect from the Government of India was very much in their minds. It seemed to the Assamese elite that the most important cause for Assam's underdevelopment had been the centre's control over the economy of Assam for a long time, indeed, throughout the period of British rule. This had led only to a bitter controversy between Assam and the centre but even a sense of helplessness and frustration among the Assamese elite. Therefore,

sometimes, a strong anti-centre, if not anti-national, attitude emerged among a section of the Assamese elite.

In the tug of war with the centre, together with the growing threat of being swamped by immigrants; the Assamese elite became increasingly assertive of their socio-political and economic rights in order to safeguard what they called the 'legitimate Assamese interests' such as—(i) protection of the Assamese people from the socio-political dominance of the non-Assamese, particularly the Bengalis (ii) prevention from the 'negligence' of a domineering centre. As a measure of protection of their 'legitimate interests' they wanted a greater degree of provincial autonomy. In view of this, the provisions of the Draft Constitution which had strong bias in favour of the centre created a considerable resentment in the minds of the Assamese elite. The provisions, particularly relating to division of subjects in the three Lists—Central, State and Concurrent; appointment of state governors by the centre; allocation of financial resources between the centre and the states; declaration of emergency; the principle of single citizenship received sustained criticism from the Assamese elite. It appeared to them that under the proposed provisions of the Draft Constitution the Union Parliament was made too strong which would be dominated by the bigger states. And as a result, the Assamese elite thought, the interest of small states like Assam would not be well-projected. For this reason, they wanted to limit the powers of the centre.

But it is interesting to note that the Assamese elite did not completely ignore the necessity of a strong central government. What they generally pleaded was that the centre should not be made strong 'at the cost of the provinces'. In fact, they advocated for what they called an 'equitable' and 'balanced' distribution of powers between the centre and the states in order to provide, as *The Assam Tribune* put it, "a stable equilibrium between centrifugal and centripetal forces."⁴ They held the view that the central authority must sufficiently be strong to hold the subordinate units together, but just that strong and no more. At the same time, however, they wanted that these units must also be strong and must have a large functional area of jurisdiction capable of asserting themselves in pursuit of their exclusive

sphere. This was the main dilemma in the attitude of the Assamese elite towards federal polity in India. They wanted strong provincial governments and at the same time felt the need for the establishment of a strong central authority. It seems that this dilemma was created by the partition of the country and the creation of a foreign state on the very threshold of Assam. It is true that on the one hand they were happy to be a part of India, but at the same time they were afraid that the people of the thickly populated neighbouring states of the Indian Union may spill over into Assam. Their desire for a strong India arose from the fact that they felt anxiety about the possible danger from Pakistan and the threat of the Communists from across the Burmese and the Chinese borders. For this reason, possibly they wanted a sufficiently strong centre to provide protection for Assam from any threat of foreign attack or invasion. It is curious that the Assamese elite did not see any contradiction in these two attitudes. If the point of power lies in the differential, then clearly both the centre and the states could not simultaneously be strong.

Again the Assamese elite pleaded that Assam should be given adequate financial power for her rapid economic development. They asserted that this would reinforce the security of the country as a whole. The economic development of Assam, they argued, was highly essential to make the people of this border state to be fully integrated with the rest of India. Unless this was done, they were afraid, some sections of the people of this province might become "agents of foreign powers" and subvert the political system of the country. Whether this was genuinely felt or was used as a pressure tactic is difficult to assess. But the point remains that they wanted a powerful provincial government with adequate financial resources.

Thus it seems evident, that there was an ambivalence in the feeling of Assamese elite. They felt the need for both a strong centre as well as a strong provincial government. For the strength of the centre, they opined, it was necessary to maintain the strength of the units. But their priority was clearly in favour of the provinces. In a leading article on September 5, 1949, *The Assam Tribune* argued that "the power of the centre

must follow from the units," which "in the *first place* must be made strong and powerful."⁵ It may, therefore, be assumed that the Assamese elite were thinking of a model of classical federation of the United States of America where such has been the federalizing process. It is quite clear that their conception of the strength of the centre was rather different from that embodied in the Draft Constitution. In fact, they did not want that the central government should be made responsible for everything. They repeatedly pleaded that for the strength of the centre it was necessary to endow the states with adequate powers in a large area of action.

