

Conclusion

The Treaty of Yandaboo on 24 February 1826, was formalized British occupation of Assam, and established its administration in the province of Assam. The mercantile character of the British East India Company espoused their policies for expansion and extraction of raw material in the province. Number of survey operation was done to explore the available sources. Their policies had been solidly protected by the “steel frame” of its organizational set up¹. The prime motive of the colonial administration of Assam was revenue maximization. Hence, the extent and scope of all activities were managed by considerations of commercial gain². The colonial intervention and exposed the new avenues of employment led to the large scale of migration into the province. Nepalis are one of the important migratory groups into Assam. This made a drastic change in the demography and socio-economic life of Assam.

The economic structure of Assam has always been pre-eminently an agricultural country. The village was the most important unit and because of the difficulties in communication with the outside world, it had to be self-sufficient. All the principal needs of the community were satisfied locally and only for such articles like salt was to be had to an outside source. Like the rest of India, the village was the kernel around which Assamese society evolved. It grew its own food, made its own implements, wove its own cloths and had its own priest, goldsmith and doctor³. Most of the people were self-employed and seldom to worked for hire. No worker was hereditarily attached to any particular trade and there was considerable social mobility. In fact, the autonomy of the village economy was a significant feature of the Assamese *paik* based society, in the pre-colonial era.

¹ P. Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialisation and Colonial Penetration*, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1999), p. 202.

² *Ibid.*, p.102.

³ *Ibid.*

But the British Government was very much aware that reliance on the traditional revenue system did not produce the desired result. The British abolished *paik* system to suit their economic interest and gave immediate priority to exert maximization possible revenue from the province. The British policy of maximization of revenue collection was easily reflected on the opium policy of the colonial government. Assamese people cultivated poppy plant in their *bari* land for domestic consumption. However, opium-addiction remained a vice limited only to a few rich men there until the middle of the next century⁴. But when the British government came to know that the general people of Assam also have weakness to opium, taking advantage of this situation the British made it an article of universal consumption of the people of Assam and by doing so they augmented their revenues by leaps and bounds. Consequently number of opium eaters grew rapidly. British officials were also in support consumption of opium thus:

“the use of opium has with many almost become a necessary of life, and in a damp country like Assam it is perhaps beneficial if taken with moderation”⁵.

Again the wake of kala-azar, an idea was floated by some cases that opium cures the kala-azar. People took to the drug in apprehension of an attack by the malarial fever. The discovery of tea in the jungle of Assam attracted large number of British businessmen to invest in tea plantation in Assam. British planter had immediately experienced that the scanty populated province, local people were opium eaters which make them lazy to work and as a result of which there had been acute shortage of labour in the plantation. Opium has also its share in degrading its consumers, even when taken in moderation. It leads to physical, mental and moral deterioration. Colonel Chopra in his Enquiry Report wrote that, ‘the habitual use of opium incapacitates the individual from discharging his duties if the dose is not forthcoming at the right time’⁶. Those who were addicted opium eating were generally averse to labour. But the government was not in favour to lose

⁴ Maniram Dewan, *Buranji Vivekaratna*. Mss. No. 272, Transcription No. 108, Preserved at the DHAS, Guwahati, P.424-25.

⁵ A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, (1854), pp. 19-20, emphasis added.

⁶ *Report of the Assam Enquiry Committee, 1923*, PHA, file no. 33. ASA.

revenue which collected from poppy cultivation. To solve the labour shortage in the province Mills concluded- ‘opium they should have, but to get it they should be made to work for it’⁷. Government finally banned poppy cultivation with effect from 1st May, 1860 and allowed the government to operate opium monopoly in the province through *vendor* system. In 1873-74 there were as many as 5,137 licensed opium shops to vend the drug at the grassroots⁸. Therefore, British tea planters appealed for a ban on opium.

