

**Assam Movement and Collective Violence: A Case of
Nellie Massacre (1983) in Assam**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Dedicated to my Parents.....



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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Assam Movement and Collective Violence: A Case of Nellie Massacre (1983) in Assam**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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For the drawbacks in the dissertation, if any, I alone shall be responsible.

Shofiul Alom Pathan

List of Abbreviations

AASU – All Assam Student's Union

AAGSU/AGSU – All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad.

AIUDF – All India United Democratic Front

CPI- Communist Party of India

CPI (M) - Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CRP/CRPF- Central Reserve Police/Central Reserve Police Force (denotes same meaning)

DIG – Deputy Inspector General.

IAS – Indian Administrative Service

NRC- National Registration of Citizens

OBC- Other Backward Class

OC- Officer in Charge

RSS- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SC – Scheduled Caste

SDPO- Sub Divisional Police Officer

SP – Superintendent of Police

ST- Scheduled Tribe

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Chapter I

1.1 Introduction:

Recently, or most often the question of “who is an Assamese?” bothers the understanding of ‘Asamiya’ as a larger identity. Of late, many tribal groups of Assam like Bodo, Tiwa, Karbi etc. have asserted their own ‘linguistic’ and ‘cultural’ autonomy emphasizing on their distinct history and thus going away from “mainstream Asamiya identity”. Most of the tribal groups accuse the Assamese middle class /upper caste Hindu dominant communities of exploiting them in terms of dominant Assamese language, culture and politics etc. In this crucial juncture of defining the “Assamese Identity”, the position of Muslims of East –Bengal (now Bangladesh) origin (referred to as Na-Asamiya Muslims) plays a crucial aspect as a large portion of Assam’s population contains Na-Asamiya Muslims. There have been lots of violent incidents directed towards Na-Asamiya Muslims, particularly after independence of India in 1947, because of alleged ‘land intrusion’ and ‘threat to demographic composition’ and ‘cultural pollution’. So it becomes crucial to study the violent incidents directed against them to understand how violence becomes a crucial aspect in terms of articulating and consolidating their identity. Robinson (2005:22) in the context of communal violence in Mumbai (1993) and Gujarat (2003) also tries to explore how the experience of violence reshapes the set of relations not just with neighborhood and communities but with the state as well. The narratives and memories of violence in self-articulation of identity plays an important part among victims and survivors of violence.

Historically there have been significant number of groups who migrated to Assam since mid-19th century. They constitute a vast majority of population now. The economic transformation of Assam caused an enormous demographic shift under British colonial regime. Colonial administration actively encouraged migration into Assam .The demand for labor in tea plantation was the first major reason to bring migrant population to the present state of Assam (Baruah, 2013). Thus, the tea plantation labor community slowly had a significant population in Assam. Subsequently, the Muslims of East Bengal origin

were encouraged to migrate to Assam to convert the vast wastelands into agricultural fields, as these Muslim peasants were expert in rice and jute cultivation and colonial government wanted them to settle permanently in Assam. Further the Hindu Bengalis, the Marwaris and the Nepalis were the significant groups who started migrating to Assam. Among all the migrant groups, Na-Asamiya Muslims slowly became significant in number. Assam's geographical location, being very near to East-Bengal, it was easy for these landless or land-poor peasants to migrate to Assam, who were oppressed by feudal lords back in their place. Colonial officials saw land-abundant Assam as a solution to East Bengal's problem of land scarcity (Baruah 2013). They actively encouraged migration of Muslim peasants of East-Bengal origin to Assam to generate a better revenue from the state. Slowly these East Bengal origin Muslims or allegedly "migrant Muslims" living in the bordering districts of Assam subsequently moved to other parts of Assam as well. Initially they were tenants, then sharecroppers and gradually many of them started owning lands. Thus, an antagonism developed gradually between hard working East Bengali origin peasant settlers of Assam and other Asamiya groups, which included Asamiya Hindus and many local tribal groups like Bodos, Tiwas, Rabhas etc. The enmity and antagonism with the Na-Asamiya Muslim community was in terms of perceived threat of 'rising Muslim population' too. In most of the ethnic conflict that happened from 1979 till date between Na-Asamiya Muslims (at times including other category of Muslims) reflects concern of threat to 'demographic composition'. With respect to 2012 'ethnic cleansing' of Na-Asamiya Muslims by some Bodo extremists in few lower districts of Assam, Bonojit Hussain argues that - a whole range of clichés like 'influx of foreigner', 'loss of culture', and 'demographic invasion' were used against the Na-Asamiya Muslims which for Hussain was "no ethnic clash but rather a last ditch reaction against the 'genuine' fear of Bodos of being swamped by illegal Bangladeshi foreigners in their own homeland"¹.