It is, of course, true that from the point of view held by the Assamese elite, the need for strong states is not necessarily exclusive of the need for a strong centre. Thus, Gopinath Bordoloi asserted that Assam did not want a weak Centre.⁶ All that she wanted was a centre which would not become so powerful as to throw overboard the state authority. But it is possible that they may have said so for two reasons. In the first place, they were having a genuine dilemma: the interest of a centre strong enough to defend Assam, but at the same time a centre weak enough not to be able to overawe the states. But clearly it seems that where the interests of the two came in conflict, the interest of the state seemed to carry greater weight in their mind. Nevertheless, their basic concern is clear and it emerges almost in every statement or speech which the Assamese leaders and their press made, and this was the concern in favour of a strong state government.

On balance, therefore, it emerges that their basic objective was to have the largest measure of provincial autonomy. But they had not as yet organized themselves into a powerful lobby capable of gaining this objective. This was mainly due to the fact that the 'Assamese nationalism' had merged in the Indian Nationalism since 1921 and had thus lost its distinct organized identity. The problem was that in Delhi during 1946-49, unlike in the case of the Philadelphia Convention, most of the members of the Constituent Assembly were organized as one major party and the few small groups were bound to follow party discipline. The Assamese elite had, therefore, to toe the Congress party line in voting, whatever they might say in their

speeches. But whenever they could they tried to press their basic particularistic urge. Thus, it seems obvious that although they talked of both a strong centre and strong provincial governments what they really meant was a strong provincial government with a relatively weak central authority.

This discussion was started by referring to Granville Austin's point that there was a "relative absence of conflict between the centralizers and provincialists,"⁷ in the Constituent Assembly. It has been found that he has probably erred in taking note only of the statements of the top national leaders and to voting behaviour while arriving at this conclusion. But in a situation of party discipline, voting behaviour cannot provide guidance for examining the various under-currents of thinking of a society or its various members. A careful study of the debates of the Constituent Assembly, the Assam Legislative Assembly and the pronouncements of Assamese press, of that period, leads us to the conclusion that there was a strong, though unorganized, feeling among the Assamese elite in favour of state autonomy while the Constitution was being framed.

This study, therefore, establishes a new thesis which might perhaps be further tested by taking the attitude of the elite of other regions of the country to this question.

REFERENCES

1. Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: A Corner Stone of a Nation*, Oxford, 1966, p. 186.
2. We may refer to Ashok Chanda, *Federalism in India* (Oxford, 1968); Palmer, D. Norman, *The Indian Political System*, 2nd ed, (New York 1971); S.P. Aiyar, *Federalism and Social Change*, (Bombay, 1961); S.P. Aiyar and Usha Mehta (ed), *Essays on Indian Federalism*, (Bombay, 1965); R. Coondoo, *The Division of Powers in the Indian Constitution*, (Calcutta, 1964) S.A. Haggi (ed), *Union-State Relations in India*, (Meerut, 1967); A. Krishnaswami, *The Indian Union and the States: A Study in Autonomy and Integration* (London, 1963); Amal Ray, *Inter Governmental Relations in India* (Bombay, 1966); etc.
3. As a result of the emergence of strong Muslim communalism, many regional groups felt threatened by it and submerged themselves

in the larger Indian nationalism. Such organizations which they previously had, were merged in the Congress. At the time of independence, therefore, these regional groups were not sufficiently organized.

4. *The Assam Tribune*, June 20, 1949.
5. *ibid.*, September 5, 1949 (emphasis added).
6. *CAD*, Vol. IX, p. 229.
7. Granville Austin, *op. cit.*

APPENDIX-I

MEMBERS IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY FROM ASSAM

7 General Members (Congress)

Members nominated by Congress:

- (1) Gopinath Bordoloi, Premier of Assam.
- (2) Basanta Kumar Das, Home Minister, Assam.
- (3) J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Minister, Assam (Christian).
- (4) Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, M.L.A., Central (former Minister, Assam).
- (5) Omeo Kumar Das, M.L.A., Provincial (Kuladhar Chaliha was elected in lieu of Omeo Kumar Das after two sittings of the Assembly).
- (6) Dharanidhar Basumatari, M.L.A., Provincial.
- (7) Akshay Kumar Das, M.L.A., Provincial.

3 Muslim Members

- (1) Muhammad Saadulla, M.L.A., Provincial (For Premier of Assam).
- (2) Abdul Matin Chaudhury, M.L.A., Provincial (Former Minister of Assam).
- (3) Abdul Hamid, M.L.A., Provincial.

Members of Different Communities

(1) Hindus (excluding Scheduled Castes).....	4
(2) Scheduled Castes1
(3) Muslims3
(4) Backward Tribes2
<hr/>	
Total	10

APPENDIX-II

REPRESENTATIVES FROM ASSAM WHO SERVED AS MEMBERS OF THE DIFFERENT COMMITTEES OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

1 Muhammad Saadulla

- Member ... Steering Committee
,, ... Advisory Committee
,, ... Minorities Committee.
,, ... Drafting Committee.

