

# Unemployment in Assam

An account of Human Error

BHAKTA DAS

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In this book, the Author has highlighted various causes of the unemployment problems in Assam. The facts given in this book will be of much help to the planners, researchers and also policy makers. The Author has also discussed about the measures to be undertaken by the State Government to solve the unemployment problem in Assam specially amongst educated people.

**Rs. 200/-**

BHAKTA DAS at present Joint Secretary to the Government of Assam, Education Department is a senior government officer. He has been serving in different capacities in Assam from 1963. He served as Extra Asstt. Commissioner and Magistrate in Dibrugarh, Judicial Magistrate of Dhubri (a district bordering Bangladesh & West Bengal), Sr. Magistrate in Nagaon district, SDO(S) of Dibrugarh, and SDO(C) of Morigaon Sub Division. He also served as Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of Assam in the Co-operation Deptt. and Director SFDA in Karbi Anglong district(Hills) of Assam, Addl. Dy. Commissioner and Additional District Magistrate of Sibsagar district, Chief Executive Director Assam Co-operative State Agriculture and Rural Development Bank, Director, Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, Assam, Director of Employment and Craftsmen Training, Assam and as Joint Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, Education Deptt. As the Director of Employment and Craftsmen Training, Assam, he made indepth studies into the problems of unemployment in Assam and has got deep insight into the causes of the unemployment problem in Assam specially amongst the educated people. **The author has now retired from service.**



C O S M O P U B L I C A T I O N S  
24-B, Ansari Road, New Delhi-110002

**UNEMPLOYMENT  
IN ASSAM**  
**An Account of Human Error**

**BHAKTA DAS**



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## UNEMPLOYMENT IN ASSAM: AN ACCOUNT OF HUMAN ERROR

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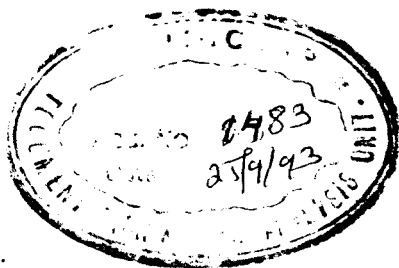
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## CHAPTER 1

# Causes of Unemployment in Assam

Assam have crossed over three decades of planning but the problem of unemployment could not be solved. Whatever employment would be generated have been neutralised by the release of manpower in the employment market due to growth of population, rapid expansion of educational facilities, handicapped by lack of growth of industries, lack of entrepreneurship and shyness of capital. Whenever and whatever opportunity comes, outsiders avail the opportunity depriving the

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sons of the soil, though the young Assamese generation is equally intelligent and capable and quite at par with their outsider counterparts.

As per 1971 Census, Assam has a population of 146 lakhs representing 34.95 per cent growth rate against all India average at 24.80 per cent during the period 1961-1971.

The projected population of Assam as on 1st March, 1988 was 244.31 lakhs which indicates increase of 98.43 lakhs people over that on 1971. This increase in the population is the root cause to aggravate the employment problem in Assam. As per the projection, the population in the age-group 15-59 years was 104.05 lakhs in 1981 which will increase to 143.13 lakhs on 1st March, 1991.

This shows an addition of 39.07 lakhs of population in the age-group 15-59 years by 1st March, 1991. At this rate, 20 lakhs of people will be added to the labour force which will create the unemployment in Assam more acute.

The increase in the population is though the result of increase in the birth rate and decrease in the death rate, but incoming of Bangladeshies, is the main factor. Immigration from Bangladesh is at its peak. More people from Bangladesh are taking up residence in the forests of Assam. Because the Bangladeshies are dependant mainly on agriculture and Assam being a platform just above three feet of the sea water level and land being fertile, attracts the hard working Bangladeshies. The local Assamese farmer do not know how to get

maximum water by utilising minimum finance. There is lack of knowledge amongst the Assamese farmers, the benefit that they will get by utilising the scientific method of cultivation for increasing food production. There is lack of storage facilities, lack of credit facilities in the rural sector. The Assamese farmers are handicapped by these constraints for years, did not cultivate the lands in the forest areas. The Bangladeshies exploited the situation and occupied all vacant forest land and the Char and Grazing areas. Gradually the cultivable land have become scarce to Assamese farmers.

The problem of illegal immigration is the deep rooted malaise in Assam. The people of Assam is no longer enthused about the cause of illegal immigration from earstwhile East Pakistan which had inflamed them to revolt for six years. Even after formation of the Assam Gana Parishad Government in Assam nothing have been done to resolve the actual problem. Nothing have been done to move in the direction of sending away the illegal immigrants from Assam and the unemployment problem in Assam is growing more and more as the effect of this continuing and untreated Cancer. Mr. C.S. Multan the then Census Superintendent in his report—1931 said, "It is sad but by no means improbable that in another 30 years Sibsagar District will be the only part of Assam in which Assamese will find themselves at home." Thus incoming of unlawful settlers in Assam has been a trial for the provincial Government since 1918.