During the period of Assam Movement (1979-85), series of violent incident were unleashed on the community; Nellie massacre being the biggest among them. The Nellie

¹ "The Bodoland (Assam) Violence and the Politics of Explanation" by Bonojit Hussain; Published in *Kafila* on 8th December, 2012. (<https://kafila.online/2012/12/08/the-bodoland-assam-violence-and-the-politics-of-explanation-by-bonojit-hussain/>)

massacre happened in 1983. Nellie is the name of a place located in the heart of Assam, hardly 90 K.Ms away from the capital city of Assam, Guwahati. In this massacre the local people including Asamiya Hindus and tribal groups such as the Tiwas, the Karbis, the Mishings, the Rabhas and the Kochs reportedly attacked the Na-Asamiya Muslims (allegedly immigrants) where almost 3000 people (number varies in different sources) were killed in a single day, although the government and other the official sources claims the number to be less than 2000. Most of the killed bodies were women and children as they could not run faster than the young men to cross the canal and save themselves (Hazarika, 2000). Assam Movement was a display of agitation against all immigrant groups in Assam, but it got violently misdirected towards the poor Muslim peasants who migrated from East- Bengal. The possible reason identified by Makiko Kimura in her study on Nellie massacre (“*The Nellie Massacre of 1983: Agency of Rioters*”, 2013) was that the Muslims of Nellie did not obey the Election Boycott call given by movement leadership under All Assam Students Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). For the tribal groups, the Muslims were allegedly ‘land intruders’. They first became tenants, sharecroppers and then begun owning their lands. Rumors of girl abduction by the “immigrant” Muslim community of the local people were also one of the immediate reasons of violence (Kimura 2003). Kimura argues that though these narrations qualify to be part of the reason for the attack, there was larger politics of Assam Movement leadership and Congress government during that time. Thus one needs to understand the multiple micro level aspects connected to the massacre. Also it would be interesting to explore the local factors connected to Nellie, which influenced the massacre.

1.2 Present Context of the Research:

Migration, Land and Identity issue has been dominating Assamese politics and “regional identity” from the middle of the 20th century. In fact, citizenship issue in the state is still occupying a major domain of politics and discussion in public forums. There is constant demand from public and civil society groups to make an upgraded list of ‘citizens’

leaving the ‘foreigners’ through National Registration of Citizen (NRC) in Assam². There has been significant migration from tribal dominated areas of Bengal from late 19th century onwards to work in newly established tea industry under colonial regime and supported by colonial administration and Assamese bourgeois for cheap labour. Muslim peasants were also brought for production of more food in a “food scarce province” like Assam. They were perceived to be “hard working” in contrast to myth of “lazy natives” of Assam, and subsequently the migration increased. This resulted in distinct “outsider” cultural identity formation which the local people perceived to be a threat, politically and culturally.

In this historical context it becomes very essential to analyze the regional specificity of Nellie which resulted in a large scale massacre. An enquiry into the changing demographic pattern, land relation and intercommunity relationship in this particular area might bring new dimensions in the understanding of collective violence, which is never done in this region before. Interestingly, Nellie is presently located in Morigaon district, where Muslims have a significant population. According to 2011 census of India, Muslims constitute 52.56 per cent of the total population of the district. In the present context too, understanding this violence will indicate the position of Na-Asamiya Muslims within the larger ‘Asamiya identity’. It becomes imperative to look how certain external factors led to mobilization for such large scale killings. Also it will be interesting to look how Nellie massacre as a larger event influenced the shape of local and national politics in Assam.