2. Gopinath Bordoloi

- Chairman ... North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and
Assam, Excluded and partially Excluded
Areas Sub-Committee.
Member ... Rules of Procedure Committee.
,, ... Advisory Committee on Fundamental
Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded
Areas.

3. Rohini Kumar Chaudhury

- Member ... Provincial Constitution Committee.

4. J.J.M. Nichols Roy

- Member ... Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights,
Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas.
,, ... North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and
Assam, Excluded and partially Excluded
Areas Sub-Committee.

5. Akshay Kumar Das

- Member ... House Committee.

**Persons from Assam who were not Constituent Assembly Mem-
bers but served as Members of the Committees:**

6. Rupnath Brahma

- Member ... North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and
Assam, Excluded and partially Excluded
Areas Sub-Committee.

1	2	3
1891/Nagpur	Meghanath Banerji	Medical Practitioner, Joypur, Dibrugarh.
1892/Allahabad	Durgakanta Ray	Dhubri
	Bholanath Barooah	Merchant, Gauhati
	Lakshminath Bezbarua, B.A.	Editor, 'Jonaki'.
	Radhanath Changkakati	Secretary, Upper Assam Association.
1893, 1894, 1897, 1899 and 1902	None	—
1895, 1896 and 1898	Not checked.	—
1901/Calcutta	Hariprasad Nath	Muktear, Goalpara
	Basanta Kumar Chaudhury, M.A.	Head Master, Goalpara School.
	Lakshminath Bezbarua	Jorhat Sarva-janik Sabha,
1903/Madras	Chandra Kamal Bezbarua	Jorhat
	Bhabani Kanta Das	Pleader, Dhubri.
1905	N.A.	N.A.
	Lakshminath Bezbarua	Calcutta, Merchant.
1906/Calcutta	T.R. Phookan	Calcutta, Barrister.
	C. Barooah	Assam Association
	Hariprasad Nath	Muktear, Goalpara.
	Mukundalal Dasgupta	Pleader, Goalpara.
	S.N. Haldar, Bar-at-Law	Barrister, Goalpara.
	Durgadas Das	Pleader, Dhubri.

1	2	3
	Abdul Aziz	Religious preacher, Goalpara.
1907	Nagpur Session was not held.	—
1908-16	None on record.	—
1917/Calcutta	S.C. Bagchi, Bar-at-Law	Planter, Tengakhata.
	Debendranath Bezbarua, B.L.	Pleader, Jorhat.
	Bhabaniprasad Barua	T.E. Manager Sibsagar.
	Gopalchandra Dutta	Manager, Borashali T.E. Sapekhati.
	Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, B.L.	
	Ratneswar Dasgupta	Lawyer, Mangaldai,
	Bistuprasad Chaliha	T.E. Manager.
	Sadananda Dowerah, B.L.	—
	Kanakchandra Sarma	—
	Chandra Kamal Bezbarua	Tea Planter.
	Umesh Chandra Das	Merchant, Barpeta.
	Bachalal Borah	Zamindar, Dibrugarh.
	Brahmananda Dutta	Pleader, Golaghat.
	(All representing Assam Association)	
1918/Delhi	Nabin Chandra Bordoloi	Assam Association.
1919/Amritsar	Nabin Chandra Bordoloi	Kamrup Association.
	Ambikanath Borah	
1920/Nagpur	Nabin Chandra Bordoloi	—
	Kanak Chandra Sarma and others.	—

1921/Ahmedabad Chandranath Sarma
Gopinath Bordoloi
Jyotiprasad Agarwala
and fifteen others.

Source: Reports of the annual Session of Indian National Congress, 1886-1921; and Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report (Sept., 1925), pp.55-57 for the year 1920.

Bholanath Barooah was elected as delegate from Tezpur in absentia to the Ahmedabad Congress (1902). See. *Bezbaruar Dinalekha* (Maheswar Neog, ed. Jorhat, 1969), p. 169. Apparently, he did not attend. (Cited from Amalendu Guha *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, Op. cit., Appendix 6, pp. (343-45)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Bibliography is arranged under the following heads:

1. Primary Sources

A. Documents—(i) Debates (ii) Reports (iii) Memoranda
(iv) Miscellaneous documents.

B. Booklets and Pamphlets

C. Periodicals and Newspapers

II. Secondary Sources

A. Books

B. Articles and Research Papers

PRIMARY SOURCES

A. Documents

(i) Debates:

Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, (1946-49).