It was popular notion amongst the British officers about the indigenous people was that most of them were opium addicted, which made them indolent and lazy. Along with this popular notion, local Assamese people on the other hand denied to work as a labourers under the Company Government. In regard to the reluctance of the Assamese people to work as labourers Mr. Griffiths opines- “the self-sufficient village economy as a rule, neither included, nor compelled by circumstances to have come in search of work”⁹. But changes occurred on the socio-economic scenario of the Assam when indigenous tea plant, coal and oil were discovered in Assam. Defying as wage-earners by the Assamese local people, British capitalist had to face a serious labour shortage in to the province. Hence, large numbers of cheap labourers were recruited from outside of the province. There were many reasons pointed out by the scholars for the labour shortage and unwillingness of the Assamese people to work as labourers. R.C. Kalita argues that the ‘aversion of the Assamese people was due to hang-over of the *paik* system of the past, they treated wage labour was as equal to the *paik* service prevalent under Ahoms and they practically prefer independence and did not come under any sort of bondage’¹⁰. Again the destruction caused by the Moamoria Rebellion, Burmese invasion and internal dissensions which deteriorated the condition of peasantry caused their aversion to manual labour. The Colonial government officials on the other hand were also not in favour of

⁷ *Ibid.* p.19-20.

⁸ Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report, *Op.cit.*, p.23.

⁹ S.P. Griffiths, *History of the Indian Tea Industry*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p. 267.

¹⁰R.C. Kalita, “Immigration to Assam: British Policy and Assamese Middle Class (1826-1900)” in *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Fourteenth Session, Shillong, 1993, pp.178-179.

given employment of Assamese labour as ‘they had a local and solid social base they had a better bargaining power with management’¹¹.

There have been numerous attempts to formulate a comprehensive theory on the question of people migration, among these, E.G. Ravenstein’s *Lucid* would be more relevance in this regard. According to Mr. Ravenstein, different factors which push a particular individual or community to migrate elsewhere were:

‘Bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxation, unattractive climate, uncongenial social surroundings, and even compulsion (slave trade transportation) all have produced and are still producing currents of migration, but none of these currents can compare in volume with that which arises from the desire inherent in most men to better themselves in material respect’¹².

If an analysis is made of the above theory, and if applied to the migration of Nepalis into Assam, during the Colonial period, one would definitely reach to the conclusion that the migration of the Nepalis were influenced by any one or combination of these factors, but among all these, economic factors have proved to be the most significant one. Manirul Hussain wrote on this point thus: “the push and pull factors that led to a large scale migration in Assam were generated by the contradictions of Colonial exploitation and expansion”¹³.

Two major factors which attracted Nepalis into Assam during the Colonial period were: (a) vast amount of waste lands available for Colonisation, and graze their cattle, (b) Economic opportunities and employment scope provided by the Colonial Government. Therefore, in the case of the gender and age group of the Nepali migrants and as is normally the migrants cases elsewhere in the world, most of the Nepalis who migrated

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.180.

¹² Thomas Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Traders to Industrialists*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), p.96.

¹³ Manirul Hussain, *Assam Movement, Class Ideology and Identity*, (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1993), p.184.

into Assam during the Colonial period, were young at the time of the migration and majority of them were males. In this regard Priyam Goswami, makes an important observation that in Colonial Assam, ‘most of the migrants came with their families, following the lead of their co-villagers and elders who had gone ahead of them and settles permanently in their new surroundings, with old friends and relatives, values and attachments’¹⁴. C.S. Mullan in the Census Report of Assam, 1931, pointed out that there were three main currents of migration into Assam and they were (a) Immigrants of labours into the Assam Tea gardens (b) Immigration of Eastern Bengali peasants and (c) Immigration of Nepalis¹⁵.

Table 6.1

Number of Immigrants into Assam and of Origin: (*figure in thousands*)

Birth place	1931	1921	Difference
Bengal	575	376	+199
Bihar and Orissa	472	571	-99
Central Provinces	82	91	-9
United Provinces	68	77	-9
Madras	58	55	+3
Central India Agency	16	13	-3
Rajputana	22	16	+6
Burma	8	7	+1
Bombay	6	1	+6
Punjab	6	3	+3
Nepal	88	70	+18
Rest of India	2	2	+0
Total from India	1314	1217	+22
Grand Total	1409	1290	+119

Source: C.S. Mullan, Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, Assam, part I, Report, Assam, Calcutta, 1933, p.45.

