

Graziers and Dairy Farmers in Colonial Assam

Grazing in Assam

In a land-abundant Assam, peasant enjoyed from time immemorial the traditional right to graze their cattle freely on the village commons and neighbouring forests¹. This position had not altered for quite some time even after the annexation of the province. To increase the revenue and cultivable land in Assam, British Government pursued in giving grants of jungles land to *ryots*, which had vary in every district. If the *mauzah* be held *khas*, the collection should be permitted to give the *ryots* with *patta*, a license to break up as much waste land as he requires for the period of his lease². Land revenue of 1854 provided reed and grass wastes to be granted rent-free for five years, then to be assessed for five years at 1 *anna*, for the next five years 2 *annas*, for the next five years at 3 *annas* and for fifty years at 4 *annas*. Grass wastes to be granted on same terms as reed and high grass, but the rent-free term to be three years only³. The British administration had taken a firm root and the administrative machinery, which started with handful officials, grew larger with the passage of time. As a result, more funds became necessary to meet the increased expenditure⁴. The scope for mobilising resources for the exchequer from other avenues was not lost for British. Accordingly they introduced, for the first time the concept of grazing tax in 1888.

Arrival of Nepali Graziers

One important feature of the British Colonial Rule in Assam was the induction of outsiders into it almost from the beginning of their rule. They did this first to supply an indentured labour force to the province, and secondly to increase the land revenue by the settlement of outsiders as cultivators on lands that remained fallow for years together in the Brahmaputra Valley due to the scantiness of population. The scantiness of population caused by internal dissensions (1770-1810) and Burmese invasions (1819-26), and then by cholera and small-pox and kala-azar, was the major

¹ A. Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006), p.91.

² A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam* (1854), p.15.

³ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁴ *The Report of the Assam Land Reform Commission, 1981*, Government of Assam, p.4. ASA.

cause of the induction of men from outside the province to meet the labour requirements in Assam. At the initial stage the British Colonial Government experienced a lot of trouble due to the non-availability of labourers. The British adopted a policy of encouraging the settlement of Nepali soldiers particularly in the foot hills after their retirement which served two purposes, one, the ex-soldiers acted as a buffer between the British administration and the restive tribal chiefs and two, families of the ex-army men provided a more dependable source and channel for fresh recruitment of Gurkhas. This, they visualized, would make them less dependent on Nepal for recruitment⁵. This kind of encouragement was not limited to the cultivating class of people only. Once started with the coming up of the Gorkha soldiers, the influx of Nepalis into the province became a regular feature during the whole period of the colonial government. When the British occupied Assam, most of the areas in the province were covered by thick virgin of jungle and vast area of wastelands. Nepali settlement in North East India in general and Assam in particular was not composed of the ex-soldiers or their families alone. Once the story of land abundant region with vast expanse of green dense jungles and hills was relayed back home by the soldiers, other poor fellow Nepalis arrived Assam to try their luck and took to cattle breeding, dairy farming, sugarcane cultivation.

Grazing Expansion

The extension of tea garden and increasing numbers of cattle, affected the existing forest resources of Assam. Forest officers in their notes, frequently alleged that the increasing numbers of cattle made a huge damage to the young and sapling of the forest. Therefore colonial government realized that there was an urgent need for the conservation of such forests. The organization of a separate Forest Department was initiated in the year 1862 by the government of India and in the initial stage was controlled by the Public Works Department⁶. To restrict the graziers to graze in forest Mr. G. Mann, the Conservator of Forests, Assam, proposed to levy grazing fees in

⁵ K.K. Muktan, "Gorkhas' Contribution to the Security of India", in *The Nepalis in North-East India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity*, eds., Sinha, A.C. & T. B. Subba, (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2007), p.128

⁶ H.P. Smith and C. Purukayastha, *A Short History of the Assam Forest Service 1850-1945* (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, 1946), ASA.

1886⁷. But his proposal was not accepted at that time. In 1886, the Commissioner, Assam Valley Districts reported that local Assamese graziers and also Nepali herdsmen in Dibrugarh and many other subdivisions, did not pay land revenue, but made handsome profits by the sale of dairy product⁸. It was also reported that their buffaloes caused damage to the cultivation of Miris and others in the vicinity of grazing grounds. Commissioner therefore in 1886 proposed to charge Nepali herdsmen a tax of 4 *annas* per buffalo⁹.

In 1886, the District Officers of the Assam Valley Division were, as an experiment, authorized to issue grazing licenses of Nepalese or any other class of buffalo herdsmen, a grazing fee at 4 *annas* for every full grown buffalo¹⁰. Accordingly Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur issued grazing license to Nepalese or any other herdsmen assessing them at 4 *annas* for every full-grown buffalo. In the Lakhimpur district Rs. 165 had been assessed under this order during the year 1886-87¹¹. In 1888, the Conservator of Forest brought to notice that with the object of avoiding payment grazing dues in Bengal, cattle were annually brought across the Sankos to Goalpara to graze in the unclassed forests and waste lands and recommended that grazing fees should be charged¹². This was approved in June 1888 with grazing fees at 8 *annas* per head per annum¹³.

In 1890, it was brought to notice that the rate of grazing fees was not uniform in all districts¹⁴. Therefore a definite instruction was issued sanctioning the levy of grazing fees at the rate of 8 *annas* per buffalo and 4 *annas* for other horned cattle subjected to the exemption of all cattle less than a year old¹⁵. Further it was directed that the grazing fee should be collected from the Nepali herdsmen and others whose chief and almost only trade was in dairy product and who grazed their cattle in reserved or protected or unclassed state forests or wastelands at the disposal of government.

⁷ *Progress Report of the Forest Administration in the province of Assam for the year 1886-87*. ASA.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ No. 4449 dated the 17th December 1886, File No. 1950R. of 1886. ASA.

¹⁰ File- Revenue A, 94-119, April, 1904. ASA.

¹¹ *Land Revenue Administration Report of the Assam Valley District for the year 1887-88*, p. 59. ASA.

¹² Letter No. 46A, dated the 21st May 1888, File No. 375R of 1888. ASA.

¹³ File No. 375R of 1888. ASA.

¹⁴ File- Revenue A, 31-38, August 1891. ASA.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Again it was expressly stated that grazing fees was not to be levied from *raiya*ts but only from herdsmen properly so called¹⁶. The Conservator also remarked “It has never been proposed to levy grazing dues from *raiya*ts, but only in special cases, such as from herdsmen whose chief and almost only trade in dairy produce and from outsiders from Bengal”¹⁷. It was distinctly laid down that grazing fees should be levied only from wandering herdsmen whose chief and almost only trade was in dairy produce¹⁸. This kind of government policy “seems that government had committed itself to the policy of taking grazing dues from Nepalese”¹⁹.

Reservation of Grazing Ground

The importance of the reservation of grazing ground was considered as far back as in 1892²⁰, but Sir William Ward agreed with Mr. Darrah, the Director of Land Record who deprecated any action in the Assam Valley District²¹. In the year 1893-94, the question was raised whether it would be desirable, in specified areas in the province, where the population was usually dense, to mark off portions of the waste still remaining unoccupied, and reserve them as public grazing grounds²². As there was available luxuriant vegetation of the province, and the large areas in most parts of its remaining waste and under jungle, local officers were not in favour of reserving such grazing ground. There was however, room for apprehension that at some centres of dense and fast increasing population where all available land was being rapidly taken up for cultivation, the *raiya*ts might be put in convenience for one of grazing grounds within a convenient distance of their homes²³.

This matter had been made the subject of enquiry by the permanent Director of Land Record and Agriculture, and Mr. F. J. Monahan. In the course of his tours during the cold seasons of 1894-95 and 1895-96, the Deputy Commissioners of Plains Districts

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ In office letter (No. 203 forest- 3708R., dated the 1st September 1896 in File No. Revenue B, 46-59, September, 1896. ASA.

¹⁹ Mr. Anderson remarked on grazing fees, File No. Revenue A, August 1891, 31-38. ASA.

²⁰ File- Revenue A, 39-43, July, 1892. ASA.

²¹ Revenue A, 71-74, May 1892. ASA.

²² *The Annual Report of the Land Revenue Administration for the year 1893-94.* Para 42. ASA.

²³ File- Revenue A, 1-23, December 1896. ASA.

were addressed for the purpose of ascertaining their opinions as the desirability of reserving grazing grounds in their respective districts. The replies received were mostly in favour of the proposal. The officiating Deputy Commissioner Sylhet Mr. Hennikar considered the plan of reserving grazing grounds to be feasible; and said that in some cases, it had been carried out in his district. He also remarked that petitions were often received from villagers against the proposed settlement of grazing grounds²⁴. The officiating Deputy Commissioner of Cachar Mr. Hallifax said:

“...lands used as village grazing grounds should not ordinarily be leased out, except for very strong reasons.... refused applications for land on the ground of its being a common grazing ground and always careful to consider that point”²⁵.

The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were in favour of reserving grazing grounds²⁶. The Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon reported that the population of this district was so thin that the *raiya*s hardly felt any difficulty in obtaining pasturage for their cattle. He however, stated that the *tahsildar* of the *Sadar* and *Roha tahsil* had recommended the reservation of certain areas for grazing ground²⁷. The Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara said:

“with regard to the eastern duars, the population is so sparse, and villages so few and far between at present, that I do not think it necessary to issue any orders about the reservation of land for the purpose ‘grazing grounds probably in the Bijni *tahsil* there may be some areas where the population is sufficiently dense to call for the reservation”²⁸.

²⁴ Letter No. 2767, dated Shillong, the 30th May 1896, From- F.J. Monaham, Director, Department of Land and Agriculture, to the Secretary, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, File- Revenue A, 1-23, December 1896. ASA.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Letter No. 2767, dated Shillong, the 30th May 1896, From- F.J. Monaham, Director, Department of Land and Agriculture, to the Secretary, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The concept of reservation of land for grazing purposes was initiated due to the extension of tea plantation in the state of Assam. Local officers of the colonial government observed that in the land abundant province of Assam as a whole there was very little need for reservation of grazing grounds. But there were certain localities in every district and subdivision in which the land was so fully taken up for tea cultivation that the people faced difficulties in obtaining fodder for their cattle within a reasonable distance²⁹. Therefore Mr. E. Gait advised to provide a legal basis for such reservation by rules. According to him,

“such rules are necessary, not only to bar squatters, but also to ensure continuing of policy on the part of successive district officers. Because several cases in which settlement of considerable areas had been refused to planters and others, on the ground that they were required for grazing and yet the some areas had been given out-meal by *mauzadars*”³⁰.

Few complaints were made by the people of different districts of Assam that the land which were formerly used as grazing grounds had been leased out to the tea planters, who either fenced it, to keep cattle out or else sent cattle grazing in the tea garden to pound. The expansion of tea gardens had left them with insufficient grazing ground. These complaints were genuine when Mr. Monahan, Director, Department of Land Record and Agriculture, Assam, remarked that

“...such cases in Cachar and others have come to my notice in different parts of Sibsagar...the extensions of ordinary cultivation threaten to swallow up all the land which, from its situation and general suitability is best adapted for pasturage for the village cattle”³¹.

The question of framing draft rules for the allotment of village grazing ground was seriously taken in hand in the year 1896. Opinion expressed by Sir Henry Cotton in 1896-

²⁹ File- Revenue A, 1-23, December 1896. ASA.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

“in the province as a whole there is very little need for reservation for grazing grounds, but there are certain localities in every district and subdivision in which the land is so fully taken up for cultivation that much difficulty is experienced by the people in obtaining fodder for their cattle within a reasonable distance...I think that on no subject can rules be less necessary than for the provision of grazing grounds in Assam”³².

Therefore it was expected that areas reserved for grazing would be easy to devise executive measures to prevent encroachment³³.

In 1896, a draft rules for the allotment of grazing ground in Assam was prepared and submitted to the Government of India for information. Government of India in their approval letter remarked that-

“Free use of reserved grazing grounds is permitted to all inhabitants of the villages without restrictions. This may permit professional cattle-dealers or cattle-breeders to benefit by what is primarily intended for the benefit of agriculturist and those who supply their needs”³⁴.

According to the draft rule, the Deputy Commissioner, was empowered the rights to allot such grazing land after local enquiry, that was necessary to the inhabitants of any village or villages as grazing ground. The Deputy Commissioner was also instructed to survey such land and demarcate with temporary boundary mark and prepare a map of reserved land. It was further instructed that the cost of permanent boundary marks should be recovered from the land holders of lands included in the village or villages for which the grazing ground had been allotted³⁵. The inhabitants of the villages were allowed to use the grazing ground free of charge. Further it was decided by the colonial government that no such reserve land should be occupied or disposed of for any other purpose without the prior permission of the Commissioner.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Any person, who occupied any part of such grazing ground other than grazing, should be liable to a penalty of Rs. 50.00³⁶.

It was alleged that professional graziers abused the grazing ground and therefore the existing grazing rule (1896) needed few modification. Accordingly, in 1911 a set of draft rules was forwarded to the Local Board of Revenue, Eastern Bengal and Assam, for consideration in consultation with the Divisional Commissioners³⁷. In 1911, when draft rules were submitted to the Government of India for approval, the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government reported that- "...the possible abuse of the village grazing ground by professional graziers...the new rule...empower the local officers either to exclude such persons all together or to restrict the right of uses within suitable bound"³⁸. The draft rules with certain modifications were approved by the Government of India and finally published with Eastern Bengal and Assam Government notification³⁹. The Deputy Commissioner was empowered to issue grazing passes to professional graziers and to charge fees accordingly. According to the rule the use of village grazing grounds by professional graziers had been made as follows-

“Professional graziers, that is persons who herds cattle solely for trade purposes or cattle-breeding, will accordingly be excluded from village grazing grounds, but may be allowed to use them in places where the Deputy Commissioner considers that this may be safely be permitted. In such cases fees must be paid at the rate of Rs. 2/- for buffalo and *annas* 8 for other horned cattle”⁴⁰.

In 1911, Mr. Arbuthnott, the Commissioner of the Surma Valley and Hill Districts, reported that professional graziers should not be totally excluded from the use of village grazing grounds; and that many wandering Nepalese visit Sylhet and Cachar at times to sell buffaloes, etc. and might find difficulty in grazing their cattle⁴¹. In the

³⁶ File- Revenue A, 1-23, December 1896. ASA.

³⁷ File- Agriculture A, 2-6, December 1910. ASA.

³⁸ File- Agriculture A, 4-9, September 1911. ASA.

³⁹ No. 456Ag., dated the 27th July 1911, File No. Agriculture A, 4-9, September 1911. ASA.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ File- Revenue A, 8-32, September, 1918. ASA.

Assam Valley also a very large number of cattle were brought to sale from Rangpur and other adjoining districts of Bengal. These wandering settlers of cattle could not but graze their cattle in the village cattle grounds or other government wastes where they happened to halt. The Commissioner, Assam Valley Districts, reported that:

“professional graziers should not be allowed to use the village grazing grounds unless it was clearly established that such use will not interfere with the pasturage of village cattle and that, as a rule, it would not be expedient to allow professional graziers to use village grazing grounds. He was in favour of total prohibition of professional grazier from using village grazing grounds in very exceptional circumstances”⁴².

In 1911 rules for the Village Grazing Ground was laid down. The objective of these rules appeared to provide grazing grounds for cultivator’s cattle. It indicated that it was intentional not to deal generally with professional graziers, and the high rates showed that it was proposed to exclude them from these areas, which would be of smaller extent and in proximity to villages. As defined in the rules framed under the Forest Regulation 1911, professional graziers, should be allowed to use village grazing grounds only in quite exceptional circumstances⁴³. The permission of the Deputy Commissioner should be specially obtained and full fees for one year (Rs. 1 for buffaloes and *annas* 6 for other horned cattle) should be charged for any halt exceeding one month. Under this rule, travelling cattle dealers were permitted to use village grazing grounds “free of fee for any period not exceeding one month at the discretion of the Deputy Commissioner, full fees being charged for any period in excess of one month”⁴⁴.