1.3 Conceptual Framework:

The study deals with the concept of violence in the particular context of Nellie massacre (1983) in Assam. It mainly locates the concept in the framework of social sciences through the writings of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Bourdieu, Galtung, Hannah Arendt and Randall Collins. Bringing the connection of “violence and collectivity” by Arendt, the

² The National Register of Citizens (NRC) includes the names of Indian citizens of Assam. The NRC was first prepared in 1951 which was after the Census of 1951. The present up gradation of NRC process includes the name of those people whose name were there in the 1951 list and those who can prove their presence in Assam up to the midnight 24th March, through valid documents.

study also engages with the idea of “collective violence” as theorized by different scholars like Tilly, Demmers and Mehendale, Roche, J. Alexander etc. Thus collective violence remains one of the key concepts throughout the study where it is analyzed in different forms and contexts. The emergence of collective violence in the context of “Assam Movement” is dealt in the third chapter. It looks on the historical process of how collective violence emerged as a phenomena during Assam Movement due to total lawlessness in the state. Collective violence is also analyzed through growing Hindu-Muslim communal polarization by external political forces during Assam movement. The concept of collective violence is also used to understand Nellie Massacre (1983) considering different micro and macro factors connected to it. Using collective violence as a conceptual tool, the study tries to understand the nature of violence in the case of Nellie massacre in comparison to other collective violence in India.

Further the concept of ‘communalism’ in the case of ‘Asamiya nationalism’ is analyzed to understand how far the idea of pan- Indian communalism influences the functioning of Assam movement.

The study also deals with the concept of “genocide” in the context of Nellie. Bringing out different definitions and arguments of genocide, the study tries to evaluate the concept of genocide particularly dealt by Demmers and Mehendale in the Dutch context by using it in the context of Nellie massacre in Assam.

The incident of Nellie massacre (1983) is also analyzed using the concept of “Electoral Competition and Violence” by Wilkinson in order to make the situational analysis in the case of Nellie massacre. Extending Wilkinson’s analysis of electoral competition and violence among different political parties through mobilization of certain ethnic or religious groups, the study analyses the incident of massacre that took place in Nellie.

1.4 Theoretical Framework:

The larger theoretical framework of the study draws from the literature on sociology/anthropology of violence. It also uses the theories of violence and collective violence in general. The study is concerned about understanding a particular phenomenon of violence , considering its local factors whose nature appears to be distinct than most of the collective violence in post-colonial India. Using a comparative

framework the study tries to understand Nellie massacre (1983) with other incidents of collective violence in India, where Hindu-Muslim communalism and memories of partition occupies the larger concern. It also deals with the works of Das (2007), Chatterjee and Mehta (2007), Robinson (2005) etc. to understand the complexities of coping mechanism of victims and survivors with their everyday life again and how the remembrance of horror shapes their future course of action.

1.5 Review of Literature:

The study deals with literature of theoretical idea of violence and collective violence. Locating violence in the domain of sociological analysis, the study begins with the debate of 'idea of violence among classical sociological thinkers'. Among the classical sociologists, Karl Marx talks about violence, connecting it to social transformation through a communist revolution by forcible overthrowing of the existing social condition. Marx, in his initial writings, argues that violence is mandatory for a communist revolution. But later on in many writings of Marx, Engels and even Lenin, they differentiated between a violent and peaceful revolution and not always identifying violence with revolution (Schaff 1973:263). For Weber, though violence is not the only and normal means available to the state, but it is categorically specific to the functioning of a state. Bringing the connection of violence with modern day notion of state and institutions, he argues that only state has the legitimacy to use violence. The concept of the 'state' may disappear where 'violence' as a means was unknown; rather this kind of situation might led to an anarchy (Owen & Strong 2004: 33). Durkheim while talking about violence argues that the society is guided by its collective morality, which always puts some specific demand on the individual which results in painful tension. Individual has its despotic demands based on his or her own sensory feelings, but societal demands stands against this individual inclination to create an element of violence (Gane 2009:42). It also includes Hannah Arendt's famous reflection on the idea of violence where she categorically talks about distinction between 'violence' and 'power'. Arendt evoking the arguments of Weber and C Wright Mills argues that violence is most flagrant manifestation of power. By citing various references Arendt emphasizes on

distinguishing between violence and power. Taking a left humanitarian position Arendt writes about dangers of subscribing to violence Arendt (1970:38).