Assam Legislative Council Debates, Select years.

Council of States Debates, (1946-47).

Constituent Assembly Debates, All Volumes (1946-50).

Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. Third Series, Vol. CXLVI, London (1857).

Indian Parliamentary Debates, Vol. II, Part 11 (1950)

(ii) Reports:

Assam Banking Enquiry Committee Report (Shillong), 1929-30. Vol. 2.

Assam Congress Parliamentary Party Annual Report, (1948-49).

Assam University Enquiry Report, Assam Government Press, Shillong (1936).

Indian Financial Enquiry Committee (Otto Niemeyer) Report, (1936).

Land Revenue Administration Report of Assam, Government of Assam, Shillong (1939-40), Appendix -IV.

Report of the Expert Committee on Financial Provision of the Constitution (1947).

Report of the Financial Relations (Meston) Committee, (1920).

Report of the Federal Finance Committee (Percy Committee), (1932).

Report of the Finance Commission (First) (1952).

Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (Simon Commission), (1930).

Report of the Line System Committee, Assam Government Press, Shillong, (1938).

Report of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919).

Report of the Parliamentary Committee for Reform Scheme (1918).

Report of the Provincial Constitution Committee, (Constituent Assembly of India, June-July 1947).

Report of the States Reorganization Commission (1955).

Report of the Union Constitution Committee (Constituent Assembly of India, July 1947).

Report of the Union Powers Committee (Constituent Assembly of India, July-August 1947).

Report of the Province of Assam (Calcutta, 1854), A.J.M. Mills.

(iii) Memoranda:

All Assam Ahom Association: A memorandum on the Ahoms as a minority—by the Ahom Minority Rights Sub-Committee (July 2, 1941).

Case of the Great Assamese people and of their Homeland Assam: Memorandum on behalf of the 'Asom Jatiya Mahasabha' to the members, All India Congress Working Committee and all India Congress Committee, New Delhi (June 9, 1946).

Demands of the Tribal Communities of Assam: A memorandum issued by the Conference of leaders of Tribal Committees of Assam, Shillong (July, 1946).

Memorandum to Bharatratna Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, New Delhi (October 22, 1972).

Memorandum demanding a Separate Autonomous Unit of Upper Assam Districts of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar, submitted to the Home Minister of India, on behalf of the All Assam Ahom Association, (August 2, 1967).

Memorandum demanding a Separate State or a Federating Unit comprising the two Upper Assam Districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, Government of India, on behalf of the Ahom Tai Mongoliya Rajya Parishad, New Delhi, (April 17, 1968).

Memorandum submitted to the British Parliamentary Delegation by the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha (January 29, 1946).

Memorandum submitted to the All India Congress Committee by Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (May 31, 1946).

Memorandum submitted by the Government of Assam to the Central Government (October 24, 1947).

Memorandum submitted to the Government of India by the Government of Assam (February 6, 1950).

Memorandum submitted by the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha to the Honourable Sri Prakash, Minister of Scientific Research and Natural Resources, Government of India, and President, Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee, Cam; : Gauhati (July 4, 1951).

Memorandum submitted to Prime Minister of India by the Mizo National Front, New Delhi (October 30, 1965).

Memorandum submitted to the President of India by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, New Delhi (May 20, 1967).

Memorandum submitted to the States Reorganization Commission—by Asom Jatiya Mahasabha Gauhati (May 20, 1954).

Memorandum of the United Mizo Freedom Organization, submitted to the Secretary, States Reorganization Commission New Delhi (May 28, 1954).

(iv) Miscellaneous Documents:

Assam Gazette, 1937.

Census of India (Assam), Vol. III (1891); Vol. III (1931); Vol. III (1941) ; Vol. XII (1951).

Draft Constitution of India (1948).

Indian (Mitra's) Annual Register, Vol. II (1931).

Minutes : Select Document, II 19, 21 (ii).

Presidential Address: All Assam Ahom Sabha, Golden Jubilee Session, Sibsagar (1944).

Presidential Address: All Assam Ahom Sabha, (Dibrugarh) Session, (March 27, 1948).

Proceedings of the Executive Committee of All Assam Ahom Sabha (Manuscript), Sibsagar (September 29, 1944).

Rural Economic Survey in Nowgong, Assam: Economics and Statistics Department, Shillong (1956).

Sabhapati Abhivashan: Samajik aru Arthanoitik Sakha, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Seventeenth Session, Gauhati (1937).

B. Booklets And Pamphlets:

Asome Bichare ki ? (Assamese). Published by Jatindranath Deori, on behalf of the Abhijan Prachar Sangha, Dibrugarh (August 25, 1947).

