CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Muslims now living in the Char area of Barpeta district are regarded as immigrant Muslims although their ancestors had come in the last part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century from erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) the same country ruled by the British Government. They are also called Charuwa, Miah, Bhatia etc. The char area Muslims of Barpeta district are predominantly agriculturists. They have cleared low land jungled-riverine areas and produced various corns bringing a revolutionary change to the agriculture of Assam. Till to-day, these people are working hard and producing jute, rice, potato, cabbage, brinjal, gram, mustard etc. The main source of livelihood of the char area Muslims is agriculture. Now-a days, a few of them partially depend on service. Many of these people depend on daily wages earned by doing hard works like drawing thelas, driving rickshaws, cleaning drains and so on. A small section of the char area Muslims has adopted business as source of livelihood.

The ancestors of the char area Muslims had come to Assam as agricultural Labours in the initiative of the British Government and some of the Zamindars of Lower Assam on some compelling circumstances for better livelihood. Since their permanent settlement they have been working hard in agriculture but they are still in economically miserable condition except a few. Being on agriculturist group the char area Muslims have their agro-associated traditional culture and beliefs. They have their traditional dresses and ornaments which are sign of their identification. With the spread of education and the association with the Assamese society their traditional dresses and ornaments have got a changed form.
The Char area Muslims of Barpeta district use their traditional colloquial language in social conversation. But they have accepted Assamese language as medium of instruction in schools and colleges. Due to long association and assimilation with the Assamese society their traditional language has got changed to a new colloquial language. The influence of Assamese words and language on the words and language of the Char area Muslims are seen to some extent.

Though the Char area Muslims work hard and produce various corns almost throughout the year, they are still in miserable socio-economic condition. The reasons for their miserable socio-economic condition are many. The exploitation of *Matabbar* or *Dewani*, higher birth rate, illiteracy, lack of sufficient cultivable land, indifference attitudes of the Government, social superstitions etc. are prominent reasons thereof.

The Muslims of Assam in general and the Char area Muslims of Barpeta district in particular have been facing various political problems since their permanent settlement in Assam. The introduction of Line System by the British rule in the initiative of the Assamese elite group of people in 1920 to segregate the immigrant Muslims from acquiring high land in Assam is the first political problem faced by these Muslims. A movement started in the leadership of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani demanding immediate abolition of the Line System created a big issue in Indian politics dividing the population of Assam into two groups – Hindus and Muslims. The Line System was a matter of tension that created unprecedented hatred between Hindus and Muslims in Assam. The Line System which resulted in large scale eviction of the settlement of the immigrant Muslims came to an end after the independence of India without any fruitful results. Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was sent to jail during the movement and was released after the independence who left Assam for East Pakistan immediately after his release.
The second socio-political problem faced by the Char area people was the movement for the detection and deportation of alleged foreigners designated as 'Pakistani infiltrators' started from immediately after the partition of India. The indigenous Assamese people both Hindus and Muslims were frightened of large scale Pakistani infiltration after 1950 into Assam. The chief Minister B.P. Chaliha admitted that there were illegal migrants in Assam though he was not sure about the real numbers. Communal tension and violence took place when forceful driving out of the Muslims was carried out in the name of illegal Pakistani infiltrators.

The detection and deportation of Pakistani infiltrators was followed by the Prevention of Infiltration Programme (PIP) formulated by BN Malik, the then Director of Central Bureau of Intelligence, in 1964. This programme was supported by Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha which resulted in large-scale complaints about anti Muslim bias among the state police. This programme also assumed communal character and partisan harassment to the Muslims. However, 123159 infiltrators of the 1951-61 stream were evicted from Assam till the end of 1965.

The six year long Assam Foreigners' Movement started by All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1979 was the most terrible political problem faced by the Char area Muslims in Assam. Bahiragato Andolan (Later on Assam Foreigners' Movement) started by All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on alleged discovery of large scale inclusion of foreigners' name in the electoral rolls of Mangaldoi Parliamentary Constituency. A voice was raised by Assamese people under the leadership of AASU demanding immediate revision of the electoral rolls by deleting all foreigners name from electoral rolls. The demand of revisions of electoral rolls gradually spread all over Assam turning it to a great national movement. The Assam Foreigners' Movement pushed the non-Assamese Hindus, Mulsims and other minorities to an insecure position. The agitation started
aiming at detecting and expelling all out-siders irrespective of caste, community and religion was, however, changed in the long run and only the Bengali Muslims were targeted committing partisan harassment and oppression against the Bengali Muslims permanently residing in Assam. Thousands of people were killed during the movement most of whom were Muslims. Many villages of the minority communities were set to fire by supporters of the Assam Movement with the alleged help of Assam police.