Going beyond the realm of physical violence, the study deals with concepts of structural violence and cultural violence. Galtung (1969) reflects on structural violence which he differentiates from personal violence. Personal violence is visually manifested where structural violence is not. He defines structural violence with the help of two key terms; those are – ‘actual’ and ‘potential’. For Galtung, structural violence lies in between potential violence and actual violence. In a simpler form- structural violence is the factor between ‘what it is’ and ‘what it could have been’. He uses the idea of symbolic violence to define cultural violence. He defines cultural violence as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 1990). For him, these factors are part of the culture and not the entire culture; entire culture can’t be violent. For him cultural violence brings into light the ways through which, direct and structural violence within our society is legitimized. It points out the process by which structural and symbolic violence are normalized within the society.

Since our concern is largely occupied by understanding the ideas and contexts related to collective violence, works of Arendt, Tilly, Demmers, Roche, Alexander etc. are reviewed for an elaborate understanding of collective violence. Roche argues that the collectivization of any kind of violence is comes from strong association. Such strong association arise firstly when a third party supports one party against the other and secondly when the followers of a group shares a common interest (Roche 2001:140). In the context of collective violence, Arendt argues that the effectiveness of violence does not depend on numbers, but in the case of collective violence the individuality tends to disappear. Rather there exists a group coherence which is more intensely felt and the bond proves to be much stronger than all the varieties of friendship, though it is more temporary in nature (Arendt 1970:67). Tilly (1977) in one of his earliest works connects ‘collective violence’ to the byproduct of a non-violent ‘collective action’. Again taking about collective violence, Tilly argues that the characteristics of collective violence have three “common episodic social interaction”. The first one is “physical damage on persons

and/or objects”; secondly, it involves “at least two perpetrators of damage”; thirdly it “results at least in part from coordinating among persons who perform the damaging acts” (Tilly 2003:3-4). Again Demmers and Mehendale (2010) in a very interesting analysis reflects upon the complexities of connection between ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘xenophobia’. They talk about the rise of xenophobia and cultural assertion against the non-European or “immigrant” group in Europe in general and Netherlands in particular. Jeffery Alexander theorizes on collective trauma which is associated to post -collective violence normal life. Alexander (2012) attempts to give a general theory of ‘collective trauma’ in his work. He explains how “collective agency develops, or fails to develop in response to the experience of social suffering” which might be based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class etc.

The study also reviews works of collective violence in Indian context like Das (2007), Chatterjee and Mehta (2005), Robinson (2005) etc. to have a comparative viewpoint with that of collective violence in Assam which emerged during Assam Movement and of rest of India. Assam’s colonial history related to migration and post-colonial social and political changes are dealt to get a clear background of Assam movement. The literature also includes subsequent debate related to Assam movement and it’s gradual development into a violent agitation. Overall, the existing literature depicts how a non-violent movement turned into a violent agitation by making “Na-Asmiaya Muslims” it’s essential ‘other’. With brief socio-economic history of Na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam and in Nellie, I include literatures which analyze the brutal Nellie massacre carefully. The study particularly deals with Makiko Kimura’s (2013) work on Nellie massacre. Kimura has done an extensive field research on Nellie Massacre that happened on 18th February, 1983. She argued that the “Tiwas” (the tribe who actively participated in the Massacre) alleged that they were mobilized by the leader of All Assam Students Union (AASU) in the name of anti-immigration movement and participated in the massacre. Later the leaders of AASU denied the allegation and the Tiwas admitted that they did not have any serious rivalry with Muslims except some conflict over land and petty issues of girl abduction, which should not be a cause of a Massacre. On the other side, the Muslims too said that they had always peacefully co-existed with the Tiwas. They do not find any serious reason to justify a Massacre of that intensity. Basically Kimura’s work was a first

of its kind to take narration of all the three sides; the victims and the perpetrators, along with narration of AASU leaders.

Also using different theoretical frameworks, reports of enquiry commissions, newspapers, magazines and other archival sources, the massacre of Nellie and its subsequent social and political developments in Assam is being understood and explained.

1.6 Objectives:

1. To understand the idea of violence theoretically with a particular emphasis on collective violence in general.

2. To map out the historical process in post-colonial Assam which led to Assam movement (1979-85) and subsequent development of collective violence, particularly on Na-Asamiya Muslims.