This problem assumed serious proportion on account

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of the large influx of immigrants in 1944-45. In the Census of 1961 the all India percentage increase of population was 21.64 per cent. For the same decade population increased in Assam by 34.98 per cent. The Census of 1971 saw an all India increase of population of 24.8 per cent. In the case of Assam it was again 34.90 per cent. Much more disturbing is the case of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Districts. The percentage growth rate mentioned below from the Census reports of 1951 onwards shows how alarming is the situation.

	1951	1961	1971
Karbi Anglong	30.06	79.21	63.28
North Cachar	6.16	36.95	40.00

The Chief Election Commissioner during the conference of Electoral Officers held in 1978 observed that the influx has become a regular feature and that the increase in population which is likely to be recorded in 1991 Census would be more than 100 per cent over the 1961 Census. A stage would be reached when Assam will have to reckon with the foreign nationals which will constitute a sizeable percentage. If not, the majority population in the State. The fact that a large number of immigrants succeeded in illegally coming to Assam and settling down unnoticed, proves that the measures so far taken have not been effective and the basic idea that land is the central core for their existence to the Assamese people, their future, the future of their progeny, jobs, employment opportunities has become an

illusion to the Assamese people and today Assam has become an account of human error compounded by arrogant and immatured decisions.

This have further been aggravated by fresh influx of Bangladeshies and high birth rate among them. The population in Assam have increased alarmingly and it has now on the one hand become difficult for an Assamese farmer to get sufficient land to engage him and his children fully in Agriculture and whatever land they have, they cannot cultivate the same for the whole year fully, due to successive floods in the summer and scarcity of water in the winter. The stage has come when the Assamese farmer can engage himself and his children only 120 days in a year in his land. The rest of the days in a year, they remain idle and this has resulted in the unemployment in the villages, yielding on rush of young villagers to the towns seeking employment. The number of job seekers through employment exchanges of the State went up by 2.8 per cent between January and September, 1988.

Agriculture in Assam which is the main economic activity is characterised by monocropping and high risk of flood, low productivity and very poor extension and support system. It is gradually becoming less attractive and the rural youth is running after white-collar jobs. The rural youth feel that farming is not viable and cannot sustain them. They feel helpless because of their lack of skills that can fetch them alternative appointment. Today for the youth in Assam on the one side there is an increase in the cost of living and lack of

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alternatives on the other. Though a few industrial projects are being set up but it will take a long time before the impact on the rural population will be seen. The Assamese rural youth have not been able to find employment in the projects except in Grade IV services like peon, driver etc. for lack of suitable skills. Thus the large industries like Oil Refinery/Paper Mill is not a solution to rural unemployment.

On 31.12.89 the live registers of employment exchanges which covers only a segment of the unemployed persons had 977126 lakhs registered unemployed in the State of Assam of whom 552215 lakhs are educated unemployed. For solving the unemployment problem the State Government should set up rural industries to give adequate employment avenues and to stop the mobility of skilled and semi-skilled workforce from the rural to urban areas.

In Assam, the number of unemployed persons is increasing gradually not only among workers but also among the educated middle class. Unemployment leads to poverty. Unemployment and poverty are not only bad but it degenerates man to less than human being and if this trend is allowed to continue, it will jeopardise the economy and it will lead to explosive situation of grave consequences.

The projected present population in Assam is about 243 lakhs. 90 per cent of this population i.e. 219 lakhs lives in villages. In towns, only 44 lakhs people live. For the villages, agriculture is the only employment source. But only 36 lakhs persons are engaged in agriculture

out of 219 lakhs which indicates that 6 persons depends on the income of only one person in the villages. As such the unemployment problem in the rural sector is more serious, but we are not so serious about this problem in the rural sector. It is estimated that the number of employable unemployed in the villages of Assam will be approximately 70 lakhs i.e. one-third of the rural population. There is one another field which can absorb the candidates for white-collar jobs i.e. in the Government and semi-Government offices. The educational system which has stimulated a large production of graduates and masters have swelled the number of educated unemployed in Assam. Competition among too many aspirants struggling for few jobs is leading to frustration and the educated unemployed have developed revolutionary instinct.

One peculiar characteristic of Assamese Society is the existence of various social groups whose adult members only do certain types of works. As a result of spread of education, more people are joining the ranks of those who go for white-collar jobs only.

Labourers are to be brought from far away places like Bihar to do earth work on road and irrigation projects. Even in the case of the crash programmes for employment which sought to provide employment to rural unskilled youths in their own villages, it has been found that in the off seasons also, only a few persons report for work though a large number of people remain unemployed or underemployed in the neighbourhood. Which indicates that people are not availing

themselves of these opportunities in full, in spite of unemployment and underemployment being rampant.