A Note on Assam's Stand Vis a Vis British Government's Statement of December 6, 1946 ; being an appeal to Congress Working Committee, Members of All India Congress Committee and Members of the Constituent Assembly, Published by Assam Provincial Congress Committee (December 9, 1946).

A Plea for Dual Citizenship: Appeal to Members of the Constituent Assembly—by Asom Jatiya Mahasabha; Gauhati (July 2, 1949).

Asomar Pamuwa aru Mati Bandabasti Samachya (Assamese) composed by H.N. Baruah, B.L. and Published by D.K. Barua, Member of the Assam Pradesh Congress and All India Congress Committee, Nowgong, (July 25, 1945).

Asomar Samachya aru Bhabichyat (Assamese); composed by H.N. Baruah, B.L. and Published by Monikanta Das, Member of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, Gauhati (February 1945).

Assam's Say and Suggestion: Assam Jatiya Mahasabha, Gauhati (July 4, 1951).

Case before the Constituent Assembly for the Unit of Assam—Appeal to the members of Indian Constituent Assembly—by Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, Gauhati (November 24, 1948).

Future Status of Assam: The speech of Padmeswar Gogoi delivered at the inaugural session of 'Assam Tribes and Races Federation', Shillong, March 22, 1945, Published by Rameswar Bora, General Secretary, All Assam Ahom Sabha, Jorhat (1945).

Juddhutor Parikalpana aru Asom (Assamese) By Prabudh Chandra Goswami, M.A. B.T. and Published by Chapala Book Stall, Shillong (1945).

Swadhin Asomar Raijak Ki Lage Aru Ki Paiche? (Assamese), composed by Prafulla Ch. Barua and Bhimsekhar Baruah, and published by Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati (January 27, 1948).

Sodow Asom Ahom Sabha Aru Sarba Doll (Assamese), (All Assam Ahom Sabha aru All peoples' Party), published by Ghana Kanta Gogoi, General Secretary of All Peoples' Party, Dibrugarh (February 1, 1949).

Whither Assam? Drifting to Civil War?: An urgent appeal to all parties and political workers of Assam, published by Assam Provincial Organizing Committee, Communist Party of India, Gauhati (December 8, 1944).

C. Periodicals and Newspapers:

Amrit Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), Select issues.

Ananda Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), Select issues.

Assam Bandhu, Calcutta, Select issues.

Asamiiya, Bi-Weekly, Weekly and Daily (Dibrugarh/later Gauhati) 1918-47.

Avahan (An Assamese Literary monthly Journal), Calcutta; 1936, 1937, 1940, 1941 and 1942.

Chetana (An Assamese monthly), Gauhati; 1919, 1920, 1924 and 1926.

Dainik Asamiiya (Gauhati), 1946, 1947 and 1948.

Dainik Batori, (Jorhat), select issues.

Deka Asom (An Anglo-Assamese Weekly), Gauhati; Select issues.

Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), Select issues.

India (Delhi), September Issue, 1944.

Shillong Times (Weekly), Shillong, Select Issues.

The Assam Tribune (an English daily now published from Gauhati which started in 1939. Till 1945, it was a weekly paper and published from Dibrugarh); 1939-1950.

(There was no local daily newspaper in the 19th Century and even during World War II. In fact, excepting for a few years, Assam had no local daily till the late forties of this century. Moreover, old files of Assamese Newspapers and other periodicals are not easily available.)

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

(A) Books:

- Austin, Granville : *The Indian Constitution : Cornerstone of a Nation*. (Oxford, 1966).
- Aiyar, S.P. : *Federalism and Social Change*. (Bombay, 1961).
- Aiyar, S.P. and Usha Mehta (ed.) : *Essays on Indian Federalism*, (Bombay, 1965).
- Acharyya, N.N. : *The History of Medieval Assam* (Gauhati, 1966).
- Baruah, H.N. : *Reflection on Assam-cum-Pakistan*, (Calcutta, 1944).
- Bhuyan, A.C. (ed) and De, S.P. : *Political History of Assam (1940-47)*, Vol. III, (Gauhati, 1980).
- Borpuzari, H.K. : *Assam: In the days of Company 1826-1885*, (Gauhati, 1964).
- Baruah, Hem : *The Red River and the Blue Hill*, (Gauhati, 1962).
- Chandra, Asok : *Federalism in India: A study of Union-State Relations* (London, 1965).
- Chaube, S.K. : *Hill Politics in North East India*, (Calcutta 1973).
- Coondoo, R. : *The Division of Powers in the Indian Constitution*, (Calcutta 1964).
- Dutta, K.N. : *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, (Gauhati, 1969).
- Gait, E.A. : *A History of Assam*, (Calcutta, 1963).
- Goswami, P.C. : *The Economic Development in Assam*, (Bombay, 1963).