3. To understand Nellie Massacre (1983) in the regional context of Assam considering its local and national factors.

1.7 Research Questions:

1. How collective violence as a phenomena emerges in general and in particular contexts of India with special reference to Assam movement?
2. What is the relation between Assam Movement, Collective violence and identity with special reference to na-Asamiya Muslims?
3. How did Nellie massacre (1983) influenced the post-Nellie Assam society and politics?

1.8 Methodology:

The study is based on secondary sources. A historical analysis is used to map out the important process and events of colonial and post-colonial Assam which connects to the development of Assam Movement. Historical method is given emphasis here as sociologist Vertigans (2011) argues that Sociology has a proud history of understanding past events and long term processes which helps us in understanding the contemporary

processes. Particularly in the context of understanding and studying terrorism he states that there is a tendency to neglect the role of 'history'. So applying historical method here, our purpose is not write a positivist history but rather using historical analysis of society and politics; our purpose is to understand the contemporary developments in society in more nuanced form. In our particular case of studying the Assam movement a historical analysis related to colonialism, migration, demographic change and changing society and politics of Assam gives a detailed understanding of the conditions of emergence of Assam movement. Also in the case of Nellie massacre, a historical approach gives thorough understanding of the social categories and political influence on them in colonial and post-colonial time. It also depicts the demographic change and land ownership pattern in the area. Thus before analyzing the event of Nellie in details, one must look at the previous changes in the region by tracing and analyzing the changes which have occurred in the history.

I have also gone through newspapers, archival sources, magazines and reports of enquiry commissions of violence and other government reports related to my study. Being born and brought up in that area my lived experience also shapes my perception while writing, which I consider primary inputs from my side.

1.9 Conceptual Clarifications:

Na-Asamiya Muslims:

Husain (1993), categorized Muslims of Assam into four groups. (I) Asamiya Muslims , (II) Na-Asamiya Muslims, (III) Muslims of Barak Valley, (IV) North-Indian Muslims living in Assam. The first category of Muslim is commonly referred to as 'local Muslim' who gradually became part of the Assamese society since medieval times. Na-Asamiya Muslims means neo-Assamese Muslims. They are also referred to as Pamua Muslims (The Farming Muslims), Charua Muslims (the Muslims of river islands or banks seasonally submerged into river/flood waters), Miya Muslims and Mymensinghia Muslims (Muslims from Mymensingh district of erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh). They migrated to Assam permanently from erstwhile East-Bengal. Na-Asamiya Muslims living in Assam today are decedents of migrants from then East Bengal, particularly from Mymensingh, Rongpur and Pabna districts (Hussain 1993:200-

201). Many of the scholars refer to them as “immigrant” Muslims as well, who started migrating to Assam from late 19th century onwards. Barak valley Muslims are linguistically Bengali like their Hindu counterparts. North-Indian Muslims migrated to Assam during later stage of colonialism. They are insignificant in numbers and totaled only 6258 in 1971 census (Hussain 1993:197). In our work, as we cite different authors’ work in their own language, terminologies like “immigrant Muslims”/ “Miya Muslims” / “Bengal Origin Muslims”/ “Bengali Muslims” / “East-Bengal origin Muslims” will carry a similar connotation, i.e. it overall refers to “Na- Asamiya Muslims”.

Asamiya/ Assamese: Assamese refers to all inhabitants who lives inside the geographical territory of Assam. Asamiya refers to those who have adopted Assamese language and culture completely, irrespective of their religion or origin of Birthplace.

Lalung/Tiwa

Tiwa tribe is also referred to as “Lalung”. Hence Tiwa/Lalung denotes the similar meaning which refers to the same tribe.

1.10 Design of the Study:

Chapter 2:

In this chapter, I try to understand the general idea of violence in its different forms with particular emphasis on collective violence theoretically. Secondly, I try to look at different collective violence in Indian context and how they could be relevant point of departure to understand incidents of collective violence during Assam Movement (1979-85). Theoretical discussion of violence and collective violence will also focus on the themes of Classical Sociology and its engagement with the idea of Violence. It also deals with Hannah Arendt’s philosophical reflection on Violence. Bringing discussion of different types of violence such as structural violence and symbolic violence, it also deals with- ‘violence and Micro-Sociological Theory’. Then finally it focuses on understanding the idea of Collective Violence in it’s different forms and contexts. It also deals with collective Violence in Indian Context.

