

## **Role of Assam Press in the Formation of Public Opinion for Assam Accord Implementation**

Jayanta Kumar Bhattacharjya

*Research Scholar Department of Communication and Journalism Gauhati University*  
*Corresponding Author: Jayanta Kumar Bhattacharjya*

---

Date of Submission: 10-07-2019

Date of acceptance: 25-07-2019

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Social phenomena can take proper shape through free press. Any locality, race, state, region, country and the world at large can establish an issue and a justified goal can be availed with peoples opinion which can reframe a social paradigm. Assam Accord is the social paradigm for Assamese people in its own home land. Assam, the North Eastern State of India is dominated with Assamese diaspora with its variation, diversity colour, vigor, ethnic variations thereby creating the mosaic of indigenous existence. The migration, when natural contributes and when unnatural disrupts the structural existence. However migration specially from Bangladesh and Nepal disrupts the population pattern and changes the demographic pattern in Assam. The wave of unnatural and intentional migration from East-Bengal to Brahmaputra Valley of Assam in the Pre-Independence period is continued even after Independence. After independence of India, illegal immigration from erstwhile East Pakistan continued to Assam. Due to the unnatural demographic changes caused by the illegal immigration, indigenous Assamese people realized the threat of existence-crisis. The voice against the illegal immigration is echoed from Assamese intellectuals, literary people and concerned political stratum. However the voice has not taken the shape of popular protest among grassroots till 1979. The negligence of the Central and the State Government towards the illegal immigration along with the corrupt practices of administrative officials, bureaucrats and a greed of section of government employees resulted in providing ration card, land acquisition and even of the voting rights. Therefore political negligence and lack of farsightedness of political leaders caused transforming illegal migrants into legal voters. Such voters are virtually used as vote banks with scant development among the migrants. The social, political, economic, educational, health, cultural scenario among migrants is terrific which virtually retards development of Assam in particular and the nation in general. The frustrating situations of continuous entry of illegal migrants, uncontrolled childbirth and population explosion caused by the illegal immigrants, who are made legal citizens for political immaturity and temporary greed virtually kept the region retarded. The situation spontaneously leads towards drumming the clarion call to Assamese people to stop the illegal immigration and to save home land. It has given birth to the Assam Movement which caused sacrifices of 860 martyrs and lakhs of peoples suffering atrocities from Government Armed Forces and anti-movement reactionary forces. Assamese people continued the movement with non-violence, satyagraha and other democratic protest measures till the signing of Assam Accord on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1985. Assam press has taken an important and effective role in the formation of public opinion during Assam Movement and after the Assam Accord for the implementation of the accord. This paper analyses on the role of Assam press in the formation of public opinion for Assam Accord implementation.

### **II. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives are;

- (i) To analyze how public opinion is formed by Assam Press on the Assam Accord implementation.
- (ii) To analyze the coverage of The Assam Tribune from 2011 to 2018 on Assam Accord Implementation.

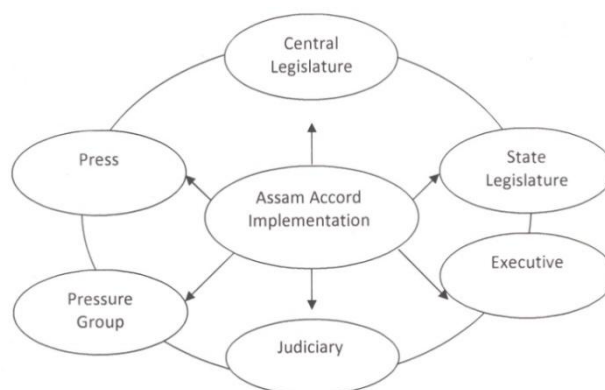
### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive analysis and content analysis method is used for the paper. Descriptive analysis of the role of Assam Press in the public opinion formation for Assam Accord implementation is performed. Content analysis of The Assam Tribune, the premier English daily newspaper published from Guwahati is analyzed from 2011 to 2018 to examine the coverage on Assam Accord Implementation in the newspaper.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Assam Accord is signed on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1985 which brings a settlement of the Assam Movement. The Accord is the National Commitment which is signed in between the participants of the movement i.e. All Assam Students' Union (AASU), All Assam Gana Sagram Parishad (AAGSP), Govt. of India and Govt. of Assam, and announced by the then Prime Minister of India from the Red-ford, New Delhi in his Independence Day speech to the Nation. Press has taken a vital role during the Assam Movement as well as in the implementation and acceleration of the Assam Accord. The Assam Accord provides for solution to the problems of foreigners in Assam. "Government has all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sagram Parishad (AAGSP) have also expressed their keenness to find such a solution." (Assam Accord, 1985, p.1)