¹⁴ Priyam Goswami, *Op.cit.*, p.215.

¹⁵ C. S. Mullan, *Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, Assam, part I, Report, p.45.*

The British Government not only made land a valuable commodity but also a scare one. The British Government in order to increase land revenue, encouraged immigration and asked to settle in Assam as cultivators on lands that remained fallow for years due to scantiness of population. The Gurkha soldiers, who were recruited, after the Treaty of ‘Sowgolee’ (1815), in the different battalions of the army, were encouraged to settle in the province after their retirement.

Table 6.2
The total area of land held by Nepalis in Assam

Assam Valley Division (Districts)	1938-39* Acres	1939-40* Acres	1944-45** Acres
Goalpara	11,596	9,790	8,281
Kamrup	10,550	11,386	11,684
Darrang	51,931	57,186	57,140
Nowgong	5,329	5,491	6,645
Sibsagar	6,633	6,896	4,148
Lakhimpur	14,342	13,987	15,702
Garo Hills	40	37	43
Total	100,421	104,773	103,643

Source: * Report on the Land Revenue Administration of Assam 1939-40, p.40.

** The Assam Gazette, July-September, 1946, p. 959.

The Colonial administration in Assam gave an active impetus to immigration into the province. It was view of the fact that land available for cultivation was vast in extent in comparison to its available men power. The main objective of the Colonial Assam Government was the resource exploitation and revenue maximization. Accordingly, East Bengali cultivators were encouraged to migrate and settled in Assam. On the other hand, what seems to have attracted Nepalis most were the vast expanse of greenery dense forests and hills, abundance of land and the ‘chars’ of the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries, dotted with verdant full of lush green vegetation, was indeed, an ideal scenario for cattle-breeding. Some of pensioners of the retired soldiers took dairy business as their occupation. With the increasing number of Nepali graziers pouring into

Assam the colonial government extended its revenue regime by imposing grazing taxes in the province where the peasants enjoyed the traditional rights to graze their cattle freely on the village commons and neighbouring forests¹⁶. Accordingly in 1886 tax of 4 *annas* per buffalo was imposed as a grazing tax, which was raised 8 *annas* in 1888 in Lakhimpur district. In 1890 a definite instruction were issued to levy of grazing fee at the rate of 8 *annas* per buffalo and 4 *annas* for other horned cattle. The continuous Nepali migration in the province as a grazier, increased the grazing fee in time to time. In 1907 grazing tax was raised to Re. 1 per buffaloes raised Rs. 2 and 6 *annas* for other horned cattle in 1915¹⁷. This rate of grazing fee was again raised Rs. 3 per head per buffalo and *annas* 6 for other horned cattle in the province¹⁸. Thereafter, this grazing fee continued to be Rs. Rs. 3 per head per buffalo and *annas* 6 for other horned cattle.

Table 6.3

Increasing the grazing cattle and Revenue Collection in Assam: 1910-1946

	1910	1915	1920	1925	1946*
No. of cattle Assessed	12,993	44,199	135,690	182,605
No of Professional graziers	90	184	6,626	9,165
Total Revenue collection	12,525	64,007	301,077	361,947	302,014

Source: ALCP, 1928, Vol.I, part IV, pp. 81-89.

*Debate of the Assam Legislative Assembly, March-April, 1947, Vol. I, No, IV, pp.871-872.

The increase in the number of herdsmen attracted the notice of the government. Therefore grazing fee was raised to Re. 1 per buffalo in 1907 and still higher in 1912. Such grazing fees were unpopular with the graziers. Numerous protest against the raising fees was made in Assam, forced the government to conduct a survey under Mr. Arbuthnot, regarding the grazing question in Assam. According to his survey

¹⁶ A. Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*, (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006), p.91.

¹⁷ File- Rev. A, Feb. 1915, 21-43. ASA.