- Gohain Baruah, P.N. : *Gohain Baruar Rachanavali*, (Gauhati, 1971).
- Goswami P.D. : *Manik Chandra Baruah*, (Gauhati, 1977).
- Guha, Amalendu : *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, (New Delhi, 1977).
- Haqqi, S.A.H. (ed.) : *Union-State Relations in India*, (Meerut, 1967).
- Krishnaswami, A. : *The Indian Union and the States : A Study in Autonomy and integration*. (London, 1964).
- Livingstone, William, S. : *Federalism in Commonwealth*, (London 1963).
- Mackenzie, A. : *A History of the Relation of the Government with Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1888).
- Muhammad, Tayyebulla : *Karagarar Cithi* (Gauhati, 1962).
- Morris-Jones, W.H. : *Parliament in India*, (London, 1957).
- Palmar, Norman D. : *The Indian Political System*, 2nd Ed. (London, 1971).
- Rao, B. Shiva : *The Framing of India's Constitution*, (New Delhi, 1968).
- Ray, Amal : *Inter-Governmental Relations in India*, (Calcutta, 1967).
- Raychaudhury, A.G. : *Deka-Dekerir Ved*, (Gauhati, 1958).

B. Articles and Research Papers

- Anonymous : "Assamese Nationalism: Indian Domination would be complete Annihilation", *The Assam Tribune* December 13, 1940.
- : "The Problem of Assam: Assamese Bengali Question" *The Assam Tribune*, November 15, 1940.
- Bora, Jnananath : "Asom Desh Aru Congress", (in Assamese) *Dainik Batori* (Jorhat), (October 24, 1937).

- : “Asom Desh Bharatbarshar Bhitarat Thakiba Kiya ?” (in Assamese), *Avahan*; Vol. II (1938).
- : “Asamiya Jati Jiyai Thakiba Ney ?” (in Assamese), *Avhan*, Vol. I, (1936),
- : “Bortaman Juddha Aru Asom” (in Assamese) *Avahan*, Vol. XII (1940).
- = : “Kamrup Aru Bharatbarsa” (in Assamese), *Avahan*, Vol. III, 1936.
- Baruah, Harendranath : “The Development Scheme: Position of indigenous people” (*The Assam Tribune*, August 29, 1941).
- Barua, Kashtavmoni : “Foreigners’ in Assam and Assamese Middle Class” *Social Scientist*, (June, 1980).
- Bhattacharyya, G.S. : “Pakistan and Assam”, *The Assam Tribune*, (November, 10, 1944).
- Chaube, S.K. : “Language Politics in Assam.” *North Eastern Affairs*, Shillong; (April-June 1973).
- Chaudhury, B.N. : “Assamese Nationality” *The Assam Tribune*, (September 29, 1939).
- Das, D.K. : “Asomat Swadhinata Samgramar Patani”, *Dainik Asamiya*, August 15 1947.
- Das, S.K. : “The Hindus of Assam: Are they a combination of Warring groups ?” *The Assam Tribune*, (May 3, 1940).
- Goswami, K.N. : “Assam’s Rubber Stamp Leadership” *The Assam Tribune*, (January 1948).
- Goswami, S.D. : “Refugees and Assam”, *The Assam Tribune*, May 27, 1949.
- Guha, Amalendu : “Immigrants and Autochthones in Plural Society : Their Inter-Relation in the Brahmaputra Valley in Historical Perspective”, *North East India A Sociological Study* (ed.) S.I. Dubey, (Delhi, 1977).

- "Impact of Bengal Renaissance on Assam (1825-1875)" *Economic and Social History Review* Vol. IX, 1972.
- "A Glimpse of Garo Politics," *North Eastern Affairs*, (Annual Number, 1973).
- Mazumder, D.N. : "The Defence of Assam" *The Assam Tribune*, (November 30 1947).
- Medhi, J.C. : "Assam: The Frontier Province", *The Assam Tribune*, (January 26, 1950).
- Prakasa, Sri : *Political and Socio-Cultural Determinants of Federalism in India*, Paper Presented at the Seminar "Political and Economic determinants of Federalism", (January 29-31, 1976 at the Punjab University, Chandigarh).
- Rasheeduddin Khan : *Position of the Governor and Centre-State Relation: Intention of the Constitution Makers—A Socio-Political Analysis*. Paper presented at the Seminar on Union-State Relations in India, (May 18-31, 1969 at the Institute of Advanced Study, Simla).
- Shanti Swarup