The Historic Assam Accord has been divided into mainly "Foreigners Issue, Safeguards and Economic development, others Issues and Restoration of Normalcy". (Assam Accord, 1985, p.3). The Accord has taken place an important role to solve the Foreigners problem of Assam which carries the "For purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners 1.1.1966 shall be the base date and year under the clause No. 5.1, again clause 5.3 mentioned that 'Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 and upto 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals)order 1964"(Assam Accord, 1985,p.1), under clause 5.8 mentioned that "Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law" (Assam Accord, 1985,p.2).The Assam Accord also express under clause 6 "Constitutional, Legislative and Administrative safeguards as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people" (Assam Accord, 1985,p.2).The Accord also expresses under clause 8.1 to 12 that 'other issues'. Through the Accord, the Central and State Government provide commitment and assurance for the greater interest to the people of Assam. Under clause 13,14 and 15 the Accord also expressed the commitment as restoration of normalcy for the agitators. In this regard the Ministry of Home Affairs will be the Nodal Ministry for the implementation of various clauses of the Assam Accord. (Assam Accord, 1985.P. 3).All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which was the umbrella body for people's involvement in the Assam Agitation has become defunct after its leaders involved and taken top positions in Asom Gana Parishad. Virtually, the Assam Gana Parishad form through National Convention held on 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1985 at Golaghat district. Distance between Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and All Assam Students' Union (AASU) increased after the signing of Assam Accord. Even All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has raised the voices against the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government. All Assam Students' Union (AASU) tried to focus on the implementation of Assam Accord for which then Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) lead State Government showed scant interest resulting dissatisfaction of people. "However, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) sensed the changing mood of the people and started distancing itself from the AGP." (Talukdar 2017, P-324). From 1990 onwards the implementation of Assam Accord has progressed step by step with all its pros and cons. The factors associated with the implemented process are Central legislature, State legislature, Executive, Judiciary, Pressure Group and the Press.



Pressure Group, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) along with other ethnic organizations continuously demanded for the implementation of the Assam Accord. Initiatives of the Central Government of India and particularly interference of the Gauhati High Court and the Supreme Court of India has taken the shape towards the implementation of most important clauses of the Assam Accord. Accordingly Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act, 1983 has been repelled on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2005. (Mathur, G.P., 2005). After tripartite meeting of Government of India, Government of Assam and the All Assam Students' Union, consensus is made for preparing NRC. "Chief Minister, Assam said that State Govt. has agreed to update 1951, NRC by including names of persons from the electoral rules up to 1971 and their descendents." (Summary of the

Tripartite meeting, 2005. P.1). Accordingly the State Government started the process of NRC updating in Barpeta Revenue Circle of Barpeta district and Chaigaon Revenue Circle of Kamrup District respectively on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2010 and 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2010. Due to disturbances by suspected Bangladeshi nationals at the provocation of All Assam Minority Students' Union (AASU), violent situation is created to retard the process of NRC update. Therefore the pilot project is stopped by the State Government. However the demand for NRC update is continuously raised by AASU and other allies. AASU and Assam Public Works continued the case for NRC update in Supreme Court. NRC update has taken momentum when Supreme Court on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 directed and instructed to start NRC updates process immediately at the monitoring of the Supreme Court. Accordingly Government of India has published one Gazette for NRC update on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2013. "Pursuant to the directive of the honourable court the Registrar General of India(5) via its notification number S.O.3591 E dated December 6, 2013 notified commencing of NRC."(Sharma)

### **Public opinion formation by Assam Press**

Indigenous people of Assam are dissatisfied for negligence of the Government to prevent the illegal influx from particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. The locals realized the threat from the phenomena of foreigners becoming citizens. Such issues are enthusiastically protested. It draws opinion leaders writings to aware peoples interest to the concern discourse. With the beginning of the Assam movement, The Assam Tribune, Dainik Asom, Nagarik, Asom Bani, Dainik Janambhumi, The Sentinel, Dainik Agradoot etc. newspapers have taken strong initiative to propagate the democratic spirit of the movement. The press expected a right way of the movement. Incidents of the movement, people's involvement in the movement, martyrdom, atrocities on the movement activists and participation by the police and CRPF are reported with minute details in the Assam press. Editorials, articles, features, letters to the editor, photos etc. reflected and represented opinions related to the movement. Some of the writers even criticized the negative elements in the movement. Dominant paradigm of the Assam press was to disseminate ample information and thoughts to give momentum to the movement.