¹⁸ File- Revenue A, June 1926, 30-103. ASA.

recommendation, grazing rules for the professional grazing reserve was formulated in 1917. According to the rule grazing fees of Rs. 3 per buffaloes and other horned cattle at *annas* 6 per head per annum was fixed for the Assam Valley Division. Despite the raising of fees and exercise of closer control, there was large increase in the number of cattle. The revenue from this source doubled between 1916-17 and 1920-21 from Rs. 1,83,000 to 341,000. The total revenue of Rs. 2,77,000 collected in 1919-20 from grazing fee was accounted for by only 1,25,000 head of cattle actually assessed. The overwhelming bulk of these cattle actually again belong to 6319 professional graziers of whom, excepting a few hundred, all were Nepali migrants¹⁹. In 1937, the total area reserved for grazing grounds in the province at the end of the year amounted to 2,69,460 acres and total revenue actually realized was Rs. 2,82,356²⁰. For the year 1939-40, the total demand for grazing including arrears was estimated at Rs. 3,53,115, of which only a sum of Rs. 2,47,052 or 70 per cent was collected²¹.

Thus the British Government encouraged immigration was purely based on economic concerns to further their colonial interest. Grazing fees constituted an expanding source of revenue to the colonial state, a fact not unrealized by the Government. The steady increase in the number of cattle and grazing fees indicated the emergence of Nepali graziers as an important economic group in the society. Nepali graziers were allowed grazing rights, derived additional revenue from grazing fees, collected from them.

Immigration of large number of land-hungry East Bengalis always cast their envious eyes on the grazing reserves and tried to encroach on them. Conflict occurred in several grazing areas between Nepali graziers and East Bengali peasantry either on economic or religious grounds. The continuous influx of East Bengalis was also a threat for the Assamese society and its economy as well. In 1927, with the purpose of restricting settlement of land with East Bengali Muslims, Madhab Sarma, moved a resolution in the Assam Legislative Council for “reserving adequate amount of land for the further

¹⁹ Webster’s reply to Barua, 12 January, ALCP (1918) No. 1, pp. 7-8.

²⁰ Extract *Assam Secretariat Proceedings*, Revenue A, No. 79R., dated 8 January 1938. p. 2

²¹ *Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley Division for the year 1939-40*, ASA, p.

generation of the Assamese”²². In 1933 with avowed objective, among others, to protect and preserve the grazing lands in Assam, the Tezpur Graziers Association was formed by the Nepalis at Singri, under the Presidentship Chabilal Upadhyaya²³. This indicated the extent to which grazing had become a major occupation and source of livelihood for the Nepalis. The threats faced by the Nepali community from encroachment by new immigrant cultivators from East Bengal also led to such mobilisation. But conflict within the immigrants communities, were always highlighted in religious lines. Even in the Legislative Council, Hindu Bengali along with Assamese always opposed the resolution of the Line System, and were in support of Nepali Graziers. Even during the course of a debate in Assam Assembly in 1937, when Maulavi Abdur Rouf asked to what the term ‘immigrant’ implied? Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, the Revenue Minister, replied that “it included all persons who came from Surma Valley or from districts outside the province excluding tea garden, ex-tea garden coolies, Nepalis and Marwaris”²⁴. While few Assamese Muslim leaders came in support of the East Bengali Muslims. The situation became more serious when the Md. Saadullah led Ministry in the name of ‘Grow More Food Campaign’ East Bengali Muslims were allowed encroachment into the grazing reserves. Grazing reserves if any found in excess of their requirement were opened up for settlement with immigrant East Bengalis. Saadullah along with the Muslim leaders in the Legislative Council were in favour of abolition of the Line System and restriction on land settlement to East Bengalis.

Colonial policies encouraged immigration into Assam as it was quite essential for their strategy upon the economic development and achieve their twin interest of exploration/exploitation and revenue maximization. These immigrant groups owing to certain historical reasons would have a natural edge over the indigenous Assamese in term of certain professions. Development of tea, oil, coal industry along with the cheap, fertile waste lands, attracted large migrants into Assam. Although the Colonial Government encouraged poor labour to migrate into Assam, to explore/exploit resources and enhance their revenue collection. But the Colonial Government was not bothered

²² *ALCP*, 1927, also *The Assam Gazette*, Part VI, 1927, Shillong, p.1105.