Mauzadar was entrusted with the power of collecting the grazing fees on 10 per cent commission basis⁴⁵, but most of the time *Mauzadar* and *Mohsirdar* were reported that they failed to recover all grazing dues as “dealing with Nepali professional graziers was not an easy task, they directly refused to pay by sending cattle into the

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Assam Secretariat Proceedings*, Revenue A, February 1912. ASA.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *The Annual Report of the Land Revenue Administration, Assam for the year 1908-09*, p.33. ASA.

forest for a few nights or by migrating into another *mauzadar's* beat”⁴⁶. It was alleged that the Nepalis were difficult people to deal with, and it would neither be easy to make them paid nor convinced to graze where he was told and whoever had to deal with them must have plenty of powers⁴⁷.

Professional Grazing Reserves

In 1911, professional graziers were allowed to using village grazing ground but villagers were suffered considerable hardship thereby. Therefore it was proposed that special areas were being set apart for their use that this objection no longer possessed⁴⁸. Therefore, there was an urgent need to separate grazing reserve for professional graziers. Again it was alleged that cattle of professional graziers caused damage to the forest resources. In 1912, the Inspector General of Forest in his inspection note recommended the regulation of grazing by professional graziers in order to avoid damage caused to young growth of forests by animals. The objectives to be obtained in dealing with the professional graziers appeared to be⁴⁹-

- a. to regulate the numbers of such who migrate into the provinces;
- b. to locate them in the places where they will do the least amount of harm to the settled land and to the valuable forests;
- c. to recover from them, as from other sections of the community, a reasonable proportion of their profits; and
- d. to take measures which will gradually produce the desired effect automatically rather than by compulsion and will interfere as little as may be with the milk supply of the province.

Proposal was made to allocate special reserve for professional graziers and that professional graziers should be compelled to occupy such areas by the imposition of

⁴⁶ File- Rev. A, 7-13, Sep. 1912, File- IIIIF-78R., of 1912. ASA.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ File- Rev. A, 8-32, September 1918. ASA.

⁴⁹ *Op.cit.*

a fee on those who kept their herds outside them⁵⁰. Mr. Arbuthnot proposed “grazing reserves should be made for the supply of milk to towns and in order to provide for the production of *ghee* and for the breeding of cattle, and to contain graziers not wanted in other places”⁵¹. When proposal for the regularization of professional grazing reserve was first mooted, it was suggested that reserves should be formed, in which cultivation would be prohibited⁵². Subsequently enquiry showed that it was impossible to set aside sufficient areas to accommodate all the professional graziers’ herds. Therefore it was decided that grazing areas should be formed in which both professional grazing and cultivation should be allowed⁵³.

The constitution of Professional Grazing Ground was not an easy task. The area which was suited for such reserves, were used by the local people for their shifting cultivation, and in consequence of the necessity of providing for a regular rotation of fallow and cultivated land, the villages were scattered very widely all over the country⁵⁴. Though the land was not thickly populated, “it was impossible to find any blocks which could be reserved without villagers being evicted from their holdings and made to remove their houses”⁵⁵.

Again there was necessity of providing alternative grazing grounds for the different seasons. These were two classes of buffaloes, locally distinguished as Bengal Breed and Assam Breed. The former graze in ‘*Nal*’ and ‘*Khagori*’ and the later in low-lying swamps known as ‘*Doloni*’⁵⁶. During the rainy season the buffaloes of both kinds can exist in the Brahmaputra *chaporis*. But it was doubtful whether the Assamese buffaloes will find sufficient substance there in the dry season, or whether buffaloes

⁵⁰ File- Rev. A, 1-38, July 1916. ASA.

⁵¹ W. J. Arbuthnot, *Report on the Question of Grazing in the Assam Valley Districts* (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, 1915) p. 13, ASA.

⁵² Letter No. 2255R., dated the 3rd July 1916 File No. Revenue A, 1-38, July 1916. ASA.

⁵³ Arbuthnot. *Op.cit.* p. 163, ASA.

⁵⁴ No. 2397R & F., dated Jorhat, the 23rd March, 1914, From- Major Playfair, Deputy Commissioner, Sibsagar, To- The Commissioner of the Assam Valley District. File No- Revenue A, 124-139, March 1915. ASA.

⁵⁵ File- Revenue A, 124-139, March 1915. ASA.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

of either description would be able to live within the same areas in both seasons of the year⁵⁷.

The rules for the regulation of grazing by professional graziers were framed on 1917⁵⁸. According to the rule, professional graziers must take out permits for all cattle kept in their charge before 1st June of each year from the Deputy Commissioner, Subdivisional Officer or any other Special Officer-in-charge of grazing business in written application. Two-thirds of the grazing dues must be paid to officer issuing the permit at the time when the application is filed⁵⁹. The remaining one-third had to pay to the *mauzadar* or *mohsirdar* on or before 1st of December. The permit covered the term of the land revenue year from 1st of July to 30th of June⁶⁰. To get the maximum return of the dues, rewards upto the whole value of the excess fee realized was granted by the Deputy Commissioner to any person giving information of the existence of unreported cattle⁶¹. The Deputy Commissioner had given the authority to fix the site of the *khutis* or *bathans* in each grazing area, and from one *bathan* or *khuti* to another without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner or Sub Divisional Officer. And if any person infringed any of the rules may be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one month or with fine which may extend to Rs. 100 or both⁶².

Separate arrangement had been made for the Goalpara and the *Sadar* Subdivision of Lakhimpur. In Goalpara, number of forest village had been constituted to protect from the fire and forest labour. The forest officers had the information regarding the need of forest village than anyone else. Therefore in both districts the Deputy Conservator of Forests was the officer who issued the permits and the duties imposed on *mauzadars* and *mohsirdars*⁶³.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ File- Rev. A, 97-126, September 1917. ASA.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ File- Forest A, 52-55, December 1918. ASA.

Nepali Cultivator

The increase in number of buffaloes in the province was marked; in 1893-1894 the numbers of buffaloes were 12,915 and in 1911-12 it was increased to 45,893. Buffaloes became popular with Assamese and other settlement holders as shown by the fact that in 1893-94, 110 such animals were grazing freely; in 1911-12 there were 73,902⁶⁴. The increase in the migration of Nepali graziers and their cattle also turned the grazing fee from an insignificant to an expanding source of government revenue. The total number of buffaloes taxed in the Brahmaputra Valley increased year to year as follows:

Table: 4.1

Number of buffaloes in the Brahmaputra Valley, 1895-1920

Year	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920
Number	15640	18735	24346	40000	42000	86325

Source: A. Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p.74

The increase in the number of buffaloes and Nepali graziers in the province provided enough scope to impose grazing tax and further tightening up of collection machinery. The fee which was 8 *annas* per annum per head of buffaloes and 4 *annas* per head of other horned cattle rose to Re. 1 per buffalo in 1907. The grazing Rules, which were framed in 1911, raised the grazing fees to Rs. 8 per buffaloes per annum and Re. 1 per head of other horned cattle⁶⁵, which were modified after an official enquiry done by Mr. Arbuthnot in 1916⁶⁶. Thereafter, this grazing fee continued to be Rs. 3 per buffalo and 6 *annas* per head of other horned cattle⁶⁷. The revenue from this source between 1916-17 and 1930-31 can be seen from the relevant figures given below:

⁶⁴ *Forest Administration Report of Assam 1911-12*, p. 6. ASA.

⁶⁵ File- Revenue A, 59-65, April, 1913. ASA.

⁶⁶ File- Revenue A, 1-38, July, 1916. ASA.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Table: 4.2

Revenue Collection from the Grazing Fee in Assam: 1922-23 to 1930-31

Year	Revenue Collection
1922-23	3,29000
1923-24	309000
1924-25	310000
1925-26	371000
1926-27	356000
1927-28	340000
1928-29	328000
1929-30	329336
1930-31	340000

Source: Report of the Land Revenue Administration, respective years.

In the Brahmaputra Valley, the Nepalis were initially involved in cattle rearing and grazing as a profession. In the unclassified forests the *ryots* were allowed to graze free of cost for their plough and domestic cattle while Nepali graziers were charged for the grazing privilege. The fee was collected “entirely from Nepali herdsmen who obtain a ready and lucrative rate for the dairy produce in the numerous tea gardens of the province”⁶⁸. According to the Grazing Rules 1917 “persons who herd cattle solely for dairy and breeding purposes or for sale were alone called on for payment and then not if they were traders bringing cattle into the province from outside”⁶⁹. These rules encouraged the settlement holders to keep large herds of inferior cattle beyond the needs of people for agricultural purposes.

Among the Nepalese, those migrated to Assam, other than ‘Gurkha soldiers’ were ‘Graziers’ or ‘Cultivators’. The new rules compelled the Nepali graziers to engage themselves in cultivation as an alternative source of occupation. The concession was given to the settlement holders in a view to increase the cultivable land with the cattle they kept. The Chief Commissioner observed that bonafide *raiya*s whose principal business was agriculture should be exempted from payment of grazing fees irrespective of the number of cattle kept by them⁷⁰. It was expected that Nepali professional graziers might had taken settlement of a plot of land in order to consider themselves as settlement-holders⁷¹. Therefore it was proposed that 10 head of cattle

⁶⁸ *Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Province of Assam, 1892-93*, p.10 .ASA.

⁶⁹ File- Rev. A, 97-126, Sep. 1917. ASA.

⁷⁰ File- Rev. A, 94-119, April 1904. ASA.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

used for agricultural pursuit should be allowed to graze free of cost and surplus cattle should be charged according to grazing rules.

But Commissioner's view in this matter was that as the Nepali settlement holders number was not large, he was not in favour to harass settlement holders on account of very petty dues⁷². It was the desirability of encouraging the settlement of Nepalis in Assam⁷³. This kind of government policy encouraged the Nepalis to settle in the permanently settled areas. According to *the Administrative Report of 1905-06* "a noticeable feature of the year was the increased settlement of Nepalis in Lakhimpur, Darrang and the Barpeta sub-division of the district of Kamrup"⁷⁴. *The Land Revenue Administrative Report of 1913-14* reported that the Nepalis were establishing considerable colonies in Darrang district where they held nearly 17,000 acres of cultivable lands⁷⁵. According to *The Land Revenue Administrative Report of 1919-20*, "Darrang which was at one time sparsely populated was increasingly being colonised...Nepalis in Darrang have taken up land to an extent unknown elsewhere being now possession of 28,000 acres"⁷⁶. Meanwhile, most of these Nepali land holders engaged themselves in large-scale sugarcane cultivation⁷⁷. They settled in the midst of jungles usually on the bank of a river, cleared the forest and grew sugarcane⁷⁸. After the ex-tea garden labourers and immigrant peasant cultivators from East Bengal, the Nepalis constituted the third single largest immigrant group to take up land for settlement and cultivation. The land holds by Nepali in Assam were increased from 80,041 acres in 1926-27⁷⁹ to 104,066 acres in 1938-39⁸⁰ and 108,308 acres in 1939-40⁸¹. The increasing number of Nepali settlement holder shows that

⁷² File- Rev. A, 94-119, April 1904. ASA.

⁷³ Mr. P.G. Melitus, Commissioner, Assam Valley Division, Letter No. 3122-26L.R. dated Guwahati, 22nd Dec. 1902. File no- *Assam Secretariat Proceedings*, File- Revenue A, April 1903, p.99. ASA.

⁷⁴ *Report on the Administration of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905-06*, Shillong, 1907, p.165. ASA.

⁷⁵ *Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam, 1916-17*. ASA.

⁷⁶ *Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam, 1919-20*. ASA.

⁷⁷ H.K. Barpujari, *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. V* (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 2004), p.60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp.60-61.

⁷⁹ *Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam, 1926-27*. ASA.

⁸⁰ *Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam, 1938-39*. ASA.

⁸¹ *Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam 1939-40*. ASA.

they left their nomadic life habit and responded to the government policy to settle permanently in Assam. But on the other side, it was said that due to the increasing grazing fee in regular interval, there was no room left to continue their traditional business except cultivation. In fact, due to the reduced prices of their dairy product the Nepalis took shifted to jute and paddy cultivation⁸².

Table: 4.3

Land hold by the Nepalis in Assam: 1913-14 to 1940-41

Year	Area (acres)
1913-14	17,000 (Darrang)
1914-15	35,786
1926-27	80,041
1930-31	85,709
1935-36	91,103
1940-41	107,866

Source: Report of the Land Revenue Administration Assam of the respective years.

The numbers of Nepali immigration to India, especially in Assam made the Nepal government very much concerned. Therefore Nepal government requested Government of India not to encourage the poor Nepali people to settle permanently in India⁸³. Under the patronage of Colonial Government, large number of Nepalis migrated to Assam. On the other hand, Nepalis were popular with the local Assamese unlike East Bengalis (Mymensinghians)⁸⁴. That was because as compared to the Mynemsinghians, Nepalis were not so numerous⁸⁵. The Sub-Deputy Collector of Chhaygaon reported that:

“the Nepalis are honest straight forward and peace loving and would not like to entangle themselves into any trouble by filing or refusing to abide by government orders. They cannot be clashed in the same category with the immigrants from

⁸² *Report of the Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley Division, 1934-35*, p.4. ASA.

⁸³ File- Revenue A, 30-38, June 1929. ASA.

⁸⁴ Letter No. 2588R., dated 18th December 1928, W.A. Cosgrave, Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup. *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Mymensingh. They are diametrically opposite in their nature and dealings”⁸⁶.

Most of the Nepalese took the profession of cultivation as a supplementary means of livelihood and remain in Assam both as graziers and cultivators. They were given annual *pattas* for the land occupied by them and very few of them applied for the periodic *pattas* and squatted generally⁸⁷. They generally like riverside areas and occupied patches in dense jungles. They made large tract of jungle land fit for cultivation, where they cultivated mustard paddy and jute, which lost fertility after a few years of cultivation and thus preferred to open up new land elsewhere⁸⁸.

The cultivating class of Nepalese generally divided into three categories- 1. Cultivating forest lands in submontane tracts with sugarcane; 2. Periodic *patta* holders; and 3. Those who are connected with the grazing professions.

There were classes of Nepalis who broke up forest lands in the submontane tracts mainly for the cultivation of sugarcane. These people were mostly temporary settlers and seldom hold the same land more than three or four years. They mostly occupied high lands which lost fertility after a few years of cultivation and thus preferred to open up new lands elsewhere. Special concession had been offered to the Nepali graziers. In the Darrang District those who paid more than a certain amount of grazing tax, were allowed to be professional graziers with the privilege of cultivating four *bighas* of revenue free land⁸⁹.

In 1912, when Bengal Government raised the grazing fees to Rs. 18 per annum⁹⁰, to check the unwanted cattle movements into the province of Assam, grazing fees in Assam were also rose from Re. 1 to Rs. 8 for each buffalo⁹¹. The hike of grazing fee was highly criticised in Assam Valley Division. Assam which was not even self sufficient in milk supply for its own consumption, the raising grazing fee would have

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Letter No. 25188, dated the 10th January 1929, *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Letter No. 2553R., dated the 17th January 1929, Mr. C.S. Cunning, Deputy Commissioner, Darrang, File No- Revenue A, 30-38, June 1929. ASA.

⁹⁰ File- Revenue A, 1-11, December 1914, (III/319R. Of 1914). ASA.

⁹¹ File- Revenue A, 59-65, April, 1913. ASA.

an impact on the price of the milk as well as leading to possibility of adulteration. Scarcity of pure milk in Assam was also elaborately discussed at the Legislative Assembly of Assam in 1911, when Mr. M.G. Mukherjee raised the question of scarcity of pure milk and its raising price⁹². According to him:

“Milk ranks as a very digestible food, which contains proteins, fat, carbohydrates, and mineral water, a complete food. A quart of milk contains about the same amount of nutrients as three quarter of a pound of flesh, about six ounces of bread. The consumption of milk in the city is very high but due to gradual increased in the grazing fees, it was now almost impossible to get pure milk in the province. The price of pure milk which had always almost been normal at the rate of 2 per *seer* had risen from 3 to 5 *annas* in Dhubri, Goalpara, Jorhat etc”⁹³.