INDEX

- Act of 1935, 6, 87, 110, 142
 Ahom, 1, 45, 47, 52, 53, 54, 56, 67
 Ahom Sobha, 53, *See also* All Assam Ahom Association
 All Assam Ahom Association, 53, 55
 All Assam Plains Tribal League, 57, 59
 All Assam Tribes and Races Federation, 59, 60
 All Peoples Party, 54
 Ambedkar, B.R., 103
Amrita Bazar Patrika, 22
 Ao, T. Aliba Imti, 48, 63
Arunoday, 2
Asamiya 2, 4, 25
Asom Bilasini, 2
 Asom Chhatra Sammilan, 2
 Asom Jatiya Mahasabha, 5, 25, 29, 30, 47, 61-2, 63, 133, 134, 138
 Asom Sahitya Sabha, 3, 59
 Asom Samrakshini Sabha, 4, 5
 Assam, impact of Socio-Political issue on, 1-44; Demographic composition in, 8-9; Economic exploitation in, 33-4, 65
 Assam Association, 2, 3
 Assam Citizens' Association, 19
 Assam Legislative Council, 12, 16, 19, 26, 67, 99, 100, 112, 122, 152
 Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee, 29
 Assam Tribal Students Association, 61
Assam Tribune, 2, 4, 14-6, 23, 27-8, 30, 32, 51, 71-2, 84, 87-8, 101-4, 110-1, 119, 124, 126, 134, 136-9, 142, 149
 Assamese-Bengali tension, 11-13
 Assamese elite, 9, 35, 46, 51, 83, 87, 91, 95, 104, 109, 112, 114, 116, 119, 121, 124; and federalism, 1-3, 150; Demands of economic resource share, 126-8; and issue of citizenship, 132-42; and election 142-5
 Assamese language, 13, 18-19, 46, 53
Avahan, 2, 4, 63
 Azad, Maulana, 23
 Austin, Granville, 147, 152

Banhi, 2
 Barua, Harendranath, 13
 Barua, Manik Chandra, 5
 Baruah, B.K., 66
 Bezbaruah, Lakshminath, 2
 Bhattacharyya, G.S., 64
Bijulee, 2
Boga Bongal, 22
 Bongal Kheda Movement, 22
Bonti, 2
 Borah, Bolinarayan, 10
 Bordoloi, Gopinath, 6, 16, 25-6, 111, 122-3, 125-151
 Bordoloi, Nabin Chandra, 12
 Borpetta, 14, 21
 Brahma Chaudhury, Sitanath, 59, 64
 Brahmaputra Valley, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 21
 Brajeswar Prasad, 92, 93
 British Administration, 1, 2, 6, 10, 17, 48, 50, 57, 142
 Cabinet Mission Plan, 24, 25, 26, 48, 91

- Cachar, 6, 17, 27, 47
 Chaliha, Kuladhar, 67, 83, 141, 143
 Chaudhury, Abdul Matin, 14
 Chaudhury, Rohini Kumar, 86, 87,
 89, 90, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99,
 116, 123, 127, 137
Chetana, 2, 4
 Citizenship, 132-42
 Clow, Sir Andrew, 57
 Communist, 125
 Communist Party of India, 72, 126,
 139, 141
 Constituent Assembly, 25, 89, 92,
 97-102, 113-5, 127, 143, 147
 Constitution, India, 3, 5, 25, 73, 85,
 89-92, 97-102, 109, 113-120, 128,
 133-4, 139-43, 149
Dainik Asamiya, 4, 24, 71, 94, 110
Dainik Batori, 63
 Darrang, 6, 27
 Das, Basanta Kumar, 12
 Das, Omeo Kumar, 84, 114, 118
Deka Asom, 4, 5
 Desmukh, P.S., 93

 East Bengal, 11, 12, 135
 East Pakistan, 27-28, 29, 71, 85, 113
 Election, 132, 142-5

 Federalism, I ; and centrifugal and
 centripetal tendencies, 45-81 ;
 division of powers, 82-108 ;
 distribution of financial powers,
 109-131

 Gandhi, Mahatma, 55, 63, 64
 Garo Hill, 6, 27, 47
 Garo National Council (GNC), 49
 Goalpara, 6, 8, 17, 21, 23, 27
 Grouping Scheme, '1

 Hazarika, Jogendranath, 61

 Immigrants Expulsion Act, 28-9
 Immigration, 1, 7, 11, 12, 137, 140,
 148
India, 23
 Indian National Congress, 3, 6, 25,
 54, 58, 60, 62, 65, 66, 69, 70, 82,
 87, 96, 100
 Indian Statutory Commission, 31