²³ Present in Sonitpur District, 25 K.M. away from Dhekiajuli.

²⁴ Debates of the *ALAP*, 1937, August-September session, 1937, Vol. II, No. VI, pp.783-785.

about the health and hygiene of these migrant labours. They were concerned only about the benefits that the migrants could deliver, in the form of labour or revenue, but not their welfare.

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century the economic potentiality of the region had been fully ascertained. But the main impediment towards opening out the province had been its almost non-existence communication system. The mighty Brahmaputra was navigable but the enormous cost of fuel made steam navigation an impractical proposition. The necessity of a local source of supply of coal was, therefore, actually felt, especially after the establishment of the tea industry.

Preliminary reports had confirmed the existence of coal in upper Assam but it was not until the formation of Assam Railway and Trading Company in 1881 that steps were taken to mine the mineral available locally. But extraction of coal from the remote area and in the midst of jungle was not an easy task. Shortage in labour was another impediment in this matter. Initially labour from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Central Provinces were recruited but soon it was proved that they were unsuitable for mining work. Therefore it was decided to recruit Nepali labourers from the Gorkha martial race. Accordingly recruitment Depot was opened at Gorakhpur to recruit Nepali coolies for the coal mines of Assam (Makum- Tikak, Ledo, Golai and Margherita) in 1912. But as these coal mines were situated in the midst of the dense forest, where availability of basic items like pure drinking water, food, shelter and sanitation was a pathetic one. The owner of the coal estates in Assam compelled the coolies to work at least 9 ½ hours daily, without any rest. In 1923 under the New Mines Act, restriction was imposed on underground work for not more than 54 hours in a week.

Capitalism in the form of British Government brought class-distinction in the Assamese Society and economy. On the basis of imperialistic ideology 'low wages more profit' cheap labours were imported from various parts of the country and also from outside of the country. Labours were imported mostly from the famine affected and poverty stricken areas of the country. They were compelled to stay in an unhealthy, unhygienic

“Horrible Condition” of the labourers as observed by Mr. Purcell and Mr. Halls²⁵. From the Enquiry of the Lal Dhwoj for the first time the working condition and treatment they get in their working place was highlighted. At the end of January last 1923, Captain Lal Dhwoj, an officer in the army of His Majesty the King of Nepal in made private enquiries into the coal mines of Assam. He submitted a petition in March 1923, to the Governor of Assam which highlighted that many Nepalis including ex-sepoys and military castes were working in the coal mines of Makum viz., Ledo, Tikak, Golai, Rangring (Namdang), Lekhapani and Margherita in very harsh conditions. Many of these coolies had been lured by false inducements and forcibly kept. The point emphasized was that the Nepali labour was not doing well in the coal-mines and was anxious to get back to their homes. Lal Dhwoj’s memorandum highlighted for the first time the fraudulent practices in Gurkha recruitment as well as their plight in the coal mines in Assam.

In the absence of sufficient labour coming forward from the state of Assam, workers were mainly drawn apart from Assam, eastern Bengal, Nepal and to a lesser degree, from U.P. and Punjab. Nepali people were employed from the very beginning of the oil exploration operation in Assam. More than 3000 Gorkhas labourers were work under the Company²⁶. Jit Bahadur was one of the contractors for the recruitment of labour in the company. The working condition of the Assam Oil Company, Digboi, was not satisfactory. Though the physical facilities and working condition in this factory was certainly better than the plantation labourers in Assam, those were certainly worse than many other factories in India of similar status. The workers were subjected to hard work in many cases fourteen hours a day including Sundays. They were not entitled to enjoy

²⁵ Mr. Purcell, Representative of British Labour Party and Mr. Halls Worth, Chief Secretary, National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers. They visited Tea Gardens of the Company on 14th December 1927, on December 16th 1927; they also visited the coal fields at Margherita and made an enquiry about the condition of the labourers remarked about the working condition in Assam.