A conference was held at Shillong in 1912 to decide the raising grazing fees at Bengal and its effects. The representatives of the conference were believed that the industry could afford to pay, tax of Rs. 8/- per buffalo and Re. 1 for other horned cattle. Even before the hike of grazing fees, it was the view of the administration that the number of buffaloes kept by the professional graziers was reaching an undesirable high figure and with the idea to check the number of cattle in the province, a grazier must either pay it or leave the valley⁹⁴.

Grazing was never a lucrative business as depicted by the British Officials in their reports from time to time. The climate and natural calamities due to flood in Assam caused various kinds of diseases every year; people had to lose a considerable number of their cattle. The following table shows the reported mortality among the cattle in the province.

⁹² File- Agriculture A, 42-49, Feb, 1912. ASA.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ File- Rev. A, 1-11, December, 1914. ASA.

Table: 4.4
Mortality among Cattle: 1882-83 to 1884-85

Number of Cattle Death			
District	1882-83	1883-84	1884-85
Goalpara	26,528	14,237	18,289
Kamrup	7,862	16,256	28,620
Darrang	12,871	20,772	13,286
Nowgong	28,154	38,698	25,395
Sibsagar	994	2,410	851
Lakhimpur	7,062	1,112	4,650
Total	83,471	93,494	91,091

Source: Land Revenue Administration Report of Assam, of the respective years.

The high rate of mortality amongst the cattle resulted in great loss to the dairy business as well as to the cultivators. Every year flood of the Brahmaputra swept away a large numbers of cattle belonging to the settlers, and graziers, which made a huge loss. Again every year, the cattle diseases prevailed from April to September, when the cattle were mostly required for agricultural purpose⁹⁵. In 1884, the cattle disease in few districts especially in Nagaon had taken an epidemic form⁹⁶. The mortality rate was further enhanced as “it never occurred among the Assamese *ryot* to the supplement the pasturage by storing stocks of straw as in Bengal and other parts of India, or by feeding the cattle with grain”⁹⁷. People of Assam from time immemorial used to graze their cattle in the reserved forests. But with the increase of population, the number of cattle increases, but the pasturage, however decreases⁹⁸. It was also suspected that mortality was caused by poisoning healthy cattle by *Chamars* for the sake of their skins. A brisk trade had sprung up in late 1886-87 amongst the Muhammadan *beparis* from Dacca those were engaged in skin trade in Tezpur⁹⁹.

⁹⁵ *Land Revenue Administration Report, 1884-85*, p.7. ASA.

⁹⁶ *Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley District, 1886-87*. ASA.

⁹⁷ Mr. Campbell, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup’s note- *Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley District, 1886-87*, p.14. ASA.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

Nepali Graziers in Assam

Large sections of Nepali migrants in Assam were graziers, but unlike the Gujar's of Northern India, the Nepali grazier seldom brought herds of buffaloes with him into the province. These poor Nepalese entered Assam with no herd and generally with no money. Hence, they began by taking service as a servant under the owner of a herd who fed him and gave him one or two calves as a way of paying at the end of a year's service. The Nepalis often borrowed money from the *Mahajan* (in Majuli were generally the 'Kumars'), and bought a few more animals and started their business. The 'Kumar' retaining the option of taking interest, which was fixed at 25 per cent per annum, either in cash or its equivalent in calves. Very often the Nepali graziers signed a bond for cash, but actually received from the *Mahajan* its equivalent in buffaloes¹⁰⁰. After a few years, grazier able to pay off his debt and this was also done either in cash or by transferring some of his animals to the *Kumar's* own herd¹⁰¹. Rai Bahadur Upendranath Kanjilal, in a note dated 28th September 1912, stated that the interest paid by graziers to the money-lenders in the Majuli amounted to 25 per cent per annum. The graziers had also supplied dairy product to the financier free of cost¹⁰². Most of the Nepali graziers in the district of Kamrup were indebted to 'Keyas' and other money lenders¹⁰³. But the trade in dairy products was mostly in the hands of a few Assamese *Dahi-harias* (middlemen). These men kept the graziers in their clutch by giving them advance money free of interest, but in return collected all the produced milk at a contract rate of about Rs. 3/- per *maund*¹⁰⁴. Some of the other district reports also highlighted about similar indebtedness of graziers to *mahajans*. In the Garo Hills, it was stated that at least 70 per cent of the dairy products went to the district in Bengal, and the greater part of the profit from this trade went to 'keyas' and the *mahajans* of Tura¹⁰⁵. The *mahajans* or *keyas* lent money to the herdsmen, or more usually supplied them with buffaloes at a price of Rs. 70 per head, though the market

¹⁰⁰ File- Rev. A, Dec. 1914, 1-11, IIIIF/319R., of 1914. ASA.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ File- Revenue A, 1-38, July, 1916. ASA.

rate was from Rs. 50 to Rs. 60. Above all they even charged compound interest from 2 to 3 per cent per *mensem*¹⁰⁶.

Grazing Tax and its Issues

In land- abundant Assam, peasants had enjoyed, from time immemorial, the traditional right to graze their cattle freely on the village commons and neighbouring forests. Hence, they were not in the habit of growing fodder crops on their own private lands. Under the British regime, the right was gradually encroached upon to bring forth additional revenue to the exchequer. A grazing fee per head of horned animals was introduced. In 1888, this fee was 8 *annas* per annum per head of buffaloes and 4 *annas* per head of cows¹⁰⁷.

As early as 1 July 1903, the *ryots* of about thirty *mauzas* of Golaghat sub-division sent a memorial to the Chief Commissioner protesting against the grazing fees on buffaloes, but the government upheld it. The fee was raised to Rs. 1 per buffalo per annum in the unclassified State Forest in Assam in 1907¹⁰⁸.

In 1912 grazing fees had been raised in Jalpaiguri and neighbouring areas of Bengal. It was expected that buffaloes and cattle of Bengal might be migrated to the bordering areas of Assam where the grazing fees found much less compared to the newly raised fees of Bengal. To prevent the unwanted cattle movement into the province of Assam it was necessary to raise the grazing fees in Assam too¹⁰⁹.

In 1912, Mr. Beadon Bryant, Inspector General of Forests called attention to the fact that “there had been a large increase in the buffaloes grazed in the unclassified Forests of Assam, and it was advisable that the whole question of grazing should be systematically dealt with”¹¹⁰. According to the reference made by Mr. Bryant, a Conference was held in October 1912, at Shillong, where the desirability of grazing ground for professional graziers was discussed¹¹¹. The Conservator of Forests came

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Reid’s reply, 23 September, ALCP (1921), Vol. I, pp. 708-10. ASA.

¹⁰⁸ File- Forest A, 29-61, December 1907. ASA.

¹⁰⁹ Note on A Tour of Inspection in some of the Forests of Assam by Mr. Beadon Bryant, Inspector General of Forests to the Govt. of India, Shimla, 1912, p. 11. ASA.

¹¹⁰ File- Rev. A, 21-43, February, 1915, (IIIF/2R of 1915). ASA.

¹¹¹ File- Rev. A, 59-65, April, 1913. ASA.

up with the proposal to raise the grazing fees on the ground that Bengal Government raised the grazing fees on the other horned cattle from *annas* 8 per head per month to Re. 1-6/- *annas* (Rs. 18/- per annum) per head per month respectively for reserved forests bordering Assam. The increase will be 12 times in the case of buffaloes and 18 times in the cases of other horned cattle¹¹².

It was recommended that District Officers and Divisional Forest Officers should be entrusted with the power to select grazing ground for professional graziers. Further it was felt that regulating the number of professional graziers immigrating into the province was not possible; therefore it was recommended that the concession which had been granted to the Assamese regarding free grazing should be extended to all bonafide cultivators¹¹³. It was suggested that every year Deputy Commissioner should prepare a list of professional graziers and handed it over to Divisional Forest Officers who should assess and collect the revenue¹¹⁴.

It was proposed that certain areas should be set apart for professional graziers, and these persons should be compelled to occupy these areas by the imposition of a penal of fee on professional graziers who kept their herds outside them¹¹⁵. It was further decided that a differential grazing fees for professional graziers should be introduced¹¹⁶.

In 1913, order was passed that the selections for reserved grazing grounds for professional graziers should be made as soon as possible¹¹⁷. To constitute a professional grazing reserve instruction was given that such reserve “have easily recognized natural boundary. If there are not provided endless trouble will be experienced in keeping animals within bounds...”¹¹⁸ A further discussion was held on 11th March 1914 with Commissioner, Assam Valley Districts, Conservator of Forests, Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara, Chief Secretary and Secretary.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Note on A Tour of Inspection in some of the Forests of Assam* by G.H. Hart, Inspector General of Forests to the Govt. of India, Shimla, 1915, p. 11. ASA.

¹¹⁵ File- Rev. A, 21-43, February, 1915, (IIIF/2R of 1915) ASA.

¹¹⁶ File- Rev. A, 59-65, April, 1913. ASA.

¹¹⁷ Paragraph 2 of the letter No. 631R., dated the 21st February 1913. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ File- Rev. A, 124-139, March, 1915. ASA.

Government passed orders on the recommendations made by this final conference. It was decided¹¹⁹-

- a. to fix a uniform fee of eight rupees per buffalo per buffalo per annum and one rupees per head of other horned cattle in the Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts,
- b. that the Central Provinces system was unsuitable to the conditions prevailing in the Assam Valley Districts and therefore that the original proposal made by the 1912 conference to extend the concession of free grazing to all bonafide domiciled cultivators should be adhered to,
- c. that the assessment of the grazing tax should be made by the Forest Department on lists of professional graziers drawn up annually by the District Officers, but that the fees should be collected by *Mauzadars* who should be allowed commission at the rate of 10 per cent on the fees realized, and
- d. that the fees should be made payable in two instalments, on the 1st of June and 1st of December respectively.

The hike in grazing fee was highly criticized in the Assam Valley. Numerous memorials were submitted, pointing out that the profit of the industry would not admit to the payment of these fees. An article appeared in press suggesting that, if this rate of taxation was maintained, the price of milk, ghee and other dairy commodities was bound to rise¹²⁰. People of various sections came forward to protest against the raised tax and submitted their memorials among them¹²¹:

1. Gothe Karki and others of Barabakhra, P.O. Bijni, Goalpara,
Dated 13th June, 1914;

¹¹⁹ File- Rev. A, 10-39, September, 1914. ASA.

¹²⁰ *The Times of Assam*, dated the 15th August 1914.

¹²¹ File- Rev. A, 1-11, December 1914, (IIF/319R of 1914). ASA.

2. Beda Nath Joyshi and others of Tura in the Garo Hills, Dated the 30th June 1914, through Dutta & Sen, solicitors Calcutta;
3. Dhanpati and others, residents of villagers Singri, Sootea, Mahabhairab, Behali and Gomeri, etc. Tezpur, Darrang, dated June 1914;
- 4 Mahasing Rai and others of Tura, Garo Hills, dated the 10th July 1914;
5. Baliram Mahanta and others, residents of the Lakhimpur district, through Babu Basumbada Mitra, B.L., Dibrugarh, dated the 10th July 1914;
6. Barusingh Chettri Nepali and others, Nowgong, dated the 18th July 1914;
7. Maulavi Mohamed Amir Kazir and others of Sadar Subdivision, Lakhimpur dated the 20th July 1914;
8. Haris Chandra Deb Sarma and others of Barpeta;
9. Ghanashyam Deb Sarma and others of the Subdivision of Barpeta, dated the 3rd August 1914;
10. Balaram Mahanta, Local Board Members, Barnagar, P.O. Sorbhog, dated the 3rd August 1914;
11. Gopelall Joisi Brahman and others of villages Gohpur, Gomeri and Borali, Morachapari etc., Tezpur, Darrang, dated the 5th August 1914;
12. Joynarain Giri and others, Nepali settlers in Assam, through Babu Nanda Lal Biswas, Pleader, Gauhati, dated the 15th September 1914;
13. Sukram Kumar and others of Chinnatoli, Kumargaon in Mauza Salmora, Jorhat Subdivision, dated 23rd October 1914;

14. Komala Kumar and others of Salmora Kumargaon, Jorhat Subdivision, dated the 30th October 1914, and

15. Secretary, Hitasadhini Sobha, Golaghat, dated the 7th November 1914, against the increased rates of grazing fees prescribed by Notification No. 2027R., dated the 8th May 1914;

16. The public of Dibrugarh submitted a protest memorial on 20th July 1914 and

17. The Assam Association expressed its concern over the issue in its meeting at Guwahati on 9th October 1914.

On 31st May 1915, Padam Lal Brahman and others of Dibrugarh submitted a petition to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, protesting against the sudden enhancement of the Grazing taxes by the Forest Department and praying for a return to the old rates. They appealed that:

“the grazing business was not so much profitable and merely enabled them to earn not more than the bare living wages of ordinary unskilled labourers. Therefore, they asked to depute a special officer to enquire the matter and prepare a report on the whole subject of grazing in this valley. They also appealed to the reduction of the new rates from Rs. 8 to Rs. 2 per head of buffaloes and from Re. 1 to *annas* 6 per head in the case of cows”¹²².

One Ranga Nath Talukdar of Karakuchi of Sarukhetri Mauza, Barpeta Subdivision appealed to the Chief Commissioner of Assam that:

“due to the great earthquake 1897 in their locality, the land was rendered unfit for cultivation and a considerable part of the *Mauza* had emerged as grazing fields. They had no other option

¹²² File- Rev. A, Nov. 1915, 38-57, IIF-136R of 1915. ASA.

than grazing business, therefore, they pray for the abolition of the new tax on cattle¹²³.

Hence the newly increased grazing tax did not make any section of people happy. British officials were also against the raising of the grazing fees. E.A. Earle was in doubt whether the graziers would be able to pay the raised taxes. Because the tax that had been increased by 800 per cent (from Re. 1 to Rs. 8) was definitely an unpopular one, not only among the buffalo-keepers, but also to educated sections of the population¹²⁴. Besides, the buffalo-keepers were generally financed by well-to-do persons. B.C. Allen also reacted in the issue and said, "Graziers of Assam Valley Division are unable to pay the sudden and abrupt grazing tax as most of the graziers and the herds being generally mortgaged to Marwaris"¹²⁵.

The increased taxes directly affected the milk supply in the province. The sudden and abrupt rise of grazing tax resulted in the increase in the price of milk in Assam. Besides, *goalas* of Dibrugarh town could not be able to sell milk at less than six *annas*. They preferred to take back their milk home with the idea of making *ghee* (clarified butter) which they thought would pay them better. But being unable to get customers to buy milk at six *annas* per *seer*, the *goalas* had to pour the milk into the river¹²⁶. Criticising on the grazing fees, *The Times of Assam* wrote "the situation was serious enough and the whole town was a stir over that fresh nuisance which was directly traceable to a thoughtless measure of the Administration"¹²⁷.

For protesting against the increased rate of grazing fees, number of communications had been made, but it was not an easy task to determine the actual profits of a business and the proportion which a tax imposed on it bore to these profits. There had been a large increase of buffaloes during 1913-14; in the district of Sibsagar it had increased nearly fourfold in two years. The increasing numbers of cattle in the Assam Valley were:

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *The Times of Assam*, dated the 15th August 1914.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Table: 4.5
Numbers of cattle in the Assam Valley: 1904-05 to 1913-14

District	1913-14	1911-12	1910-11	1908-09	1906-07	1904-05
Goalpara	10,513	5640	3418	3304	5036	3109
Kamrup	10,167	8563	4605	5139	5843	5979
Darrang	11,317	11149	8796	8738	8389	6210
Nagaon	7,205	6633	5709	4752	3514	3561
Sibsagar	16,507	8588	4631	5896	3138	3716
Lakhimpur	5,984	4328	5936	5415	4802	3201
Total	61,693	44901	32555	33244	30722	25776

Source: Revenue A, December 1914, 1-11, IIF/319R of 1914.

