Hima campaigns for change in Assam

Centurion Rajanikanta Bora of Auni-Ati village, adjoining Kandhulimari, said there were only seven houses of migrants during Quit India in 1942. “Today, we are surrounded by migrants, both Muslims and Bengali Hindus, who tend not to interact with us,” he says.

Many Assamese families sold off their fields and homes because of migrant pressure and became urban migrants themselves.

“It breaks my heart whenever I visit Dhing, our ancestral town. It is a living example of how in one generation, one has to live as a minority in one’s own place. Dhing now has over 90% Muslims of East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh origin,” says Upamanyu Hazarika of Prabrajjan Virodhi Mancha, or anti-infiltration forum. Mr. Hazarika is the father of Monalis Baruah Mehta.

Writing on the wall
The last Assamese who won the Dhing Assembly constituency were Motiram Bora and Beliram Das (jointly) in 1951. The locals saw the signs when the pro-minority All India United Democratic Front won the seat in 2006 and retained it in the next two elections. In between, Dhing had become a byword for conflict. During the language riots of the early 1960s, houses of many Bengali Hindus were burnt. And in the 1970s, the United Liberation Front of Asom’s Luitporiya (the Brahmaputra riverbank) wing was formed here to ‘liberate Assam from occupiers’. Most of the cadre were from the indigenous villages around Hima’s.

“Our first mission was against the migrant people of Radha-Ati, who were into armed robbery. Things changed after gunfights in 1983,” says Dipak Bora, coordinator of the Luitporiya wing.

Radha-Ati, just over a kilometre from Kandhulimari, used to be called Assam’s Chambal. Ashafuddin, resident of the nearby Muslim village Khoirabari, trashes the influx theory. “It is wrong to call us Bangladeshis. We seem to be expanding because the Brahmaputra has taken away much of our land, forcing us to huddle in smaller spaces,” he says.

The Brahmaputra that used to be miles away is now flowing 3 km north of Hima’s village.

According to Tajmul Hassan, a sports secretary of AASU, Hima, as lifetime sports secretary of AASU’s Dhing unit, has locally been at the forefront of a renewed movement against illegal influx. She has also been vocal against Delhi’s bid to push the “non-secular” Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2016 that seeks to grant quick citizenship to non-Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, he said.

Social change
But some 190 families of Kandhulimari and adjoining villages know her more as an activist against social ills. In 2016, she led a group of women in dismantling an illegal liquor outlet at Auni-Ati. The outlet’s operator retaliated, filing a case against her father Ranjit Das, 52, and two others.

“The last hearing was on June 27. But I don’t mind appearing in court [at the district headquarters, Nagaon, 26 km away] for a daughter who has put me on top of the world,” says Mr. Das, a farmer.