 Jaintia, 6
 Janaki, 2
 Jinnah, M.A., 13, 55

 Kabir, Humayun, 23
 Kachari, Rabichandra, 59
 Kachari Sonmillan, 59
 Kamrup, 6, 21, 27
 Karbia, Durbar, 49
 Khasi Hill, 6, 27, 47, 123
 Khasi-Jayantia Political Association,
 49

 Lakhimpur, 6, 21, 27, 55
 Land Development Scheme, 13, 14,
 15, 16
 Linguo-cultural question, 13
 Lushai, 6, 47

 Mangaldoi, 14
 Medhi, Bishnuram, 32, 111, 112,
 113, 118, 122, 124
 Medhi, Jagadish Chandra, 71
 Mills, A.J.M., 11, 18
 Mizo Hill, 48
 Mizo Union, 49
 Mongoloid, 45, 47
 Montague-Chelmsford Reforms,
 109
 Mullan, C.S., 9, 21, 135
 Muslim League, 6, 25, 26, 46, 54,
 55, 58, 69, 71, 88, 123, 135-6;
 demand for Pakistan, 13-16, 82
 Mymensingh, 8, 11, 123

- Naga District Tribal Council, 48
 Naga Hill, 6, 47
 Naga National Council, 48, 51, 63,
 Narayani Handique Memorial
 Historical Institute, Gauhati, 66
Nation, 60
 Nationalism, 3, 21, 69, 70,
 Niemeyer, Sir Otto, 31, 110, 111
 Nowgong, 6, 15, 19, 21, 23

 Pakistan, 13-16, 24, 26, 27, 55, 58,
 59, 60, 67, 69, 71, 73, 82, 112,
 123, 125, 136, 139
 Phizo, Angami Zapu, 48
 Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial,
 11, 18
 Provincial autonomy, 85, 91, 93, 145

 Rajendra Prasad, 11
 Refugee problem, 28, 29
 Rouf, Maulavi Abdur, 15

 Roy, J.J.M. Nichols, 52, 90, 103,
 114, 117, 120
 Roy Chaudhury, Ambikagiri, 62, 63

 Saadulla, Muhammad, 6, 13-6, 16,
 26, 58, 94, 120-4, 135, 145
 Sarba Doll, 54
 Sarma, Mahadev, 12
Shillong Times, 62
 Sibsagar, 6, 27
 Sri Prakash, 29, 51, 65
 Surma Valley, 6, 23
 Sylhet, 6, 23

Times of Assam, 2

 United Mizo Freedom Organization,
 49
Usha, 2

 World War II, 52, 53, 113

1425 ne is meant to serve as a text-book for the student of Science and International Relations. It begins with a discussion of the nature, objectives, importance and limitations of diplomacy, which is intimately connected with foreign policy. There are subtle and basic differences between the two. These have been highlighted admirably. The value of propaganda in diplomacy has also been well assessed. The evolution of diplomacy from the ancient period up to the present day at the different phases in the stages of evolution have been demarcated. A systematic treatment of evolution of diplomacy in India in the early period is an interesting feature of the book. In pursuing effective diplomacy the diplomats play a very useful role. Various aspects of the career of a diplomat, his functions, the qualities essential for an ideal diplomat, factors that lead to his success or failure have been clearly brought out. In a world sharply divided into two ideological camps and faced with the bleak prospect of a nuclear holocaust, the future of diplomacy appears to be uncertain to many scholars. An attempt has been made to answer this dilemma in the last chapter of the book.

Dr Roy is Head of the Department of History, Bolpur College affiliated to Burdwan University.

POLITICAL THOUGHT OF HAROLD J. LASKI

G.N. Sarma

To understand and appreciate Laski in proper perspective it is necessary that the self-contradictions and changes of attitude which his writings reveal should not blind the reader to the fundamental core of his doctrine. The application of his doctrine to the interpretation and judgement of historical and social facts invited logical difficulties, but Laski's distinction lies in the courage with which these were faced and in his attempt to reconcile abstract thought with realities of political life.

Students of Laski's political thought will welcome this addition to the meagre literature available in India. The analysis of Laski's views on the role of the individual and society, the province of the state, make relevant discussion in our present national situation. The study presents interpretation and criticism of his doctrine in relation to earlier thinkers.

Dr Sarma is professor emeritus, Marathwada University, Aurangabad.

STERLING PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED

NEW DELHI-110016 JALANDHAR-144003 BANGALORE-560009