Strong opposition from various quarters against the raising of grazing fees had been made. Therefore an official enquiry was made from the government of Bengal to ascertain the effect of the raising grazing fees in Assam¹²⁸. According to the enquiry Committee report, the fee as a temporary measure had been reduced for the year 1913-14 to Rs. 2/- for buffalo and *annas* 6 for other cattle per head per annum¹²⁹.

But reduction in the grazing fees did not satisfy the people of Assam altogether. A resolution was passed at the conference of the Assam Association held at Jorhat which runs as follows:

“while thanking for the prompt consideration of the popular representation by partially giving effect to its resolution of the 9th October last by temporarily reducing the professional grazier’s tax, urges that this Association is strongly opinion that the tax should be wholly done away with”¹³⁰.

Special enquiries had been ordered in 14th Dec, 1914, where it was proposed to place Mr. W.J. Arbuthnot to hold the enquiry into the whole question of grazing by professional graziers in the province¹³¹. In 1915, Mr. W.J. Arbuthnot of the Indian Civil Service was placed on Special duty to enquire into the conditions of the grazing

¹²⁸ File- Rev. A, 1-11, December 1914. ASA.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ File- Rev. A, Feb. 1915, 21-43, IIF/2R of 1915. ASA.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

industry¹³². He was asked to submit recommendations of both the rate of taxation to be imposed and the restrictions which should be placed upon the graziers in the interests of the general populations¹³³. After carefully examining all evidence, Mr. Arbuthnot came to the conclusion that graziers could easily afford to pay a tax of Rs. 4 per buffalo and 12 *annas* per head of other cattle¹³⁴. He however, to make sufficient allowance for interest on the capital invested in the industry¹³⁵. The Chief Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division, after considering the question in all its aspects and taking the advice of his most senior officers, was inclined to the view that the rate of fees should be fixed at Rs. 3 per buffalo and *annas* 6 per head of other horned cattle, however animals less than one year old in all cases being exempted from the tax¹³⁶.

In 1916, a draft of the Grazing Rules was published for criticism, where the term of the professional graziers meant “cattle owner whose profit from cultivation (if he cultivates at all) are merely subsidiary to the income he derives from cattle keeping. Men of this class should pay grazing fees whatever be their nationality”¹³⁷. The objective of the Government was to assess the cattle of the settlement holders, because the settlers were in the habit of sending cattle to graze with the herds belonging to professional graziers and this practice made it easy for the professional graziers to escape the payment of fees by declaring a number of their cattle to the property of settlers¹³⁸. Sir Archdale Earle was however, exceedingly anxious to do all that he could to increase the supply of dairy products at a cheaper rate in towns. Therefore, he proposed that special areas might be set apart for the use of graziers who undertook to dispose of all their dairy products at the district or subdivisional headquarters to which the area was allocated. For such graziers it would be open to propose a rate of Rs. 2 per buffalo or even less¹³⁹. The draft rule was criticized from

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ File- Rev. A, 1-30, July 1916. ASA.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Assam Secretariat Proceedings*, Revenue A, September, 1916. ASA.

¹³⁷ G.H. Hart, *Op.cit.* p. 12. ASA.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

various section of people and organizations of the Assam. Therefore with a slightest modification, the first grazing rules for the Assam Valley were published in 1917.

In 1917, the rules for the regulation of grazing by professional graziers were framed¹⁴⁰. According to the Rules 1917 the definition of professional graziers means

“a cattle owner who derives the main part of his income from the sale of cattle or their produce and whose sale of cattle or their produce and whose profits from cultivation (if he cultivates at all) are merely subsidiary to the income he derives from cattle keeping; and includes persons who herd cattle on behalf of others solely or principally for trade purposes”¹⁴¹.

No bonafide domiciled cultivators should be asked to pay grazing fees without a previous reference to the Deputy Commissioner and no such reference should be made in the case of bonafide domiciled cultivator, unless he possessed at least 10 heads of cattle which were not used in the plough. The professional graziers were imposed restriction to graze their cattle on any government land, except in accordance with the provisions of a permit. The domiciled settlers of the province were exempted from paying the grazing tax by leaving their cattle under the charge of a grazier. Under the Grazing Rule 1917, provision was made that professional graziers must take out permits for all cattle kept in their charge, whether they belong to them or not.

Protest against the Grazing Fees

Assam peasants enjoyed from time immemorial the traditional right to graze their cattle free of cost on the waste lands and neighbouring forests. Graziers had to pay grazing fees for raising buffaloes and cattle under the British rule. In 1888, the grazing tax was levied on every horned animal, at the rate of 8 *annas* for each buffaloes and *annas* 4 for each cow per annum, which was raised to Re. 1 in 1907 and still higher in 1912. Peasants and graziers of Assam appealed not to raise the grazing tax further. In 1915, a survey was conducted by Mr. Arbuthnot about the

¹⁴⁰ File- Rev. A, 97-126, Sep. 1917. ASA.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

grazing question and based on his report grazing fee was increased from Rs. 2 to Rs. 3/- per buffalo and *annas* 4 to 6 *annas* per head of cow in the valley. This led to the protest into the valley.

The new rules for the regulation of grazing by professional graziers in the Assam Valley marked the culmination of the policy which had been openly pursued by the Local Administration for preventing grazing business by every means. The new rule somehow discouraged the graziers, who supplied the most indispensable requirement of Indian dietary. The new rates of taxation on graziers' cattle, the price of milk and ghee had been almost doubled in the Dibrugarh market. According to the Times of Assam,

“Pure cow's milk and unadulterated ghee were no longer available in the bazar or from even the *gowalas* for any price. We now get only 4 to 5 seers of what passes for a rupee in place of the 7 to 8 seers that we used to get for the same value about 3 years back. Milk which was available in the Dibrugarh market at 7 or 8 *seers* per rupee 1913-14 rose to 4 to 5 seers for a rupee in 1917”¹⁴².

It was said that the new grazing Rules of 1917 were ‘harassing innovations which was bound to prove a bane to the graziers’ business in this valley’¹⁴³. The sudden and heavy increase of the grazing rates had been bad enough to the public by an ultimate rise in the price of all forms of dairy products. The rules at once imposed some apparently purposeless restrictions on the trade and create some irksome obligations for the graziers. The new rules were framed evidently more with the object of ‘controlling the industry and checking what was considered, perhaps, its inordinate growth, rather than of better securing the government revenue’¹⁴⁴. Thus it would appeared that the system of issuing permits to the graziers as contemplated by rule 2 was intended to fix the graziers to specified limits and to throw a penal-responsibility on them of submitting an accurate statement of the number of cattle in their

¹⁴² *Times of Assam*, dated 14th April 1917.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ File- Rev. A, 97-126, Sep. 1917. ASA.

possession¹⁴⁵. Any professional grazier who failed to apply in time for permits or make an accurate statement of the number of cattle in his possession was liable under rule 8 to pay upto 5 times the amount of the fees due on the cattle omitted from the application¹⁴⁶. It also meant some additional expenses and large amount of trouble and worry, specially to graziers settled at some distance from the towns, every time they had to approached the authorities with written applications for issue of permits or to notify the sale of their cattle as required by rule 3¹⁴⁷. The provision made in rule 4 for payment of two-thirds of the grazing dues to the officer issuing permits at the time when the application was made for it, was also additional hardship and an innovation upon the existing arrangement under which graziers were allowed to pay their dues at any time during the year. Rule 7 only exempts cattle under one year from payment of charges, but “the young calves are of no use and are not saleable before they are at least 3 years old”¹⁴⁸.

Rule 10 and 11 empowered the Deputy Commissioner to prescribe the areas in which grazing was permissible and even to fixed the sites of all sorts of petty annoyances and inconveniences and must ultimately affect the normal expansion of the industry¹⁴⁹. The graziers generally had to shift their *khutis* three or four times during the course of a year and Rule 11, by restricting their free movements, had seriously affected the health and productive capacity of their cattle. Lastly rule 13, which penalized the breach of the rules and made a grazier liable to “imprisonment for 6 months or to fine which may extend to Rs. 500 for every such breach, can only mere ultimately a death blow to the whole industry”¹⁵⁰. It was also apparent that over and above the direct consequences resulting from the adoption of these rules, the graziers would also virtually find themselves “helpless and were at the mercy of the underlinings of the Forest and Revenue Departments”¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁵ *Times of Assam*, dated 14th April 1917.

¹⁴⁶ *Op.cit.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Extract from *The Times of Assam*, dated 14th April 1917.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The penal provision embodied in rule 13 of the proposed rules 1917 for the regulation of grazing by professional graziers of the Assam Valley was a drastic one. The Assam Times strongly criticised the rule. It was appeared in the editorial column that:

“There are certainly no such grounds or considerations which can be urged in the case of breachers of the grazing rules; the administration has been led to adopt these stringent measures. The new rule, therefore, no person however honestly disposed, can think of carrying on a graziers trade without running the risk of some day being hauled up in the criminal court on a trumpery charge laid against him by an enemy, if the professional graziers only omit to report the addition of a young calf to his herd or move his *khuti* a few yards without giving previous information to the Deputy Commissioner”¹⁵².

In 1917, Rai Bahadur Ghanasyam Barua Bahadur raised the question why graziers supplying milk in the villages, where milk was cheaper than in the towns, needed to pay a larger tax¹⁵³. Phanidhar Chaliha in the council on 6th April 1918 raised the demand for the complete abolition of grazing fee¹⁵⁴. Ghanasyam Barua on 5th October, 1918 described the grazing tax as ‘oppressive, hateful and abominable’. He formally moved that the tax on so-called professional graziers in the Brahmaputra Valley be entirely abolished or at least reduced to the level that had prevailed before 1912. The government opposed the move, therefore, Mr. Barua pleaded in a conceding mood that at least bonafide native and domiciled cultivators should have the free allowance of ten cattle¹⁵⁵. Supporting the resolution Mr. Saddullah described the taxes ‘not only dangerous but abnoxious to the community’¹⁵⁶. The motion was lost as usual, due to lack of government support.

¹⁵² *Times of Assam*, dated the 28th April 1917, Rev. A, 97-126, Sep. 1917.

¹⁵³ Ghanasyam Baruas speech at the Council meeting held on the 25th April 1917, *ALAP*. pp.18-19. ASA.

¹⁵⁴ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 76

¹⁵⁵ *ALCP*, 5th October 1918, No. 4, pp. 186-190 and 193. ASA.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The Assam Association¹⁵⁷ took the lead role against the grazing fees during 1914-20 in Assam. They put forward the argument that the tax would raise the price of milk products. Although by and large, it represented sectional interest, the agitation had mass support because the rich peasants and town-dwelling, absentee landholders used to invest in a small way in herds of cattle left under professional graziers care. They were powerful enough to launch an agitation through the revitalization of the Assam Association¹⁵⁸. The Assam Association in its session at Guwahati in 1916 strongly urged the reduction of the rate and amended of the rules of its assessment¹⁵⁹. No subject had come so frequently before the house in the form of questions and resolutions as the grazing tax issue as said by an official member¹⁶⁰. The agitation against grazing fee was so widespread that it served as a bridge between the Assamese intelligentsias and men of responsible in the Nepali community to fight against their common complaints. Chabilal Upadhyaya, Nepali, had the honour to preside over the special and last meeting of the Assam Association, at Jorhat in Assam 1921¹⁶¹. Besides condemning the recent evictions of Nepali graziers from Kaziranga Forest Reserves and the police atrocities on them, the meeting also discussed the Non-cooperation programme and organizational matter¹⁶².

Grazing Fees and the Assamese settlers

Neither the native people nor the British officials were satisfied with the Grazing Rule 1917. Their avowed intention was to confine the levy strictly to professional graziers and traders in cattle and milk suppliers. But under the existing rules (1917) benefit was provided to the settlement holders and cultivators to graze their cattle freely. The rich peasants and domiciled Assamese settlers were invest in cattle and

¹⁵⁷ Assam Association formed in 1903, with Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, President, Jagannath Barua, Vice-president, and Manik Chandra Barua as General Secretary

¹⁵⁸ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p.75

¹⁵⁹ *APCL*, 22nd Feb. 1917, B.C. Allen, Notes on Agitation against Grazing tax. ASA.

¹⁶⁰ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁶¹ The Assam Association which had changed its name and had been virtually turned into a Congress platform at its Tezpur session. The name of the Association was changed to Assam National Assembly, Guha, *Op.cit.*, p.102.

¹⁶² Krishna Nath Sharma, *Krishna Sharmar Diary* (in Assamese) (Guwahati, 1972), p.78. Also Guha, *Op.cit.*, p.102.

left them under the charge of professional graziers. In the figures mentioned below, the number of Assamese people engaged in the professional dairy business is shown. There were a large number of Assamese in Kamrup who owned land and also extensive herds of cattle. Under the grazing rule of 1917, they were not liable to pay grazing dues unless it could be shown that their income from grazing exceeds their income from cultivation¹⁶³.

Table: 4.6
Graziers in the Province of Assam, 1916

District	Nepalese	Assamese
Goalpara	228	15
Kamrup	1,497	471
Darrang	Almost all Nepalese	
Nowgong	Almost all Nepalese	
Dibrugarh	Almost all Nepalese	
Sibsagar	857	38
Garó Hills	189	08

Source: Revenue A, June, 1916, 30-103.

In 1924, enquiries had been made to find out whether any changes need to be done to the existing rules. The settlement officers submitted their reports where they experienced a great difficulty in implementing the rules. The reason behind was that in Kamrup there were many Assamese cultivators graziers, so it was very difficult to prove that a domiciled cultivator was professional graziers as defined in rule 1 (b) (ii). On the other hand Assamese *goalas* had been in charge of a large number of cattle, some of which belonged to himself and some to other persons or families. But it was difficult to prove that the main income of a person or family was derived from the sale of cattle, their calves or their products¹⁶⁴.

In the district of Sibsaagar, out of 823,127 total district populations there were only 120 Assamese professional graziers who paid the tax¹⁶⁵. It was expected that the number of Assamese professional graziers were more than that. But according to the

¹⁶³ File- Rev. A, 30-103, June, 1926. ASA.

¹⁶⁴ J. Hezlett, Commissioner, Assam Valley Division, Letter No. 287R., dated Guwahati, the 28th- 30th August 1924, in File No- *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁵ File- Rev A, 30-103, June 1926. ASA.

grazing rule of 1917, a bonafide cultivator was recognised as professional graziers if he kept more than 10 heads of cattle and whose income from grazing exceeds their income from cultivation. But it was quite impossible to establish the fact that a particular *khutiwalah* had more than 10 heads of cattle, because the animals under the charge of a *Goalas* were found to be owned by number of people¹⁶⁶.

Again the new system of enumeration was also a defective one as difficulties arose at the time of enumeration. Dispute had been occurred between the professional graziers and the enumerators over the age of the cattle. The *mauzadar* and *mohsirdar* tried to include as many cattle calves as possible to be assessable in grazing tax. On the other hand, Nepali graziers who brought buffaloes by taking loans from Marwaris and Assamese lenders, tried to make the tax as small as possible by not paying on calves. This gave the enumerator a chance of bribery. Two such cases were prosecuted in the courts at Gauhati, one against *mauzadar* and another against a checker. In either case there were more than nine hundred alleged cases of bribery¹⁶⁷. In 1925 there were 130 and 135 alleged cases of bribery against *mauzadars* and checkers in the district of Kamrup alone¹⁶⁸.

In 1925, Government of Assam had under consideration the desirability of replacing the existing grazing rules of 1917 and revised grazing rules were enforced in Assam on 1st July 1926¹⁶⁹. The desire of the Government was to frame a set of rules which would be fair and also beneficial to cultivators or settlement holders, especially those who were also engaged in cattle breeding and dairy business.