After the signing of the historic Assam Accord, the Assam Foreigners' Movement ended in August, 1985, without fulfilling targeted aims and objectives except creating unprecedented tension and animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Because, the alleged lakhs of foreigners presently designated as Bangladeshi are not exactly detected and deported till to-day by the Government of Assam. The movement also shattered the process of assimilation between the Bengali Muslims and the Assamese Hindus that had started years ago.

Besides the above political problems the char area Muslims of Barpeta district have other political problems. These problems are Lack of Political awareness among the masses, Lack of able leader, Lack of female leadership, lack of educated rural leader, political favourism etc.

As Muslims constitute a large segment of population in Assam, they have great importance in the political life of the land. In the field of politics the Bengali Muslims play a greater role in influencing Assam's politics than the Assamese Muslims for the fact that in the districts of Nowgaon, Morigaon, Darrang, Kamrup, Barpeta, Bangaigaon, Kokrajhar and Dhubri the former have determining number of population of their own. Moreover, the Bengali Muslims are more conscious about participating in election for obvious reasons. Virtually, without the Bengali Muslims of Char area of these districts
political life is impossible. In most of the Assembly elections since independence the Char area Muslims have been capturing considerable number of MLA seats in these districts.

Inspite of strong political hold the Char area Muslims in Assam in general and Char area Muslims of Barpeta district in particular are not satisfied with the political facilities provided by the Government of Assam. These people are still more backward in every aspect of social, economic and political life due to lack of ideal political leaders who can devote themselves to public interest than their vested interest. A considerable number of MLAs are elected by these people to the Assam State Legislative Assembly but they have proved themselves failure in presenting their socio-economic and political problems on the floor of the Assembly for immediate solution.

The Char area Muslims are backward in education. Their female folks are more backward than the male folks. Due to educational backwardness they are facing many social problems which include superstitions, unhygienic livelihood, dominance of Dewani or Matabbar, and uncontrolled birth.

Most of the people of Char area prefer religious education to general education. They like to send their children to Madrassa and Maktab than to sending them to schools. As a result, literacy rate in Char area is much lower than the literacy rate of other communities in Assam. Now-a-days, general education has got importance in char area.

The Char area Muslims of Assam in general and the char area Muslim of Barpeta district in particular have been trying to assimilate with the greater Assamese society and in the meantime have abandoned their ancestral traditional culture to a great extent. Now, they have accepted Assamese language as medium of instruction. Remarkable changes have taken place in their traditional costumes, ornaments, manners and behaviours due to
the influence of Assamese society. Inspite of the fact they are not considered as a constituent part of the greater Assamese society which is the most important matter of anguish for Char area Muslims. The alleged complaint as Bideshi or Bangladeshi against these people by the indigenous people is one of the main reasons for this. The Bideshi or Bangladeshi issue has become a burning socio-political problem of the nation which to be solved in accordance with the provisions of the historic Assam Accord.

The Char area Muslims as a community seemed to be one of the parts of the greater Assamese nation is perhaps undeniable. Hence, any problem of this community is undoubtedly a problem of the land of Assam as well. It is therefore desirable to solve any problem the community is facing for all round development of Assam.

The prospect of future better livelihood of the Char area Muslims will depend on the amount of eradication of the socio-economic and political problems are concerned. The spread of education, eradication of superstitions and creation of social awareness among the people is a must for the solution of all problems. Government's policies and programmes must be carried out with proper persuasion for solving those problems. Special policies, if necessary, must be formulated by the Government of Assam for Char area development.

Some remedial measures are suggested below for socio-economic development of the char area people of Barpeta district as follows:

(i) To spread education general awarness should be created among the parents to send their children to schools.

(ii) As the economy of the char area is agro-based, the char development Authority should take steps to improve agricultural system by providing super
quality seeds and fertilizers at subsidized rate. Water supply should be there through minor irrigation.

(iii) For soil conservation the Flood Control Department should take timely step to stop erosion.

(iv) Land Patta should be allotted by the authority concerned to the land holders.

(v) Agro-based industry may be set up for agro-products.

Some measures are suggested for the eradication of political problems as follows:

(i) The Foreigners Problem should be solved on the basis of historic Assam Accord.

(ii) Problem of D Voters should be solved through immediate identification by constituting special Tribunals.

(iii) All problems should be solved through mutual understanding.

(iv) All leaders of the char area should be interested in solving char area socio-economic and political problems instead of their own interest.