In 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord press virtually welcome the Accord as a prospective solution to the burning issues. The concerned reporters, writers, editors of the Assam press understood the grave situation of Assam during the six years long agitation and wanted the normalcy in the social life and peace. However the movement expected more achievements and therefore clauses in the Assam Accord were considered to be limited and less than expectation. Press therefore expressed its dissatisfaction at the least achievement of the movement. However, the Accord is welcomed by the press and press encouraged the formation of regional political party. The post 1985 scenario delimited the scope of focus on Assam Accord implementation till 1990. However, from 1990 with the changing and newer generation leadership in AASU started to raise the voice for implementation of major clauses of Assam Accord. The Assam Press continued the reporting on such demands with limited opinion writings.

Important initiatives related to Assam Accord implementation are- seventeen times tripartite meetings among Central Government, State Government and All Assam Students' Union (AASU) during the period 1990 to 2010. Legislative measures are taken by AASU in High Court and Supreme Court are- the cases for repeal of IM (DT) Act 1983, base year of citizenship, updating NRC, expel of declared foreigners; and establishing additional foreigners tribunal. Other initiatives relating to Assam Accord implementation are "Indo-Bangladesh Border seal, Constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people of Assam, Status of functioning of Foreigners tribunals, Issues relating to Ashok Paper Mill (APM), measures taken by the State Government for Flood Control, Status of construction of fencing and flood lighting along Indo-Bangladesh border, implementation status of Bogibeel rail cum road mega project, Implementation of gas cracker project, preservation and protection of archeological sites in Assam, improvement of CD ratio status and action taken on implementation of clause of 6 of the Assam Accord." (Implementation of Assam Accord). Print and Electronic Media are prevalent in Assam during the new millennium, print media including news paper and magazine are the most effective print media during Assam agitation and till year 2000. After 2000 onwards regional electronic media with private satellite television channels become popular media; from 2010 onwards internet and social media emerge as popular media in Assam along with continuation of Print Media. The Assam Accord implementation and acceleration are concerned by print and electronic media both. Assam press plays an important role in the formation of public opinion for Assam Accord implementation because press, particularly free press always plays a pivotal role in establishing an issue. "Since the news is gathered, written, edited and printed by human beings with various flows and weaknesses, it is doubtful if any news paper always lives up completely to its high ideals. We cannot expect, therefore, that any edition of any newspaper contains all of the truth about anything. We do believe that as long as many different newspapers produced by many people with varying abilities and viewpoints exist; the truth will eventually become clear to us. Our freedom of the press does not mean that newspapers are free to exist, but that they are free to learn and publish all of the news. It is here that our papers differ from those in totalitarian countries." (Bradley, p.4). Free press establishes the right to speech and expression. A responsible press can shape the proper opinion and can guide people and social decision

making. Democratic rights can be established through the action of speech and expression by the press. Democracy is strengthened by the people's participation in the press. More participation of people in the press hence assures more involvement of the people in a social cause. Free press is a right whereas responsible press is a virtue to uphold democratic causes. People's exposure to the press enhances opinion formation of the public. On the other hand public opinion shapes the path of the society. Furthermore social agenda can be set for social decision taking by press. Here is the analysis of The Assam Tribune, the premier English daily published from Guwahati. The coverage of The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord implementation issues from 2011 to 2018 are analyzed as follows.