Grazing Rule of 1926

The new grazing rules avowed intension to confine the levy strictly to professional graziers and traders in cattle and milk products. According to the new rules, cattle under two years old were exempted from grazing tax. A herdsman, as well as the owner of the animals, was liable to pay the tax for the animal found in their charge. Under this new rule, a person who traded dairy product was not exempted, merely because he happened to have land under cultivation. But exemption was given to the

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

settlement holders who disposed by selling of his surplus stock of dairy product from time to time. Sometimes for the convenience of the herdsmen, who owned a number of animals, kept their animal temporarily in charge of a few men for shorter or longer periods. These men generally sold the dairy product. But it was a matter to be decided by the officers making assessment, whether such herd was liable or not for the assessment. Regarding any dispute against assessment of grazing fee or enumeration or against any order made under these rules, orders of the Deputy Commissioner would be final¹⁷⁰.

The Government was desired to frame a set of rules which would be fair and also beneficial to cultivators or settlement holders, especially those who were also carried out cattle breeding and dairy business. According to the grazing rules 1926, the indigenous Assamese cultivators were exempted from the grazing taxes excluding tax on land revenue. But the owners of dairy business, a cattle breeding or cattle trading business were compelled to pay grazing taxes even if they had possessed any land for cultivation¹⁷¹.

People from the beginning opposed the grazing tax in Assam. But in spite of repeated popular demands for abolition of the grazing tax altogether, in 1925 the new grazing rules were proposed. Various organizations and section of people came forward to oppose the bill. In Guwahati session of the Assam Association, June 1925, resolution was passed for the first time firmly demanding total abolition of the grazing tax¹⁷². On 30th May 1925, in its meeting, the Bar Association, North Lakhimpur criticized the proposed bill. In their resolution it was said that “it is a tax on essential article of food and where cow’s milk has already become scarce in Assam. The alarming extent of infant mortality in Assam is mainly due to the shortage of milk. Again the number of draught cattle is hardly sufficient to till all the arable land of the country”¹⁷³. Therefore, the Association demanded complete abolition of this iniquitous tax or at least exclusion of all cattle belonging to the pure agricultural population from assessment. Satyanath Borah reacted on the proposed bill in 1926

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

and said that the proposed tax was going to work like a “tax laid upon the air we breathe”¹⁷⁴.

Sarbeswar Barua, B.L., Gauhati, criticising the grazing rules said, this “grazing rule has no legal basis as it is not based on any Act of Legislature. Since its inauguration the subject has always administrated by executive orders and rules. The result is that a tax can be imposed or enhanced at the sweet will of the executive”¹⁷⁵.

The grazing fees became a target of attack once more in the legislature in March 1934. Allegations that almost all cattle-owning Assamese peasants had been assessed remained unsubstantiated and were not acceptable even to R.K. Choudhuri. Nevertheless, the grazing fees continued to be unpopular. In dispute cases, the rules did not permit to move to a civil court for relief. Besides, these rules were often differently interpreted in different districts- for example more rigorously in Kamrup than in Nagaon. As a result, associations of professional graziers appeared on the scene to carry on the agitation. On 12th March, the Council’s censure was recorded through a cut motion, carried by nineteen to seventeen votes¹⁷⁶. On March 1935, Mr. M. Gohain moved a cut motion in the house on the land revenue demand to protest against the harassment of peasants at the time of assessing grazing fees. But the council voted twenty-two to sixteen to reject the motion¹⁷⁷. Grazing fees continued to be a major economic grievance from then onwards.

Grazing Rules 1935

The fertility of the soil is not after all the only factor of productiveness. The efficiency of labour and plough animals is also an important factor. The proportion which was nearer 2 buffaloes to 1 head of cattle in 1925 was increased to 61,000 and 60,000 as total taxed buffaloes and taxed cattle respectively in 1935 in the

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ALCP*. 12th March 1934, Vol.14, pp.341-51, in his speech, S. Barua demanded reduction in the rate of Grazing fees. ASA.

¹⁷⁷ *ALCP*.1935, Vol.15, pp.296-98 and 308. ASA.

province¹⁷⁸. In a Conference held on 6th May 1931, Mr. R.C. Woodford, Live Stock and Dairy Expert said that:

“Assam buffaloes were however, exceptionally good, but their numbers was very small. Nepalese buffaloes were more common; but after all, the numbers of working buffalo were small as compared with that of bulls and bullocks, but of inferior quality. A pair of Assamese bullocks was said to be able to plough about 3 to 4 *acres* of land in the year; where double cropping was in practice (as in the *Chaparis*) it could did more. A pair of buffalo can do 5 to 6 *acres*. A plough with a single buffalo (which was the rule in Upper Assam) would do somewhat less. The area which a man could cultivate was limited by the strength of his plough animals”¹⁷⁹.

Increase in cultivation due to the immigration of East Bengalis also increased the demand of good breeding cattle in the province. The cultivators of Assam also preferred bullocks than to buffaloes because though “buffaloes were far better animals, but they were troublesome to keep and require more pasturage than is available in the well-cultivated parts of the Valley”¹⁸⁰. The high demand of agricultural implement (cattle) caused the increase in their numbers also¹⁸¹. But the condition of cattle, available in Assam was not satisfactory at all. It was alleged that the bulk of the indigenous populations of the province did not pay sufficient attention to their cattle and that was why “cattle look so ill-conditioned in so many places”¹⁸². Indigenous Assamese people generally, kept large cattle, more than their necessity and unable to look after their cattle and sent them either to forest or to nearby wastelands. Importance was given to the milking cows as compared to the bullocks. Therefore there was a scarcity of the breeding bulls, from which quality cattle was expected. People used to castrate their cattle locally without the help of the doctor,

¹⁷⁸ File No. Revenue A, 39-83, March 1935. ASA.

¹⁷⁹ Mr. R.C. Woodford, Live Stock and Dairy Expert in a Conference held on 6th May 1931, *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ *Assam Secretariat Proceedings*, Revenue A, September 1902, p.69. ASA.

¹⁸¹ Taxed buffaloes- 61,000 and taxed cattle 60,000, ten years ago the proportion was nearer 2 buffaloes to 1 head of cattle. In File- Rev. A, 39-83, March 1935. ASA.

¹⁸² From- Rai Bahadur P.G. Mukerjee, *Report of the Line System Committee, Vol. III*, 1938. ASA.

minor mistake in the case was impediment to the natural growth of a cattle. Castration was a surgical operation and even trained Veterinary Assistant Surgeons committed mistakes occasionally. The lack of proper knowledge of how to nourish their cattle provided opposite result. Mr. S.L. Mehta, Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills in his notes was curious about the matter when he wrote that ‘cattle deterioration has been serious in the province and are desirable to stop further deterioration’¹⁸³ Mr. W. Harris, Superintendent, Civil Veterinary Department strongly advocated employing a trained Veterinary Assistant surgeon for the purpose¹⁸⁴.

Due to the changing scenario of the Assam agriculture, as a result of the large scale peasant immigration from East Bengal, grazing rules also needed some modification. On 22nd June 1930, Mr. R.C. Woodford, Live-stock and Dairy Expert submitted a note regarding grazing areas and the improvement of cattle in the province, wherein among other things, there was a proposal for encouraging castration by imposing differential fees on animals using government grazing grounds. This note was sent to both Commissioner of Assam and Surma Valley for advice. Both the Commissioner submitted their reports after consulting various local officers under them. The matter was then placed before a conference, composed of the Hon’ble Minister of Agriculture, Conservator of Forests, Superintendent, Civil-Veterinary Department, Revenue Secretary, Live-stock and Dairy Expert, and Secretary, Transferred Departments, which was held on 6th May 1931. The subject was thoroughly discussed and the conference came to the conclusion that Mr. Woodford’s scheme for introducing differential rates on the uncastrated bulls of the professional cattle-owners and exempting selected breeding bulls should be accepted. In pursuance of this resolution, the Live-stock and Dairy Expert was asked through the Education Department to submit a draft showing how the grazing rules should be revised to meet his wishes. After a thorough examination of these rules by the Education Department (in consultation with the Director of Agriculture and Live-stock and Dairy expert) and by the Revenue Department, draft rules had been framed and as a finally corrected rule had been published on 25th September 1934¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸³ File- Revenue A, 39-83, March 1935. ASA.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The rules were primarily based on the benefit of the agriculturists. Cultivators who were not interested in dairy business exempted from the payment of grazing fees. A person, who dealt in dairy products, was not exempted under this rule by only just having land under cultivation. No fees should be charged for buffaloes or cattle under two years old on the 1st of July of the year for which a permit was applied for. The reason behind was that two years was just the safe age to encourage castration, early castration prevents the full development of draught powers. Castration at two years avoided this difficulty and at the same time gave the minimum space of time for a young bull to indulge in immature breeding. Experts view on the matter was that, young bull of Indian breeds became able to fertilize a cow successfully at about 1 ½ years. Under the slower growth consequent on the conditions of the Assam's grazing areas most young bulls will achieve that ability only after reaching two years of age¹⁸⁶.

According to the proposed grazing rules 1935, no fees shall be charged for breeding bulls in the case of cattle only- provided such bulls and young bulls were, necessary and suitable for the purpose of breeding. And uncastrated males (other than breeding bulls) were charged Rs. 1.2 *annas* per head per annum for the Assam proper, double the amount (Rs. 2.4) in the Garo Hills and twelve *annas* for Sylhet and Cachar¹⁸⁷. The new rules increased the tax on the immature and poor bulls unless they were castrated, was increased whereas good breeding bulls were allowed free of tax and castrated males at 6 *annas* per head per annum¹⁸⁸.

It was realized that the individual male animal had potential powers of influencing the next generation greatly in excess of the individual female. In the case of cattle the comparison worked out at anything between 50 and 100 to 1. The cow therefore might be left out of consideration and emphasis was given to select best bull for future breeding.

'Tax on Testicles' was imposed on poor cattle above two years of age, as they might indulge in immature breeding which prevented the full development of draught power. The classification made by the Agricultural Inspector, approved breeding

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

bulls should graze free and uncastrated males other than breeding bulls should be assessed at three times the ordinary fees¹⁸⁹. Because Hindu graziers were not in favour of cattle castration and major portion of that community did not support of any castration.¹⁹⁰ Buffaloes were omitted from such an arrangement, as the male buffalo was not usually castrated, even when taken for works¹⁹¹.

The *bathans* of the graziers were mostly situated in riverside areas, and it was difficult to access at distance from ordinary villages, and frequently surrounded by jungles. Cattle were commonly shifted from one place to another in order to evade the payment of fees. To cope up with the situation, 101¹⁹² numbers of *Gaonburas* were appointed to report these moves¹⁹³.

Criticising the policy of government for not maintaining a uniform rate of grazing tax throughout the province, Gauri Kanta Talukdar moved a motion in the Assembly. The rate of grazing tax on each buffalo was Rs. 3 in the Assam Valley, Garo Hills Rs. 6, while in Sylhet and Cachar it is Re.1. Grazing ground in the province was insufficient, and those areas which had been reserved for grazing ground were also unsuitable and useless. Due to insufficiency of fodder, the buffaloes were deteriorating and were giving scanty amount of milk. Under such condition, imposing heavy tax, the burden ultimately fell in the shape of exorbitant price of milk and *ghee*. Joining him Mr. Krishna Nath Sarmah said that “grazing tax is abnoxious tax imposed on the cattle population. There is a scanty grazing ground and even those that exist are without grass. As a result the price of the milk as well as adulteration increased and it had become impossible to get pure milk”¹⁹⁴:

The raising grazing price was also criticized on the ground that every year large number of cattle died in various diseases. The chief cattle diseases prevalent in the province were rinderpest, anthrax, haemorrhagic septicaemia, and foot and mouth

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *ALAP*, May 2, 1928, part VI, pp. 625-626. ASA.

¹⁹¹ File- Rev. A, 39-83, March 1935. ASA.

¹⁹² Goalpara-04, Kamrup-37, Darrang-27, Nagaon-8, Sibsagar-15, Lakhimpur-10. *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ According to the order LR., 2038/3896R., dated Guwahati, 2nd November 1936, Land and Revenue Department, in File No. Revenue B, 1352-1253, December 1936. ASA.

¹⁹⁴ *ALAP*, 5th March 1940, p.552. ASA.

disease. Rinderpest was the worst kind of disease and was alone responsible for more than half of the cattle mortality in the province. The total number of cattle in Assam in 1935 were 54, 48,670. The total cattle mortality in 1938-39 was 54263 (1 per cent. of total cattle) of which 27,600 died from rinderpest alone. Goat-vaccine was introduced for treatment of such cattle. The following figure shows the total numbers of rinderpest cases were treated¹⁹⁵:

Table: 4.7

Rinderpest infected Cattle treated in Assam: 1933-34 to 1938-39

Year	Number of Cattle treated
1933-34	2,733
1934-35	20,396
1935-36	70,081
1936-37	1,11,857
1937-38	1,25,521
1938-39	2,76,814

Source: ALAP, 5th March 1940, p. 859.

Colonial State and its Attitude to the Nepali Graziers

Discovery of tea plant in Assam was significant in the socio-economic perspective of the state. For the expansion of tea industry, large areas of waste land were given to the tea planters in favourable terms, which people once used as grazing grounds. For the suitable and cheap labour to the industry, labours were imported from the Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madras, Madhya Pradesh etc. Feeding this large number of tea labourers was a challenge for the Colonial Government as the Assamese people did not cultivate land more than their necessity. With the gradual expansion of the tea industry, policies of the British official regarding the matter of grazing and wasteland were also changed. British officials encouraged the cultivators for expansion of cultivation by occupying the waste lands. For the benefit of the cultivators and their plough and domestic cattle, Village Grazing Grounds were constituted, where the entry of professional graziers was restricted.

The establishment and growth of tea, coal and oil industry lead to the development of the timber trade in Assam. The large requirement of timber for tea chests, railways sleepers, bridges, planking's, buildings and host of other uses, made the exploitation of the existing forests.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 859.

With the gradual expansion of the tea and railway communication, the importance of the forest resources as well as the value of waste lands was realized. There were occasional complaints against the Nepali professional graziers as “professional graziers cause considerable trouble and damage to the ordinary cultivation and in *jhuming* areas obstruct the growth of forests”¹⁹⁶. Therefore Major W.M. Kennedy, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner remarked that “it is desirable that a definite scheme for dealing with this matter should be formulated”¹⁹⁷. K.L. Barua, Subdivisional Officer, Barpeta said

“Nepali graziers who do not pay income tax on their trade because they wander from district to district and cannot be found. They also evade the payment of grazing fees by their process of wandering”¹⁹⁸.

British officials view was that

“the cattle of the professional graziers did immeasurable damage to the forests, as their large herds of buffaloes eat up everything in sight and left comparatively little grazing for the cattle of local cultivators. They just wanted to get rid of Nepali professional graziers who also tried to avoid payments of fees as long as they could”¹⁹⁹.

In 1916 Mr. Arbuthnot was appointed to enquire the matter of the profits derived from the profitable grazing business. Though he came to know that Nepali graziers were indebted in the hands of the *Keyas* or moneylender, he calculated the profits derived from their business was more than Rs. 40 per annum and suggested that they could easily bear the grazing fees of Rs. 4 per buffalo per annum²⁰⁰.

The government decided to appoint a small committee to examine the functioning of the new grazing rules and to advice further action, if necessary, to limit the fee

¹⁹⁶ File- Revenue A, 59-65, April, 1913 (IIIF/4R of 1913). ASA.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ File- Revenue A, 21-43, February, 1915, (IIIF/2R of 1915). ASA.

¹⁹⁹ Attached copy in File No. Rev. A, 210-275, Dec. 1932. ASA.

²⁰⁰ File- Revenue A, 1-38, April 1916. ASA.

collection to the intended classes of people alone. N.C. Bordaloi refused to serve on it since a nominated committee headed by a Divisional Commissioner did not inspire his confidence. Finally, a committee was formed on 7th May 1927 under the Presidentship of Mr. A.H.W. Bentinck, Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division, with members- Sadananda Dowerah, Keramat Ali, and this Committee was popularly known as the 'Bentinck Committee.' It recommended a liberal application of the rules so as to bring down the total number of assesses listed in 1926-27²⁰¹.