Chapter 3:

Chapter three focuses on the historical developments, particularly in post-colonial Assam, which lead to Assam Movement (1979-85). Secondly, it focuses on understanding how a peaceful protest ended up in violent agitation generating mass violence. Thirdly, it studies the process, through which, the 'Na-Asamiya Muslims', among many other migrant groups were termed as "outsiders" and "foreigners" coupled with series of incidents of political violence inflicted upon on them. The major themes of debates and discussions covered in the chapter includes- the Assam Movement (1979-1985) and speculation, anxiety and mass outrage about number of foreigners in Assam. It also includes the discussion of myth and reality about abnormal population growth rate of na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam. Regarding Assam movement it includes different perspectives, debates and criticisms of Assam movement. It also deals with Assam movement and the aspirations of emerging Asamiya middle class. At last it deals with the questions of Assam movement and occurrence of collective violence. particularly on na-Asamiya Muslims. It also engages with Muslim question in Assam movement amidst growing communal polarization.

Chapter 4:

Chapter 4 focuses on understanding Nellie massacre (1983) within its regional context which includes the local factors. Secondly, it tries to understand the massacre within the macro framework of state politics and Assam Movement (1979-85). Thirdly, Debates, criticisms and discussion are placed about post-Nellie communal division of Asamiya public sphere and how Nellie as an event influenced Muslims of Assam to take question of a political agency more seriously. Also, the chapter focuses on understanding the violence theoretically- whether it contains elements of communal violence like elsewhere in India or the communal angle is systematically hidden by giving an upper hand to 'native/outsider' conflict? Or was Nellie massacre at the local level influenced by broader political developments in the state during that period? The chapter's key portions is - Nellie massacre along with that the Communal Turn of Assam Movement. It also deals with 'Naghabanda' Violence as the background of Nellie massacre which was a replica of Nellie, but of lower intensity. It also deals with the role of leadership of Assam

movement in Nellie massacre and the role of Congress government and difference between Administration and Local Police. The chapter tries to understand Nellie massacre within its regional context. Citing enquiry committee reports, the chapter raises some pertinent questions- whether Nellie massacre could have prevented? Bringing in Wilkinson's idea of relation between 'electoral competition' and 'violence' this chapter analyses Nellie massacre connecting to electoral politics. Also the debate of 'genocide' or 'massacre' in the case of Nellie massacre is dealt in this chapter. Also it includes the discussion on 'Nellie massacre, communal developments and Assamese public sphere'.

Chapter II

Theoretical Reflections on the Idea of Violence and Collective Violence

Violence has always played a crucial role in human history. Violence as a phenomena often gets manifested in varying forms depending upon different contexts. Beyond the realm of physical violence, there exists issues of violence which are often more related to psychological, cultural or structural aspects of our society. In this context, scholars of violence try to understand and theorize about what it constitutes to call something as violence. There are contending ideas of violence based on different school of thought (like Marxian, Functionalist, Post-Modernist, Feminist, Symbolic Interactionist etc.) and also by different theorist influenced by none of the dominant school of thoughts. Though there are different form of violence like physical, psychological, symbolic, structural, cultural, domestic etc., our focus primarily here will be to understand and discuss about collective violence which is usually deeply political in nature. With this background, our concern here is to understand Nellie (1983) as an event of collective which happened nearly 34 years back in Assam. Now the question arises, how do we study and understand a violent event sociologically which happened 34 years back? Sociologist Vertigans (2011) argues that Sociology has a proud history of understanding past events and long term processes which helps us in understanding the contemporary processes. Particularly in the context of understanding and studying terrorism he states that there is a tendency to neglect the role of 'history'. He carries twofold objectives for his research on terrorism -- -- First, to examine how terror groups to utilize history mobilize mass support and then justify the use of political violence. Second, to enquire and understand societies before the formation of a particular terror group to draw a connection if preceding activities or political processes provide a basis for development of subsequent political violence (Vertigans 2011:24). Thus keeping in mind our concern of research, it becomes clear from Vertigan's argument that taking a historical approach, understanding an event of collective violence sociologically is even more elaborative. As he says the purpose is not

to give an entirely historical narrative, but to take note of the pattern of developments, which eventually leads to the event of our sociological analysis. But, before going to the concern of our research and its historical developments, let us first understand some basic ideas about violence/collective violence in a more detailed manner, which will to the overall understanding of our topic.