The authorities have not been able to detect and deport the foreigners as per Assam Accord. After going through the I.M.D.T. Act., 1983 one can easily realise that it would not be easy to deport the lakhs of foreigners illegally staying in Assam unless this act is repealed. The Union Minister for Law and Justice, late Dinesh Goswami on 26th August, 1990 while addressing a workers meeting of the A.G.P. at Rabindra Bhawan, Guwahati stated that the Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunal Act (I.M.D.T.) 1983 could not be repealed, (Source: *Assam Tribune*, dt. 27th August, 1990). The Assam Accord signed on Aug. 15, 1985 did not therefore fulfill the purpose for which the people faced the bullets and many of them became martyrs.

Though Assam is rich in oil, but the crude oil of Assam has been pumped out of the State to feed a bigger refinery located at Barauni in Bihar. Even for the Toy refinery at Noonmati (Gauhati) the Assamese people had to launch a movement. Assam produces tea, but all the major offices of the Tea Board have been functioning from West Bengal. Major industries remain still a far cry in Assam as necessary infrastructures have not been created for growth of industries in Assam during the 42 years of independence. Assam remained neglected due to the weak leadership. The State though rich in natural resources but the job generating industries are conspicuous by their absence in the State.

Again there is the problem of migration of the rural educated youth to the towns in search of white collar jobs. While the urban sector is facing the challenge of providing white collar jobs to the educated, the rural sector is facing the problem of landless farmers/workers, marginal farmers, rural artisans, fishermen, etc.

In the Urban sector the tendency amongst the unemployed youths is to run after jobs from office to office. The white collar jobs being limited, most of them remain unemployed and continue to inflate the number of unemployed. A strong feeling has developed that the young boys and girls leaving—schools, colleges and universities regards manual work and vocational employment as something inferior to clerical works. This attitude is a handicap for fuller employment, economic growth and development in the Assamese society. We in Assam are still following the out dated approach to education. Even now the Arts Graduates dominate the field of education and most of them are not getting any job though their names are in the live registers of the employment exchanges for years together. This is to be checked and they should be informed of the scarcity of wage and paid jobs and also about the alternative facilities available for starting self-employment ventures.

The problem of unemployment in Assam has assumed such a magnitude that the planners have always stressed the need for arresting this wide spread problem through various planning process. But in spite of the best efforts the problem of unemployment could not be restrained yet. Whatever result could be achieved is

neutralised by the factors like growth of population, rapid expansion of educational facilities and release of vast manpower in the Employment market.

Most of the educated job seekers of the state do not pass successfully in the examinations held by various Staff Selection Commission of the Central Government and other public sector undertakings. State Government may therefore provide necessary pre-recruitment training facilities to the local youths so that they could overcome their shortcomings and can compete with the candidates of advanced states.

According to the Seventh Plan document, the backlog of unemployment in India in March 1985 was the order of 9.20 million. However, during the period December 1984-July, 1989, the number of persons registered with the employment exchanges increased from 23.5 million to 31.6 million or by 34 per cent. The Seventh Plan was expected to generate about 40 million standard person years of employment. According to the E.M.I. programme employment in the organised sector of the economy increased by about one million during the first four years (upto December, 1988) of the Plan. Besides the special employment programme like NREP, IRDP, TRYSEM, two new employment programmes called the JAWAHAR ROZGAR YOZANA and NEHRU ROZGAR YOZANA have been introduced for the benefit of rural and urban unemployed persons respectively.\*

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\* *Source:* (Agenda papers for 28th meeting of the Working Group on National Employment Service) held from 8th to 11th Nov. 1989.

The trend of unemployment in Assam was not much acute as it appears today. The reason for this also, are that economy of the State by then was mainly dependent on agricultural sector and the number of educated persons was also not very high in comparison to the available employment opportunities. The problem of unemployment assumed a serious proportion with the ever increasing expansion of educational institutions. In 1947-48 there were 7574 primary schools, 742 middle schools, 191 High Schools and 16 colleges. While in the year 1988-89 the position increased to 28,807 primary schools, 5,635 middle schools, 3,110 high and higher secondary schools and 181 colleges in the State.

The number of passed out candidates in the High/Higher Secondary examinations increased from 2,490 in 1947-48 to 69,008 in 1983-84 (*Source*: Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Assam). The total number of educated job seekers registered with the employment exchanges was 1,44,800 in 1980 while it stood at 4,97,868 at the end of 1988. Thus the staggering growth of educated unemployed in Assam is also responsible for the acute unemployment problem in the State. Because the untrained educated do not match with the technical jobs.

There are short-comings both in the Employment Service as well as the Education Department. Before launching the new educational programme in the country we ought to have thought of appointing properly trained career masters in every school whose duty will be to maintain assessment cards of every students by

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which the guidance officers can assess the ability of a particular student in relation to his interest in particular course of study leading to particular field of occupation. Wrong choice of subject under the diversified curricular study leads not only to a frustrated person in his later vocational life but also cost the state exchequer to a great extent in making training facilities available in technical institutes and engineering colleges.