In 1931 to enquire about the incidence of grazing fees a 'Retrenchment Committee' was appointed. Rai Bahadur Nilambar Datta, Rohini Kumar Choudhury and Brindaban Chandra Goswami were the members of the Committee. The main aim of the Retrenchment Committee was to curtailment of the grazing expenditure, availability and improvement of grazing grounds. According to the recommendation of Retrenchment Committee, the post of Grazing Superintendent was abolished²⁰². The post of Grazing Superintendents and their establishment were meant primarily for enumeration and assessment. It was decided that the post and duties should be transferred to Special Sub-Deputy Collector²⁰³, who was also responsible for the land settlement of the area under his charge. The Retrenchment Committee of 1931 expected that it might be possible to increase the revenue from grazing, a portion of which might be devoted towards the improvement of cattle and supply of milk for the province²⁰⁴. Though the main aim of the committee was to solve the grazing related problem, but in the real sense of view their objective was to check the availability of the land under the reserve so that they could open up maximum area of land for cultivation. Chief Commissioner, Assam Valley Division on 10th December 1931 stated that "his policy would be to reduce the area of grazing grounds and increase the rates of grazing fees, giving preferential rates to bonafide agriculturists and to castrated bulls or bulls passed by the veterinary or Agriculture Department"²⁰⁵.

²⁰¹ *ALCP*, 17th September 1927, Vol. 7 pt. 2, p. 1689, ASA.Guha, A. *Op.cit.*, p. 159.

²⁰² Vide letter No. 3583R., dated the 20th Nov. 1931, with reference to office notes at page 27 in File No.- Revenue B, 613-655, March, 1932, and also Appointment Department letter No. 5592AP., dated the 8th sep. 1931. ASA.

²⁰³ File- Revenue A, 210-275, December, 1932. ASA.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The encroachment of Bengali immigrants on the reserves and the action of the local boards in opening pounds close to the professional reserves had given grazing business a setback. Clashes between the East Bengali Muslim immigrants and the Graziers in the professional grazing reserves increased the matter that buffaloes of the Professional graziers damaged their crops. These led to the tendency of replacing cattle to buffaloes. Again this might be also due to the impoverishment of the stock of buffaloes by breeding from the inferior Bengal animals and driving off the Assamese wild or semi-wild bulls²⁰⁶.

The Retrenchment Committee in their report, 1931 recommended of throwing open a very large area of lands for cultivation which was set apart for grazing. The point was that the area was much larger than actual requirement and it was, therefore their consideration whether they should permit the area in excess to be brought under the plough or not²⁰⁷.

The Committee in their report said that in Barpeta and Kamrup there was a disproportionately large area reserved for grazing. Mr. Rohini Kumar Choudhury, a member of the Committee, pointed out that in Kamrup, there were people who did not sell milk or any milk product but also using these reserves. Mr. S.P. Desai, a member Secretary to the Government of Assam Revenue Department remarked that “when the public got no benefit, it was but fair that the graziers should be charged as they must have some pecuniary interest in keeping a large number of cattle”²⁰⁸.

The Retrenchment Committee accepted the desirability of reducing the extent of professional graziers and recommended that the area so excluded should preferably be settled with graziers. Total grazing reserves as distinct from village grazing grounds in Assam in the year 1931 were as follows²⁰⁹:

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ S.P. Desai, File- Rev. A, 210-275, Dec. 1932. ASA.

²⁰⁹ No. 376R., dated Gauhati, the 6th July 1931, From A.H.W. Bentinck, Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division To- The Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Revenue Department. *Ibid.*

Table: 4.8
Grazing Reserves in Assam, 1931

District	B.	K.	L.
Kamrup	266,260	0	17
Darrang	153,724	4	19
Nagaon	138,089	0	0
Sibsagar	146,798	4	0
Lakhimpur	200,410	0	0
Total	905,282	4	16

Source: Rev. A, 210-275, Dec. 1932.

In 1931, the Retrenchment Committee proposed to start “colonization scheme in the larger grazing area and allowed Gurkhali’s to take up land free of premia”²¹⁰. The Committee made a recommendation for the introduction of premium system throughout the Assam Valley in the case of “non-indigenous” population (Gurkhali will come under the term “non-indigenous”). The idea of appointment of Sub-Deputy Collector, as a Grazing Superintendent as well as Colonization Officer so that he could settle as much land to fulfil the government policy of maximization of culturable land²¹¹. Mr. Bentinck, Commissioner, Assam Valley Division, also Chairperson on the meeting of Retrenchment Committee, 1932, tried to draw the attention by saying that, “the revenue of government was a little less than 3 lakhs, where as if the grazing lands could be brought under plough, the income would be somewhere near about 10 Lakhs”²¹².

British government from the very beginning tried an expansion of cultivation in Assam. The local authorities observed that there was large area of land in Assam remained waste and realised that ‘unless these wastelands reoccupied and brought under tillage neither revenue of the government nor the resources of the people could be improved.’²¹³ There was large area of wasteland, which was remained untouched by the plough at the end of the 18th century²¹⁴. Local authorities from time to time encouraged immigrants into Assam. As early as 1832 circular letters were issued inviting settlers to Cachar through respective collectors to populous districts of

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Barpujari, *Vol.V, Op.cit.*, p.37.

²¹⁴ Revenue A, 128-138, November 1898. ASA.

Bengal, Dacca, Tipperah and Mymensing offering waste land rent-free for a term of years after which settlement would be made for the portion brought under cultivation²¹⁵. Few migrants from the neighbouring districts of East Bengal crossed the boundary and settled down in the Sylhet and *Char* lands of the district of Goalpara. Tenure between 1905 to 1911 Assam and Bengal together formed as “East-Bengal Assam.” A large number of East Bengalis marched towards former Assam region to find out their habitable and farming land²¹⁶. The availability of cheap, plentiful and fertile land on easy terms in Assam attracted the immigrants, particularly of Mymensinghians to move up to the valley.

The numbers of East Bengali immigrants in Goalpara district till 1881 were 49059²¹⁷. The population of the Goalpara increased by 1.4 per cent during 1881-91 to 2 per cent during 1891-1901²¹⁸. During 1911-1921, immigrants, particularly of “Mymensingh, formed an appreciable element of population in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon”²¹⁹. The number of immigrants rose from 49,059 in 1881 to 1,18,223 in 1921 forming 19.7 per cent of the actual population of Goalpara²²⁰. On the other hand number of immigrants from Mymensing district to Nagaon increased rapidly from 4000 in 1911 to 58,000 in 1921, and formed 14 per cent of the population of Nagaon district²²¹.

The course of East Bengali immigration into Assam Between 1911 and 1921 has been well described in the 1921 Census Report as follows:

“In 1911 few cultivators from Eastern Bengal had gone beyond Goalpara, those censuses in the other districts of the Assam Valley numbering only a few thousands and being mostly clerks, traders and professional men. In the last decade (1911-

²¹⁵ H.K. Barpujari, *Assam: In the Days of the Company* (Shillong: NEHU, 1996), pp.102-103.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Barpujari, *Vol. V. Op.cit.*, p.52.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Also Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil; Migration and Ethnic Conflicts in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 40-41

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Sagar Barua, *Migration from East Bengal to Assam: Response, Reaction and Assimilation 1900-1947* (Dibrugarh: Kaustav Prakashan, 2007), p.20

²²¹ *Ibid.*

21) the movement has extended far up the valley and colonists now form an appreciable element in the population of all the four lower and central districts... The two upper districts (Sibsagar and Lakhimpur) are scarcely touched as yet. In Goalpara nearly 20 per cent of the population is made up of these settlers. The next favourite district is Nagaon where they form about 14 per cent of the whole population. In the Kamrup waste lands are being taken up rapidly, especially in the Barpeta Subdivision. In Darrang exploration and settlement by the colonist are in an earlier stage, they have not yet penetrated far from the banks of the Brahmaputra.... Almost every train and steamer brings parties of these settlers and it seems likely that their march will extend further up the valley and away from the river before long²²².

The following table shows the flow of immigration of people into Assam in three decades and the total number of persons born in Bengal and district Mymensingh, and enumerated in each district of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.

Table: 4.9

East Bengali (Mymensinghias) immigration in Assam: 1901 to 1931 (figures 000)

Year	Goalpara E.B.(M.S.)	Kamrup E.B.(M.S.)	Darrang E.B.(M.S.)	Nagaon E.B.(M.S.)	Sibsagar E.B.(M.S.)	Lakhimpur E.B.(M.S.)
1901-11	77 (34)	4 (1)	7 (1)	4 (1)	14 (Nil)	14 (Nil)
1911-21	159 (78)	44 (30)	20 (12)	59 (52)	14 (Nil)	14 (Nil)
1921-31	170 (80)	134 (91)	41 (30)	120 (108)	12 (Nil)	19 (Nil)
Total	398 (192)	182 (122)	68 (43)	183 (161)	40 (Nil)	47 (Nil)

Source: Census of India 1931, Vol-III, Assam, part I Report p.50
(E.B.- East Bengali, M.S.- Immigrants from Mymensingh district)

²²² Census of India, 1921. ASA.

Landless immigrants from overpopulated East-Bengal had continuously migrated and settled in Assam. The way in which the migration of East Bengalis took place was remarked as “invasion”²²³. Census Report 1921 says:

“by 1921 first army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara. The second army corps which followed them in the year 1921-31 has consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely but few thousand Mymensinghians in North Lakhimpur are an outpost which may during the next decade; prove to be a valuable basis of major operations”²²⁴.

The migration of these land-hungry immigrants brought about changes of far-reaching consequences: economic, political and socio-cultural. The Census Report of 1931 observes-

“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 did 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 the Eastern Bengal and particularly from Mymensingh”²²⁵.

The wave of immigration of Mymensinghians, Mr. Mullan in his Census Report of 1931 had very aptly remarked- “the only thing I can compare it to is the mass movement of a large body of ants”²²⁶.

²²³ Census Report 1911. ASA.

²²⁴ Census Report 1931. ASA.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Line System in Assam

In 1911, the Census Commissioner for the first time pointed out the danger of East Bengali immigration by calling it “...a peaceful invasion of Assam”²²⁷. However, immigration was no doubt a favourable phenomenon for labour-limited, land-abundant Assam from economic point of view. Initially, land-hungry East Bengali immigrants found land in Assam’s waterlogged, jungle-infested, riverine belt, later in their riverine base, and then further went forward in all direction. It was the period when an open clash of interests began to take place. Because, land-greedy immigrants did not infrequently encroached on government reserves and on land belonging to the local people from which they could be evicted only with great difficulty²²⁸. There was an increasing awareness since around 1913; the Assamese had begun to attract attention of the government. A consolidated set of rules for wasteland settlement was published in September 1915. According to the rule Deputy Commissioner empowered to make settlement subject to the Chief Commissioner’s approval. The settlements were made on an annual *patta* basis, to the landowner who exceeds ten years during which the cultivation took on a permanent nature²²⁹. Concessional rate of revenue for three years was granted to annual lease and after which would be converted into a periodic one²³⁰. Increasing number of East Bengali immigrants already created an alarming situation, and the government decision to give periodic *pattas* to the immigrants acted as fuel to the fire. People of the Brahmaputra Valley strongly protested against the rules and demanded for its revision. The Assam Association adopted a resolution against the government policy in its Annual Conference held at Dibrugarh on 29th December 1915²³¹. The Times of Assam, on its issue dated 27th November 1915, also supported the public demand. To solve the problem government of Assam proposed Line System in 1916, and adopted in 1920. Under this system, a line was drawn in the districts under pressure in order to settle immigrants in segregated areas, specified for their exclusive settlement²³².

²²⁷ Census of India, 1911, Commissioners remarks. ASA.

²²⁸ Barpujari, *Vol. V. Op.cit.*, p.52.

²²⁹ File- Revenue A, 1-22, September, 1926. ASA.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Sagar Barua, *Op.cit.*, p.32.

²³² *Report of the Line System Committee, Vol. I, 1938, Shillong, pp. 1-4. ASA.*

Large number of East Bengalis both Hindu and Muslims left their hearth homes and came to Assam. The table shows the area settled with these people during the last ten years were:

Table: 4.10

Area in acres settled with Mymensinghians: 1920-21 to 1929-30

Year	Hindu	Muslim
1920-21	3,299	30,106
1921-22	4,878	41,487
1922-23	5,960	50,790
1923-24	7,789	55,293
1924-25	7,619	64,192
1925-26	9,643	74,682
1926-27	8,899	75,857
1927-28	11,363	84,098
1928-29	11,614	87,435
1929-30	13,285	89,078

Source:

The increasing numbers of Mymensinghians in the valley also increased the land under tillage. People who did not have their own sufficient land in their home districts, were leading a life of difficulty with the drawbacks peculiar to undertenants of Bengal *zamindars* in overcrowded villages. It was quite natural for these industrious agriculturists to be attracted in large numbers to Assam where they could occupy as much virgin soil as they could reasonably expect to bring under cultivation, and live an independent life with no overload above them except Government²³³.

Discontent between Graziers and Immigrant Cultivators

East Bengali immigrants into the province of Assam had remarkable consequences in Socio-culture, Economic and into the demography at large. The people of other parts of India were encouraged by the colonial government for its own economic benefit. A few prominent Assamese persons like Gunabhiram Barua, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and Bolinarayan Bora also welcomed immigration for economic development of Assam. East Bengalis were settling on government wastelands. They were better cultivators and hence could also offer higher and lucrative land prices to

²³³ From- Rai Bahadur P.G. Mukerjee, *Report of the Line System Committee, Vol. III, 1938. ASA.*

induce Assamese peasants to sell out portion of their holdings²³⁴. Local Marwaris and even Assamese money-lenders financed the immigrants with a view to help them to reclaim land, and expand the cultivation of Jute, *ahu* rice, pulses and vegetables²³⁵. Many Assamese farmers turned into land speculators. They sold off their lands to immigrants at a good price. They then cleared new plots (*pam*) on waste lands and sold them again²³⁶.

In 1917, professional grazing reserve had been constituted, with a view to confine professional graziers to a certain definite areas and also to protect the cultivator against the nomadic graziers²³⁷. But with the influx of a dense wave of immigration from Eastern Bengal into the province, the situation had completely altered. It was then necessary to protect the professional graziers against cultivator. The lands, where the Nepali graziers had been grazing their cattle in the province for a period of 50 years or more, these lands were encroached by the East Bengali. In 1922 few *khutiwallas* of Nagaon met Mr. Heggins, then Deputy Commissioner and complained that *pamuas* were driving them out of their *khutis* and grazing grounds²³⁸. The formation of 'grazing areas' was no bar to settlement by cultivators to spread their cultivation over the whole grazing areas. It was a very favourite trick of the Assamese *pamuas* to go and cultivate close to a *khuti* to obtain the advantage of little free manure²³⁹. The immigrants occupied the waste lands, grazing and forests reserves in an organized way. According to the Line System Committee Report:

“the immigrants coming from East Bengal specially are the most land hungry people. They had come here for land and money being hard pressed by poverty and necessity. So if they somehow or other could get possession of any land, they will rather prefer death than giving away their possessed land”²⁴⁰.

²³⁴ Assam Banking Enquiry Committee Report, 1929-30, Vol. II, pp.508-17. Also Guha, *Op.cit.*, p.167.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ File- Revenue A, 97-126, September 1917. ASA.

²³⁸ File- Revenue B, 1039-1047, June 1923. ASA.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Report of the Line System Committee, Vol.III, 1938. ASA.