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2011***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letter	Photo
	Front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	2					
Border	4		1			
Safeguard	4	2				1
NRC			1			
Educational	1					
Economic			1	1		
Heritage	1	1	1			
Forest			1			
Industry	1	1				1
ONGC	1	1				
Land rights	2				1	1
Bridge	1					
Total	17	5	5	1	1	3

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2012***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letter	Photo
	Front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	10	4	3	2		2
Border	2	1				
Tribunal	1					
Safeguard	3	1				
NRC	1	2				
Economic	2	2	1			
Heritage	1					
Forest	1	1				
Industry	4	1			1	
NRL/OIL		1				
Land rights	3					
Total	28	13	4	2	1	2

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2013***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	6	2	1			1
Border	2		2		1	
Tribunal	1				1	
Safeguard	9	1	1			
NRC	13					
Educational	2	1	2	1		
Economic	5				1	
Heritage					1	
Forest	2		1	2		
Industry	2		1	1		1
Land rights	5	2	3			1

Total	47	6	11	4	4	3
-------	----	---	----	---	---	---

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2014***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	Front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	2			1		1
Border	2	1	1			
Tribunal	1	1				
Safeguard	4	1	1	1		1
NRC	3					1
Economic	1	1	1			
Industry	3					
ONGC	1					
Land rights	1					
Total	18	4	3	2		3

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2015***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	Front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	10	3	2	3	3	8
Border	1	1				
Tribunal	3	2				2
Safeguard	6	2	1	1		1
NRC	7	10		1	2	
Educational		1				
Economic	1					
Forest	2		1			
Industry	4	1		3		
ONGC					1	
NRL/OIL	1				1	
Land rights	2	3		3		
Total	37	23	4	11	7	11

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2016***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	Front page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	15	5		6	2	2
Border	5	4	1	1		1
Tribunal	3	5	2			1
Safeguard	3	9	3	2		
CAB 2016	6	4		3	1	
NRC	4	1			1	
Educational		2		2		
Economic	1	1	1	1		
Heritage	2	4		1	2	
Forest	2	1			1	
Industry	2	2	1	2		
NRL/OIL	4	1		2		
Total	47	39	8	20	7	4

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2017***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	Font page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	13	4	1	4	3	1
Border	8	1	1			
Tribunal	4	1	1			
Safeguard	20	13	2	8	1	5
CAB 2016	5	2		2		
NRC	7	6	1	1	1	
Educational		3	2	1	1	
Economic	3	3		1	1	
Heritage	1		1			
Industry	6			1		
ONGC	1					
Total	68	33	9	19	7	6

***The Assam Tribune coverage on Assam Accord Implementation, 2018***

Issue	News		Editorial	Article	Letters	Photo
	Font page	Inside pages				
Foreigners	6	5	1	1	2	
Border	3					
Tribunal	5					
Safeguard	4	3	2	2	1	
CAB 2016	38	35	5	5	4	13
NRC	29	30	5	4	2	1
Educational		2				
Economic					1	
Heritage	1		1	3		
Forest		1				
Industry		2				
Land rights	3	2				1
Total	89	80	14	15	10	15

**V. CONCLUSION**

The content analysis of The Assam Tribune from 2011 to 2018 has shown that press has taken an important and effective role as the fourth estate of democracy in contemporary context of Assam Accord implementation. Assam press is reporting to the depth along with formation of public opinion for upholding Assam Accord implementation process. Assam press has paved the wide open platform to involve the intellectuals and common readers in the important issues and can prevail with priority in the public domain when the issue is repeatedly focused through news and opinion. Involvement of opinion leaders in an issue thereby helps creating public consensus for implementation of Assam Accord.

**REFERENCE**

- [1]. Assam Accord(1985). Govt. of India. New Delhi.
- [2]. Implementation of Assam Accord.(2005). Government of Assam, a brief note on tripartite meetings of Assam Accord, [https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/Portless assam- accord-and-its-clauses](https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/Portless%20assam%20accord%20and%20its%20clauses)
- [3]. Mathur,G.P. (2005). Case No. writ petition (civil) 131/2000, Sarbananda Sonowal vs.. Unionof India & Anr.
- [4]. Sharma, Pratiksha and Kamal, Nain. National Registrar of citizens of India(NRC). <https://navias.in/national-register-of-citizens-of-india-nrc/>
- [5]. Summary of the Tripartite Meeting (05.05.2005).Tripartite meeting Participants: Govt. of India, Govt. of Assam, All Assam Students' Union. <https://assamaccord.assam.gov/frontimpotentdata/tripartite-meeting>
- [6]. Talukdar, Mrinal. Ed.(2017). Assam After Independence. Nanda Talukdar Foundation: Guwahati.

Jayanta Kumar Bhattacharjya. " Role of Assam Press in the Formation of Public Opinion for Assam Accord Implementation." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR- JHSS). vol. 24 no. 05, 2019, pp. 35-40.