²⁶ Shyam Raj Jaishi, *Assam Ma Nepaliharuko Aitihashik Prishtabhumi*, (Digboi: Bodh Kumari Smriti Prakashan, 1990), p.108.

any holiday nor did they receive any allowance for the over-time work²⁷. But there was no union no unity among the workers for which they could place their demand or to safeguard their interests. On 22nd December 1927, in a public meeting at Curzon Hall, Guwahati where Nabin Chandra Bardoloi along with other senior Congress leaders were participated, Mr. Purcell appealed-

“You who are the intelligentsia of the people it is upto you to work for organization of all those men and women who are called coolie. The word coolie should never be used in contempt for those who serve humanity with a certain standard of comfort... Government always side with the employers. The British worker is better fed, educated... we want to instill this idea... organize and organize, and agitate and do not fear for the consequences...”²⁸.

Protesting against such working condition, about 800 workers of Digboi Oil field struck work in January, 1929. They demanded weekly holiday, extra payment for overtime work and additional proportionate pay for working on Sundays²⁹. The authorities after a few months of bargaining conceded to the workers’ demands. Weekly holiday or proportionate pay for working allowed including over-time allowance³⁰. When these concessions were acquired by the workers from a foreign capitalist enterprise, those were considered to be real achievement on their part. Assam oil company workers went on a major strike later in 1939.

Efforts of Chowka Singh and other labour organizers, a meetings was held on 22nd Feb 1938, the formed the AOC Labor union, which was a registered subsequently on 7th August 1938 under the Trade Unions Act, 1926. Under his secretaryship they formed a

²⁷D. Benarjee, *Labour Movement in Assam: A Study of Non-Plantation Workers’ Strikes till 1939*. (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers & Distributors, 2005), p. 79.

²⁸ Tilak Bora, “Margherita-Ledo: Samajik Paribartanar Dukhariya Chhabi”, in Ledo eds., Mohan Moran, Lakhyadhar Sonowal and Noble Kishor Buragohain, (Ledo: Souvenior of the 7th Special Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha, 2012), p.19.

²⁹ Guha, *Op.cit.*, p. 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

strike committee and submitted to the company a 14-day strike notice along with a 12 point character of demands, which included, among others, labourers' wage increase, recognition of bungalow servants as company's employees, and termination of company's usual police of illegal retrenchments³¹. Under the circumstances, a Court of Enquiry under the Trade Dispute Act, 1929, to enquire into the employment conditions in Digboi and Tinsukia was formed on 16th Aug 1938, consisting of Muhammad Saadullah, Omeo Kumar Das and Sayidur Rahman, headed by an ICS officer, J.G. Higgins³². While the enquiry was in process a bungalow servant was suddenly dismissed from service on the alleged ground of giving evidence before the said committee. Such action was contrary to the Union's demand and as a protest the AOC workers refused to cooperate with the Higgins committee. The enquiry somehow continued up to 29th OCT 1938³³. Meanwhile unrest amongst the laborers increased and in Sep 1938 a strike broke out amongst the contractors' labourers of the company.

The union therefore was forced to declare a strike from 3rd April 1939. People like Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan, Aiman Thapa, Ramlal Subedi, Dalbir Singh Lohar from the Nepali community were actively participated on the Digboi AOC strike 1939. The protest strike was planned initially to last only a week. But from 16th April, the situation of Digboi worsened on the night of 18th April when a direct clash ensued between some strikers and a patrol party of Assam Rifles. Three labourers were killed and many were injured³⁴. This had wide spread repercussions all over the country. The Government immediately ordered a judicial probe into the matter, but the findings of the committee did not satisfy the strikers. On 10th July 1939 Manmathnath Mukherjee, a retired Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, was appointed to enquire into the Digboi affairs³⁵. At the end of July the Government also appointed a Board of Conciliations under K.K.

³¹ *ALCP*, 6th May, 1936, pp. 190-91.

³² Bhuyan, A.C. & Sibapada De, *PHA*, Vol. II. p. 263.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Administrative Report for the year 1938-39*, Political summary.