Fearing the possibility of breaching the peace, the Line System, devised in 1916, was enforced in 1920 in the district of Nagaon and subdivision of Barpeta compelling the migrants to settle in 'segregated localities.' Under the Line System land were divided into three categories: those (i) open to immigrants, (ii) close to immigrants, (iii) and where a line was drawn only where they could settle one side of it. The system was particularly successful in restricting indiscriminate occupation, but 'mixed' and 'close settlements' were turned before long immigrant settlements mainly because of insincerity and corrupt practices of the settlement officers²⁴¹. These landless immigrants settled on the border and across the settlement boundary and created trouble to the Assamese villages in a more or less systematic way until they were provided with land²⁴².

The scheme of colonizing waste land, though received protest from various section of population of Assam proper, but it came into force due to the support of Saadullah and N.C. Borodoloi. The first colonization scheme started in Nagaon in 1928, followed by the Barpeta and Mangaldai sub-division. Under the colonization scheme, a small family was given 20 *bighas* of land on payment of premium, a family less than 10 *bighas* of land was recognized as a landless. This golden opportunity led to the large number of influx of immigration in to Assam. The target of these immigrants in the Assam Valley was mainly four districts, Nagaon, Darrang, Kamrup, and Goalpara. Therefore the increase in the number of immigration in these districts was also high. The following table shows the number of immigrants in these districts:

²⁴¹ H.K. Barpujari, *North east India: Problems and Policies and Prospects: Since Independence* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1998), p.37.

²⁴² K.R. Choudhuri, Superintendent of Police, Nowgong, Assam, 28th October 1937, *Report of the Line System Committee, Vol.III*, 1938. ASA.

Table: 4.11

The increase number of immigration in Assam: 1921 to 1931

District	1921	1931	Increase
Nowgong	397,921	562,581	41.3%
Kamrup	762,671	976,746	21.9%
Darrang	477,935	584,817	22.6%
Goalpara	762,523	882,748	15.8%

Source: Census Report, Assam 1931, Vol. III, part I, pp.14-31.

The population of the Assam Valley excluding the Frontier Tracts has increased altogether by 22.4 against 21.4 per cent in 1921. Every district showed a substantial increase, the smallest rate of increase being Sibsagar by 13.4 per cent and largest in Nagaon by 41.3 per cent. The population of Goalpara had increased by 15.8 per cent. The percentage increase in population of Kamrup works out at 21.9 while Barpeta subdivision, which gives the enormous increase of 69 per cent. The increase in the population of the Darrang showed 22.6 per cent. The greatest increase in population had been Dalgaon *mauza* in Mangaldai which had increased by nearly 151 per cent. The unprecedented increase was due to almost entirely by immigration of Eastern Bengal settlers, chiefly from Mymensingh²⁴³.

The most adverse effect of the colonization scheme could be seen in the grazing ground. Large acres of land had opened in the name of colonization. Cancellation of reserves or exclusion of areas from the grazing reserves took place in the province since 1927. The grazing Committee which reported in 1927 stated that there were 1,250,000 *bighas* of grazing ground in Assam excluding Goalpara, which was reduced to 905,282 *bighas* in 1932²⁴⁴. Some 5 reserves of the North Lakhimpur subdivision with a total area of 60,712 *bighas* were cancelled in 1932 and the areas were thrown open for settlement²⁴⁵. During the six years preceding 1936, as many as 59 grazing forest and village reserves had been thrown open in Nowgong under the

²⁴³ Census Report, Assam 1931, Vol. III, part I. ASA.

²⁴⁴ File- Revenue A, 210-275, December 1932. ASA.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

colonization scheme for settling immigrants²⁴⁶. Government was always keen for dereservation of professional grazing reserves as it yielded revenue about 5 *annas* per *bigha* only. But the land which would be cultivated by jute would bring Rs. 1-4-0 per *bigha* as jute duty. Even from the paddy cultivation revenue Re. 0.50 would be released²⁴⁷. In 1924, Mr. Hezlett, Commissioner, Assam Valley Division said:

“it is quite possible that in the near future most of the professional grazing reserves will have to be thrown open for cultivation. The total abolition of the reserves would rather be an advantage to the country than otherwise. From an agricultural point of view the reserves are wholly bad as no improvement in the breed of cattle can be hoped for until they are abolished...I am entirely in favour of curtailing the areas at present included in professional grazing reserves as there is a demand for the land for cultivation”²⁴⁸.

‘Line System’ had become a political issue from the day of its inception. Indigenous people of Assam were always in favour of retaining its entirety. But immigrants always opposed it, because according to them it keeps alive feelings of separatism between the immigrants and the Assamese. It also shut the door for fellow feeling, friendship and unity. A Committee was appointed to examine the necessity of the ‘Line System’ under the Chairmanship of Mr. F.W. Hockenull. In February 1938, the Committee submitted its report and emphasized in the retention of the Line System. The Committee emphasized that indigenous people alone would be unable, without the aid of immigrants, to develop the province’s enormous waste land resources²⁴⁹.

The influx of immigrants from East Bengal continued with increasing vigour owing to the rumour circulated by interested and unscrupulous persons that all restrictions

²⁴⁶ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p.169.

²⁴⁷ *ALAP*, 5th March 1940, p. 553. ASA.

²⁴⁸ File- Revenue A, 30-103, June 1926. ASA.

²⁴⁹ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 212.

on settlement and colonization would be removed in Assam²⁵⁰. Saadullah ministry was also responsible for such large number of East Bengali Muslim immigration in to Assam. Large number of these immigrants caused difficulties, as they indiscriminately occupied vacant lands, and also encroached without hesitation on reserves, prohibited areas and even land already leased to others²⁵¹. In 1937, 1,151 families on an area of 11,280 *bighas*, and in 1938, 999 families on 8,067 *bighas* of land had been colonized in Nagaon district alone²⁵². During the year 1938, 1792 families containing 5,040 members, both Hindu and Muhammadans were also migrated to North Lakhimpur from East Bengal, while 14,187 *bighas* of land in Mangaldai was colonized²⁵³. In 1938 few Muslim immigrants appeal to Mr. Saadullah, to settle nearly “40,000 landless immigrants of Nowgong as there was about 13,00,000 *bighas* of waste land in the Nowgong district, otherwise Muslim community will not pardon him”²⁵⁴. But most of these landless immigrants came from some neighbouring villages for *pam* cultivation, and those in grazing reserves possessed other land, before they came to reserve²⁵⁵.

Table: 4.12

The number of landless immigrant’s families who came to Assam before the 1st April 1937:

District	Sub-Division	Approximate No of Families	Remarks
Darrang	Tezpur	591	
	Mangaldai	106	
Lakhimpur	North Lakhimpur	100	
Goalpara	Khas Mahal Area	5	
	Zamindari Estate	2,099	
Kamrup	Barpeta	1,500	
	Guwahati	950	
Nagaon		7642	
Total		12,993	33963 souls

Source: Revenue B, VIII-14 of 1939

²⁵⁰ Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley Division for the Year 1937-38, p.3. ASA.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid. pp. 3-5.

²⁵⁴ File- Revenue B, 835-36, March 1938. ASA.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

In the paucity of available waste lands, these landless immigrants easily encroached professional grazing reserves, which were unprotected by any natural boundaries. From the Deputy Commissioner's statement it was found that in 1938, 800 *bighas* of land in Tezpur, 311 *bighas* in Mangaldai, 1361 *bighas* in Bhabanipur, 1349 *bighas* in Barnagar (both Barpeta Subdivision) area of professional grazing reserves had been encroached by the East Bengali immigrants²⁵⁶. Most of the landless immigrants were also received encouragement from the indigenous landholders who offered land in lieu of cultivating their large holdings of land²⁵⁷.

The increasing numbers of immigrants alarmed the government also. In a discussion in 1937, the government imposed the year of 1st April 1937 as a cut of mark for the immigration. Those who came after that should be evicted²⁵⁸. But it was difficult to distinguish between those came before 1st April, 1937 and those came after. Therefore, Mr. C.B.C. Pain, Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, suggested offering a particular place for these encroachers²⁵⁹. The Line System Committee was also not in favour to maintain a dead line for the immigrants. Rather in the Report of the Line System, Committee indicated that professional grazing reserves might be curtailed whenever possible and the encroachers allowed payment of back revenue²⁶⁰. A state of alarm and consternation existed among the local inhabitants, since the government was encouraging immigrants rather than protecting the reserves. Some of these grazing grounds were created by voluntary surrender of lands by the local people and they objected possession of these lands by encroachers²⁶¹.

Meanwhile, the Congress set up its own Government headed by Gopinath Borodoloi on 19th September 1938. After almost fourteen months in office, Borodoloi's cabinet adopted a resolution accepting the report of the Line System Committee in general terms whereby it prohibited settlement of land to persons who came from outside the province after 4th April 1937²⁶². Accordingly in 1939 a portion of land under *Theka*

²⁵⁶ File- Revenue B, VIII-14 of 1939. ASA.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

professional grazing reserves under Barpeta Subdivision, which was encroached by 29 families of immigrants, were evicted on 18th January 1939. But the execution of the Government order to evict encroachers from the grazing reserves was also unable to fruitful results because the nature of the immigrants. Encroachers in the *Theka* professional grazing reserves were evicted twice before, but after sometime they again returned to their old places. Therefore this time they were not only evicted from the reserve by dismantling and burning their houses but fined also²⁶³. The cases of encroachment in the professional grazing reserves were so large that the “grazing reserves at Barpeta are all paddy field now. Manisimla, Sahpur, Barbala, Kowemari are no more reserves, almost all encroached by Mymensinghians”²⁶⁴. The graziers protested and complained to the local authorities, about the encroachment, the land record staff submitted names of encroachers and extent of encroachment for necessary action. Eviction orders were passed but execution stayed indefinitely. Since then encroachment gradually increased. In spite of graziers protests and local officer’s reports government had taken no action, nor had they given any direction to the local revenue officers in regard to the protection of the rights of the graziers and the controlled regulation of the spread of immigrants on waste land outside the colonization areas²⁶⁵.

On the resignation of the coalition government, Sir Saadullah, came to power in November 1939, opposed Borodoloi government policy of eviction. An All-Party Conference on the Line System was held on 31st May and 1st of June 1940 discussing the wasteland settlement question. The government took resolution on 21st June 1940, known as ‘Development Scheme’ decided to settled landless immigrants who entered into Assam on or before 1st January 1938²⁶⁶. This kind of Government policy seemed to be interpreted as an invitation to the immigrants to occupy any land at their will and pleasure. But before the schemes came into force, the Saadullah Ministry departed and the governor reverted to the colonization scheme²⁶⁷.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Kameshwar Das speech, *ALAP*, 27th February 1940. ASA.

²⁶⁵ *Report of the Special Officer appointed for the Examination of the Professional Grazing Reserves in the Assam Valley*, 1944, p.8. ASA.

²⁶⁶ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 213.

²⁶⁷ *The Assam Tribune*, 1st September, 1944.

On 25th August 1942, Saadullah Ministry again came to power for the fourth time. On 16th July 1943, the Bengal Legislative Council carried a motion, calling upon the government of India to take immediate steps to remove all existing restrictions imposed by the Assam Government on land-hungry emigrant cultivators from Bengal. During that time due to the World War II, there was a shortage of food and other essential commodities, Saadullah, against the quit India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi, supported British financially. To cope up with the situation Saadullah Ministry adopted a new resolution on the land settlement under the slogan “grow more food”, which was actually ‘grow more Muslims’²⁶⁸. Under the new slogan proposed to de-reservation of selected grazing reserves, he threw open even grazing and forest reserves which were earlier held to be inviolable. This resulted in numerous clashes between the immigrants and the graziers²⁶⁹. The Hindu Sabha criticized the scheme of the Saadullah Government as an insidious move towards creating a Pakistan in Assam. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha successfully organized the “Assam Land Policy Protest Day” on 25th August 1944 against the Government policy on land²⁷⁰.

S.P. Desai, a senior ICS was appointed as a Special Officer in August 1943, to investigate the grazing condition in the Assam Valley²⁷¹. But the real motive of the Government was to ascertain what portion of professional grazing reserves could be declared as surplus available for settlement²⁷². The gravity of the situation was summed up in his report thus-

“the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation is, so far as the immigrants encroachers are concerned, virtually non-existent. The immigrants openly claim to have short circuited the local staff and officers. Every day new bamboo sheds and temporary huts are sprouting up in the reserves... the immigrants absolutely ignored the local officers, so much so that they did

²⁶⁸ *The Assam Tribune*, 3rd September, 1943.

²⁶⁹ *ALAP*, Vol. I, 15th March 1945, p.519. ASA.

²⁷⁰ *The Assam Tribune*, 24th October, and 1st September 1944, also Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, (eds), *Political History of Assam, Vol.III* (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 2008), p. 269.

²⁷¹ Government Letter No. R.D.3/43/20, dated the 28th August 1943. ASA.

²⁷² *Report of the Special Officer appointed for the Examination of the Professional Grazing Reserves in the Assam Valley*, 1944, p.1. ASA.

not even answer questions put to them. The Nepali graziers and Assamese *pamuas* finding no protection from anywhere give ‘*dohai*’ in the name of King Emperor. To this some of the thoughtless among the immigrants are said to have replied that the immigrants themselves are the kings- verily the cup of humiliation for the Assamese is full. They feel the law is meant for them only and not for the immigrants, that the Government which is the custodian and trustee of their interests has failed them. All section of the people are greatly perturbed and their talk exhibits deep-rooted bitterness”²⁷³.

Buffaloes and cattle played a vital part on the rural economy. Professional Grazing Reserves were a source of supply of draught animals of good type and milk and milk products to villages and towns alike. For better production and profit these animals were maintained in large herds and required large areas full of fodder. Therefore, Mr. Desai recommended that the “grazing reserves which will hence forward remain should not be reduced until such an experiment yields reliable information and that information supports further reduction”²⁷⁴.

The East Bengali immigrants, who came in huge numbers, raised sheds in the corner of the professional Grazing Reserves for their shelter and later encroached the reserve and began to cultivate. The few graziers in the neighbourhood were incapable of doing anything apart from protesting and appealing to the local officers. The immigrants did not listen to protests. “The only alternative for the grazier was to shift himself bag and baggage. But where is he to go?” said Mr. Desai²⁷⁵. Special officer reported that forcible occupation of grazing lands by the immigrants had already taken place by a large scale, even in the predominantly Assamese or Tribal areas. His conclusion was that there was no surplus land available for new settlement²⁷⁶.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.3.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 11.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.3, also *The Assam Tribune*, 27th October 1944.

Ignoring the report, Saadullah Government threw selected professional grazing reserves open for settling immigrants²⁷⁷. The Secretary to the Government of Assam wrote to the Revenue Department, Government of Bengal in May 1944 that:

“settlement of land with immigrants is continuously on the increase and Government are trying their level best to accelerate it; the de-reserving of surplus lands in the professional grazing reserves. Such land not only set apart from the professional grazing reserves but also were being thrown open is also likely to result in considerable increase of settlement with the immigrants. The process of gradual abolition of the Line System was a process that had already been under process ‘in areas where castes Hindu are in the majority’²⁷⁸.

There was a protest all over the province of Assam. On the basis of the Special Officers report Congress also launched various programmes to protest Saadullah Government. This led to the situation chaos. Ultimately on December 1944, Saadullah convened an all-party meeting to find out acceptable solution of the Line System and settlement policy. Saadullah, without consulting Muslim League, passed a resolution on 16th January 1944 on the basis of the recommendations, Government passed a resolution on 16th January 1944, by which it was decided to keep the professional reserves intact and all trespassers should be evicted²⁷⁹. It was also decided to keep reserve 30 per cent of available wasteland as provision for indigenous people’s expansion in future and to settle the rest of the wastelands with the landless local people as well as immigrants, who had come to this province before 1938²⁸⁰. But Saadullah Government could not operate its resolution owing to opposition both from the Muslim League and the Congress. Extremist section of Muslim League demanded full accommodation of immigrant Muslims even at the cost of the local people’s interest²⁸¹. The Congress on the other hand opposed the

²⁷⁷ *The Assam Tribune*, 27th October 1944.

²⁷⁸ A.G. Patton to the Revenue Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Shillong, 5th May 1944, Revenue Department Development Branch, File- RD25/44. ASA.