1.1 Classical Sociology and its engagement with the idea of Violence:

Among the classical sociologists, Karl Marx talks about social transformation through a Communist revolution by forcible overthrowing of the existing social condition. The bourgeoisie have been historically exploiting the proletariat and the existing social relation can be altered by a revolutionary transformation where the proletariat will take control of the state. This will happen through class struggle between the two. He writes “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx: 1970:31). Two things become clear from his ideas. The first is the existing social and political system has to be changed by a revolution. Secondly, it involves overthrowing the existing social structure through violence. The occurrence of this idea several times in different writings of Marx and Engels almost makes an impression that social revolution essentially resorts to violence. But again at a later stage in many writings of Marx, Engels and even Lenin they differentiated between a violent and peaceful revolution and not always identifying violence with revolution (Schaff 1973:263). Nevertheless, the idea of violence remains a crucial point of discussion in Marx’s idea of revolution as subversion of an entire social structure seems quite unlikely without a confrontation between two classes.

The idea of the term “social revolution”, for Schaff can be interpreted in a broader or narrower sense. In the broader sense of the term it means a “change in the social formation”. In Marxist language it also refers to a qualitative change in both base and superstructure. In the narrower sense of the term, there is a possibility of sudden change, which involves violence. It denotes the use of physical violence in a sudden revolution which is separate from the idea of evolution- a gradual quantitative change (Schaff 1973:264).

For Marx, neither the class struggle need to end in destruction of a civilization nor in a violent confrontation through usage of arms, even though even though it results in new forms of relation of production. Marx and Engels were influenced by the French revolution and revolutionary idea of first half of nineteenth century which is reflected in his writings of *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx from his youth to end of his life never denied the possibility of a violent or armed revolution, but he neither glorified it nor preached it to be the only way for a socialist transformation. Contrarily, during his older age, he advocated for peaceful transformation towards socialism (Schaff 1973: 265-66). Schaff concludes that a peaceful transition towards socialism means it involves social reforms and without class struggle a sudden social reform appears to be naive. Thus from the above discussion it becomes apparent that violence remains as one of the most key elements within Marx's radical theory of social transformation.

Max Weber in his classic lecture "Politics as a Vocation" reflects on violence while trying to define the modern state sociologically. Physical violence is one of the most peculiar characteristics of modern states as well as political institutions. He refers and justifies Trotsky's remark that "every state is based on force". The concept of the 'state' would disappear in societies where violence as a means was unknown; rather it would lead to emergence of "anarchy". Though violence is not the only and normal means available to the state, but it is categorically specific to the functioning of a state. The relationship of violence with state is relatively closer in modern states. In the past different small human groups starting from a clan used physical violence in normal sense. But in modern times, the state has the legitimacy to use physical violence. This violence is legitimate within a particular territory and this notion of territory is an essential component of the entire process of sanction of violence. Specifically in today's world the right use of physical violence by an institution or an individual depends on the permission of the state. In this way the state is regarded as the only authority to legitimize violence (Owen & Strong 2004: 33).

Weber talking about the modern day notion of 'politics', Weber argues that the state denotes the relationship of people ruling over people. The relationship sustains on legitimate use of force. Thus for a modern state to survive, the authority of the ruler must be accepted by the ruled (Owen & Strong 2004: 34).

Among the classical sociologists, Durkheim's analysis of modern society is quite unique and carries a functionalist view of society. He denies direct influence of Marx's work and the idea of communism. His classic work like "Suicide" is still relevant today which provides the framework and methodology of a good empirical study. But his works mostly are only interpreted within the domain of conservative functionalist tradition, ignoring his reflection on conflict and violence (Gane 2009:41).