³⁵ *ALAP*, January-June 1939, p.256; July-December 1939, pp. 206-08, also Bhuyan, A.C. & De, Sibapada. *Op.cit.*, p. 270

Hazra, District and Sessions Judge³⁶. In his report, submitted on 8th August 1939, Hazra recommended reinstatement of all strikers including those who were discharged and dismissal of all new recruits³⁷.

But before anything could be done the oil area in Digboi was declared a “protected area” under the Defense of India Rules with the declaration of World War II on 3rd September 1939³⁸. This led to the termination of a strong and firm labour movement at Digboi in Assam³⁹.

The colonial period has witness a large population movement from Nepal to Assam. The Census Report 1901 observed that “...in Assam the growth of the population largely depends upon the introduction of a number of people, who were brought up at expanse of European Capitalists”⁴⁰. It is significant for the history of Assam in the nineteenth century that “one section of the *Assamiya* middle class welcomed this large-scale immigration of productive labour and skill from other provinces and outlying regions, and was convinced that economic progress was not possible unless the then de-populated condition of Assam was restored to normalcy”⁴¹. The host society by and large made space for the Nepalis in an economy that had big gaps in terms of labour and other essential services that the Nepalis provided⁴². Because of their inexpensive skill locally required by almost everybody for which there had hardly been any conflict between them⁴³. Nepalis were engaged in road construction and labour, some were marginal farmers, dairymen and milk supplier, and some others became security guards (*chowkidars*), peons, drivers and carpenters.

³⁶ *Administrative Report for the year 1938-39, Op.cit.*, Political summary.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. & Sibapada De, *PHA, Vol. II*. p. 270.

⁴⁰ Census of India, 1901, p.13.

⁴¹ Anindita Dasgupta, ‘Othering of the Not-So-Other’: A Study of Nepalis of Assam, in T.B.Subba and A.C.Sinha (eds.) *The Nepalis in North-East India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity*, (Indus Publishing House, New Delhi, 2007), p.235.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴³ A.C. Sinha, “The Indians of Nepali origin and Security of Northeast India”, in *Ibid.*, p.369, 2007.

Many Nepalis move out of Nepal hills in search of opportunities. The beginning of this migratory trend had begun with the demobilised 'Gorkha soldier' into the province of Assam. They were followed by large section of Nepali people who took grazing as their profession. These migrated Nepalis in due course of time has chosen to settle in Assam. Having settled in the Assamese villages, they started learning the language, adapted to the lifestyle and celebrated Assamese festivals. Assimilation also found in food habits, social, religious and matrimonial relations.

The Nepalis of Assam had also actively participated in the freedom struggle from 1920. The freedom movement took a new turn after the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam as the Assam Association led by Chabilal Upadhyaya ceased to function. Chabilal Upadhyaya took the leadership of Nepali community in the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam. Chabilal and his brother Hari Prasad Upadhyaya was sentenced a period of three month imprisonment⁴⁴. During the Civil Disobedience movement Dalbir Singh Lohar, Bir Bahadur Chettri, Anantalal Sarma, Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan were punished imprisonment. During the Quit India Movement, Nepali people of Assam were also actively participated and many of them were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment and kept in different jails of Assam. More than three hundred Nepali volunteers were recruited in *Shanti Sena* and *Mrityu Bahini* from different places of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Many communities came to Assam with a motive to search their livelihood and among them Nepalis were the important migratory group into Assam. The colonial period witness the largest people movement in the world. Large number of Nepali population migrated into Assam in a small span of time which is remarkable in the history of Assam. Nepalis were the largest migratory people after the Tea labourers, East Bengali peasant in Assam in the form of soldiers, potters, coolies, graziers, peons, *chowkidars*. In the long run the Nepalis were assimilated into the host society and contributed much to the social, economic, and political development of the state. Along with their sizeable

⁴⁴ P. Bhandari, "Evolution and Growth of the Nepali Community in Northeast India", in *Ibid.*, p.110.

contribution to the local economy the Nepalis had impressive record of participation in the struggle for the India's independence⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ Lopita Nath, "Conflict-Afflicted Nepalis of Assam: The Reality", in *Ibid.*, p.212.