²⁷⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III, Op.cit.*, p. 269. Also Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 232.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *The Assam Tribune*, 25th June 1945.

resolution as it conferred powers with regard to the allotment of land to the immigrants²⁸². On 6th February, 1945, armed police intervened in a clash between local graziers and Bengali Muslim encroachers in the *Kawaimari* grazing reserves of Barpeta sub-division. Two Bengali encroachers were injured from gunshot. This was followed by a communal tension in the district. Due to the administrative interference from above, the local police failed to take any effective action against the illegal encroachers²⁸³.

In 1946 the Congress Government was formed under the leadership of Gopinath Borodoloi. Bordoloi government attempted to implement the policy of the Saadullah Government. It took up the eviction issue and decided to evict the immigrants from the professional grazing reserves. This prompted the Provincial League Committee to form a Committee of Action headed by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani on 19th February 1946 which directed the Muslim League workers and volunteers to agitate against the eviction policy of the Congress Government all over the Assam²⁸⁴. Tension generated in the reserve areas on 21st March 1946 and a police patrol party, provoked by some immigrants, fired a few warning shots to disperse them. But this only infuriated the immigrants who, about 5,000 in numbers, attacked the police camp in retaliation. And as a result, Police again opened fire which killed 12 persons. Driving out the encroachers, under such circumstances, practically became difficult for the Government²⁸⁵. The more so when Jinnah after his arrival at Guwahati on 7th April 1946 made a remark that “if the Government does not immediately revise its policy and abandon this prosecution, a situation will be created which will not be conducive to the well-being of the people of Assam”²⁸⁶. In the midst of the protest Borodoloi Government issued fresh instruction on 14th May 1946 to execute the earlier order of the government. Accordingly, from the *Kumolia* Professional grazing reserves of Tezpur, as many as 229 families were evicted successfully between 15th and 16th May 1946. In fact, on 14th May 1946, a Magistrate with some *Mandals* and a large number of armed forces from the railways and eight elephants demolished the

²⁸² Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III, Op.cit.*, p. 270.

²⁸³ File- Confidential B, 1945, File No. C27/45, ASA.

²⁸⁴ File- Confidential B, File No. C.240/46, Political, ASA.

²⁸⁵ Home Political, File No. 18/3/47, Fortnightly Report, Assam, 2nd half of March 1947, NAI.

²⁸⁶ Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III, Op.cit.*, p. 279.

dwellings of the immigrants. The police also fired six rounds on the immigrants, causing three deaths and injuring six others²⁸⁷.

Abdul Hamid Khan, leader, Assam Muslim League gave a call to the evicted persons to return to the grazing reserves. Responding to their leader's advice, one hundred and sixty persons, reoccupied their holdings and reconstructed their hovels overnight²⁸⁸. Leaders of the Muslim League created the situation tensed. Clashes with graziers and even to the armed police and military were common during those days. To cope up with the situation, section 144, criminal Procedure Code was imposed in the tensed areas all over Assam.

Abdul Hamid Khan, commonly known as Moulana Bhasini, a leader of Assam Muslim League decided to undertake a Civil Disobedience Movement against the Government's eviction policy. Subsequently Bhasini was arrested on 10th March 1947. On 11th June 1947 the Civil Disobedience programme was officially abandoned by the Assam Provincial Muslim League²⁸⁹. In the meantime, the entire political scenario of India had taken an altogether new turn. Issue of Independence and partition dropped down the question of immigrants particularly Line System for the time being.

Protest against Grazing

The large sections of Nepalis in the Brahmaputra Valley were graziers. The immigrant Nepali settlers were initially settled in the grazing reserves of Brahmaputra valley that is *Chapari* area. Increasing numbers of East Bengalis in Assam and their encroachment in the professional grazing reserves made very much concerned about their dairy business in the province. Nepali graziers who were settled in Kaziranga areas prior to 1890, were evicted from the reserve in the name of constitution of forest reserve. In 1920, the British Government ordered, all the graziers of Kaziranga to vacate their grazing lands within 24 hours. The households

²⁸⁷ File- Confidential B, File No. C.297/46, Political, ASA.

²⁸⁸ File-Confidential B, File No. C.247/46, Political, ASA.

²⁸⁹ File- Confidential B, File No. C. 133/47, Political, ASA.

of the graziers were burnt down. The Nepali graziers, terrified by the atrocities of the colonial government, looked for alternative settlement²⁹⁰.

The atrocities on the tax-paying graziers of Kaziranga compelled the leaders of the Nepali community in northeast India to think about politically organizing themselves²⁹¹. The idea of Graziers' Association was in the mind of the advocate Gangadhar Upadhyaya of Shillong in 1931, and told Chabilal Upadhyaya²⁹² to resettle the Nepali graziers of Assam, especially those who were evicted and found difficulties in the Kaziranga forest. As a result, 'Tezpur Graziers' Association' came into existence with the efforts of Chabilal Upadhyaya. Later on this association was renamed as "Assam Graziers Association" in 1933 at Singri²⁹³. It was the oldest association of Nepalese in Assam. Chabilal Upadhyaya was the founder president of the Association²⁹⁴. The main objectives of this Association were²⁹⁵:

- (i) protection and preservation of Graziers' land of Assam,
- (ii) stop cultivation in the professional grazing reserves, prevention of immigrants in Burachapari,
- (iii) protection of forests of Assam for the survival of Nepali community in Assam,
- (iv) involvement of domicile Nepalis of Assam in the freedom movement of India, and
- (v) preservation of social integration between the Assamese and Nepali communities.

The second conference of the Association was held in 1936 at Singri in Darrang district. In the conference it was observed that, the members were very concerned about the issue of illegal migration of East Bengalis into Assam . These lands hungry

²⁹⁰ Sajal Nag (2007). "Fei-isation of the Nepalis of Northeast India", in *The Nepalis in North-East India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity*, eds., Sinha, A.C. & T. B. Subba, (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2007), p. 189.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Chabilal Upadhyaya was the first President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).

²⁹³ P. Bhandari, *Freedom Movement and Role of Indian Nepalese 1800-1950* (Jagiroad: Rama Bhandari, 1996), p. 88.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

East Bengalis easily encroached on land set apart for professional grazing reserves²⁹⁶. The Association faced a major challenge from the aggressive encroachment of grazing lands by the East Bengali Muslim immigrants from Mymensingh²⁹⁷. The fight was in fact physical rather than official²⁹⁸. The Association took up the fight against the Mymensingh immigrants. Prasad Singh Subba took active part for the protection of grazing land from the encroachment of East Bengalis of erstwhile Darrang of Assam²⁹⁹. Under the slogan of 'Grow More Food' Saadullah Government encouraged the East Bengali Muslim cultivators to occupy waste lands and grazing reserves. The Assam Graziers Association strongly opposed the Saadullah government policies. The Association submitted several memoranda to Saadullah government to protest against such encroachments³⁰⁰.

A section of influential Gorkhas living in India succeeded with the inception of the All India Gorkha League on 15th May 1943 at Darjeeling to bring the entire Indian Gorkha population to the mainstream of national life³⁰¹. It supported the freedom movement and propagated that only independence of the country from foreign yoke would serve the interests of the Gurkhas best³⁰². Dambar Singh Gurung was the founding father of the All India Gurkha League. A large number of Gurkhas who served under the Colonial Government settled permanently in Assam after their retirement. Most of them engaged themselves in agriculture and dairy business. But continuous inflow of East Bengalis, their encroachment of the grazing reserves brought a serious threat to the dairy business and existence of Nepali graziers in the reserves. The Nepali graziers urged Dambarsingh Gurung to save them from total ruination by exercising his political influence³⁰³. The AIGL was also interested in extending its activities in the province, immediately responded the request of the graziers of Assam. The AIGL resolved to create pressure on the Government of

²⁹⁶ Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III. Op.cit.*, p. 319.

²⁹⁷ Nag, *Op.cit.*, p. 189.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁹⁹ P. Bhandari, *Op.cit.*, p. 91.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Gurkha*, a fortnightly, (Nepali) Gauhati, 15th January 1955.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 30 May 1946.

³⁰³ *Gurkha*, 1 March 1945.

Assam not to evict the Gorkhas from its grazing land³⁰⁴. In early 1944, Dambarsingh Gurung, president AIGL made an extensive tour of the province³⁰⁵. In February 1944, Gurung initiated discussion with Gopinath Borodoloi in the matter of graziers in Assam³⁰⁶. Further, Gurung led a delegation of Gorkha graziers and placed their problems to Saadullah, the Prime Minister of Assam, and urged him to make an enquiry to look into their grievances³⁰⁷. All these efforts to highlight the problems of the Nepali graziers in Assam also earned the attention of the Assembly. During the address to the Assam Assembly in November 1944, the Governor also made a specific reference to the problem of the Gorkha graziers³⁰⁸. The House also discussed the issue at length and authorised the Government to convene a conference to solve it³⁰⁹. Accordingly, a Conference was held from 17 to 19 December 1944³¹⁰. A resolution was passed and urged to the Government to adopt measures to stop cultivation in the professional grazing reserves, to serve notice to the encroachers to vacate the reserves within six months, and to settle the evicted families from the grazing reserves elsewhere³¹¹. The Gurkha League continued with its demand for protection of the interest of the Gorkha graziers in Assam after Government failure to implement the recommendation³¹². The Gurkha League was particularly active in Darrang and Lakhimpur districts. It appealed to the Gorkhas to treat Assam as their motherland³¹³, and to identify themselves as Assamese³¹⁴. They blamed the British

³⁰⁴ Singh, Bhai Nahar and Kirpal Singh, *History of All India Gurkha League 1943-49* (New Delhi: Nirmal Publishers and Distributors, 1987), p.26. Also Rudraman Thapa “Political Organisation of the Nepalese in Assam (AIGL to AGS): A Summary”, in *History and Culture of Assamese-Nepali*, eds., Jamadagni Upadhyaya, (Guwahati: DHAS, 2009), pp.75-84.

³⁰⁵ *Gurkha*, Gauhati, 1 January 1945 and 15 January 1945.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 January 1945.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *APAI*, Memo No. 1/B-5 (4) (J) 48/14A, S. B. Shillong, 16 March 1948. Also Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III. Op.cit.*, p. 319.

³¹² *APAI*, for the week ending on 20 November 1946.

³¹³ *Assamiya*, 27 April 1946.

³¹⁴ Home Poll. File No. 18/1/47, F.R., Assam, 2nd half, January 1947, NAI.

Government for deliberately retaining the Gorkhas of India economically and educationally backward³¹⁵.

The Line system acquired a new dimension when the Muslim League began to champion the cause of the immigrants by launching an all-out propaganda campaign in the rural areas. They selected particular *hat* (weekly market) in the immigrant inhabited areas, League members announced in the *hat* days by the beating of drums that the League would espouse the cause of the landless immigrants to settle in Assam and took steps for speedy redress of their grievances³¹⁶. As a result a new class called *Dewani* emerged who made false promises to the immigrants that they would reserve land for them³¹⁷. The *Assam Samrakhsini Sabha* vehemently opposed the settlement of immigrants in Assam and viewed it as a menace to Assamese race and culture³¹⁸.

Veer Sarvarkar, the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, in a meeting of Assam Provincial Hindu Sabha held on 27th November 1941 at Gauhati, to counter the East Bengali immigrants, urged upon the Hindu leaders to maintain unity and prepare a scheme for the purpose of attracting the hill tribes in and around Assam to settle on those areas which were left open to the immigrants³¹⁹.

In 1942, Saadullah in the name of the land development scheme, threw open even the grazing and forest reserves which were earlier held to be inviolable. This resulted in numerous clashes between the immigrants and the graziers³²⁰. Public agitation soon ensued against de-reservation and settlement of land to immigrants. The *Assam Jatiya Mahasabha* and *Sibsagar Ahom Sabha* supported this popular sentiment. The *Hindu Sabha* criticized the scheme towards creating a Pakistan in Assam. The *Assam Jatiya Mahasabha* successfully organized the “Assam Land Policy Protest Day” on 25 August 1944³²¹.

³¹⁵ File- Confidential B, File No. C. 125/47, Political, ASA.

³¹⁶ *The Assam Tribune*, 24 May 1940.

³¹⁷ Conf. B, File No. 1 of 1946, Political, ASA.

³¹⁸ *AICC papers*, File No. 4 (i) 22, 1937, NMML.

³¹⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. and Sibopada De, *Vol. III. Op.cit.*, p. 268.

³²⁰ *ALAP*, Vol.I, 15 March 1945, p.519. ASA.

³²¹ *The Assam Tribune*, 24 October 1944.

The manoeuvres of the activities of the Domiciled Association provoked the Assamese. Leading Assamese personalities like Ambikagiri Ray Choudhury, Nilmoni Phukan, Jnananath Borah appealed the Assamese through their writings and activities to be on the guard to protect their interests³²². Ambikagiri Ray Choudhury, through the platform of Assam *Jatiya Mahasabha* and its mouthpiece *Deka Asam* attempted to draw a distinction between the immigrants and domiciles on linguistic basis. The Mahasabha raised the slogan “Assam for Assamese.” It also expressed anxiety over the Government’s handling of the sensitive issue of the Line system, and strongly demanded the eviction of immigrants and their repatriation to Bengal³²³.

Conclusion

British East India Company, after annexing Assam, was busy in search of various avenues from where they could easily collect revenue to expand their exchequer. The British Government with a view to meet the expenses of administrative machinery, imposed taxes in grazing where Assamese people enjoyed revenue free from generations. Nepalis who were recruited and immigrated to Assam in the form of soldiers or porters or labourers were very much impressed by the densely jungle and vast area of wastelands which was ideal for the grazing business. Later these soldiers were encouraged by Colonial government to settle down in Assam after their retirement and they took grazing as their profession. Large number of Nepalis migrated to Assam as graziers. Colonial Government on their part did not lose the opportunity of extracting revenues from graziers. The grazing tax was introduced in Assam in 1888 at the rate of 8 *annas* per buffaloes and 4 *annas* per cattle which was raised Re. 1 in 1907 and still higher in 1912. In 1917 Grazing rule was introduced for the professional graziers and grazing fees was increased Rs. 3 per buffalo and 6 *annas* per head per cattle which was continued the same till independence.

Grazing had been the prime issue of discussion in both the house and outside the house in Assam. British initially tried to increase their revenue collection by promoting and encouraging Nepali graziers into the province. But soon the discovery of tea changed the demographic picture of Assam. Therefore, Colonial Government concentrated their attention to expand the cultivated land to feed the increased

³²² *ALAP . Op.cit.*, p. 321. ASA.

³²³ *Ibid.*

number of immigrated labours into the province. Peasants from East Bengal were given pecuniary assistance to settle into Assam. They were encouraged to catch up lands which were reserved for grazing and for the purposes of expansion and settlement of future generation of indigenous population. Grazing business was also discouraged as it was alleged that graziers were continuously shifting their *khutis* and difficult to collect taxes as *khutis* were available mostly in the midst of jungle and Nepalis were on the other hand also tried to avoid paying the grazing fees. It was also alleged that cattle of graziers destroyed crops and forest resources. Therefore, Government increased the grazing taxes in gradual interval with the intention that if the graziers wish to run the grazing business they had to pay the increased taxes or vacate the place.

But the grazing taxes had always been a subject of criticism not only by the graziers but also from the indigenous Assamese. People denied paying such kind of taxes for the facilities they enjoyed from generations free of cost. The national movement for freedom also started a non-tax campaign to oppose such taxes. The continuous inflow of East Bengali peasants into Assam and their encroachment of the grazing reserves led to conflict between graziers and East Bengalis. The indigenous population also felt threatened not only from economic but also socio-cultural and religious grounds. Indigenous population came out to support Nepali graziers in their conflict with East Bengalis in the grazing reserves. When Borodoloi Government came into power in 1946, orders were issued to evict East Bengalis from the grazing reserves of Assam. This made the situation chaotic in Assam which ended with numbers of communal violence.