Referring to Durkheim's writings on *Homo duplex*, social energy and social causation in an essay published in 1914. Durkheim writes that the dualism between body and soul, individual and social are norms of human life. According to Durkheim with the notion of collectivity individual human existence is impossible. An individual body exists within the realm of its own sensory experience and emotion while the soul is impersonal and transcendent. It is that world of impersonal which forms the idea of collectivity. The collectivity is formed through language, culture and thought of the world and it has its own collective morality. Thus there is an individual body and against are social norms and sanctions. The society guided by its collective morality, always puts some specific demand on the individual which results in painful tension. Individual has its despotic demands based on his or her own sensory feelings, but societal demands stand against this individual inclination to create an element of violence (Gane 2009:42).

1.2 Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Reflection on Violence:

Hannah Arendt's book "On Violence (1970)" till today remains one of the most path breaking work on the idea of violence. She discusses violence in its philosophical as well as in different contextual notions. It becomes imperative to engage with her work thoroughly to understand the whole notion of violence in its different forms and contexts. She distinguishes violence from power, force or strengths and argues that violence needs implements to be manifested (by referring to Engels) like a revolution in technology or in toll making, which is reflected in warfare. She tries to understand violent action through means and ends and argues that there often lies a possibility of ends being overwhelmed by means which is justified by the end and is essential to achieve it. She argues that unlike a fabricated action, a human action is often unpredictable and the means used to achieve political goals are of lesser importance to future world and is concerned with the

immediate intended goals. Since the results of men's action are beyond men's control, violence as an element harbors an additional elements of arbitrariness. Like no one knows what luck one carries in a battlefield and this intrusion of the "utterly unexpected" is beyond any rational prediction. There is also possibility of mutual destruction as well on particular circumstances. Violence like warfare is under all-pervading unpredictability (Arendt 1970:4). She argues that no one can be ignorant about the role of violence in terms of engaging with "history and politics". Violence has always occupied a significant role in terms of human affairs, but till now violence and its arbitrariness is taken for granted and very seldom it got attention for special consideration (Arendt 1970:8).

Violence as an instrument has gained reputation and appeal more in terms of domestic affairs than in international relations, especially in the matter of revolution. On this particular thought she gives example of strong Marxist rhetoric of new left as in the case of Mao Tse-tung who says "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun". For Marx the role of violence was secondary, the primary concern being the contradictions inherent in the old society, in her words "the emergence of a new society was preceded, but not caused, by violent outbreaks". In the same she argues that for Marx state was an instrument of violence in the command of ruling class, but the actual power of the ruling class was not solely dependent upon violence, but it was dependent on the ruling class's participation in the production process (Arendt 1970:11).

Violence in political realm becomes quite essential to understand her analysis. Arendt evoking the arguments of Weber and C Wright Mills argues that violence is most flagrant manifestation of power. By citing various references Arendt emphasizes on distinguishing between violence and power by referring to Alexander Passerin Entreves' work *The Notion of the State*. But again in her opinion, this thoughtful distinction of power and violence does not reach the "root of the matter". (Arendt 1970:38). Going on distinguishing power and violence she argues that "indeed one of the most obvious distinctions between power and violence is that power always stands in need of numbers, whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements". She says that the extreme form of power is "all against one" whereas extreme form of violence could be "one against all" and the latter is not possible without instruments. She expresses her discontent in then present state of political science for not

distinguishing terminologies like “power”, “strength”, “force”, “authority” and finally “violence” which carries different connotations. For her most important question lies on ‘who rules whom’. These words indicate the means by which man rules over man. We often find it synonymous because they have the same function. Power for her corresponds to the “human ability not just to act but to act in correct”, it belongs to a group represented by one for the group. Strength unequivocally refers to the act of an individual, a property of individual capability. Force refers to something to indicate the “energy released by physical or social movements”. Authority she tells, is quite elusive in comparison to these words, hence mostly and frequently used out of context. It denotes to the power relation between two entities, which may be determined by sociality, divinity or legality. Violence in a unique sense have its own instrumentality. It has more similarity with strength since the tools used in violence are often used to multiply the natural strength. But power in one of it’s special cases that is in the power of a government it tend to equate in terms of violence. Many a times violence as last resort becomes essential to keep the power structure intact against any domestic or foreign threat. In these particular contexts it appears as if violence were pre requisite to power. Though it is not true if one looks closely, but she tries to elaborate it by citing the example of the phenomenon of ‘revolution’ to map the gap between theory and reality. She talks about change of power and thus possibility of revolution (not necessarily) and how arms changes their hands. If civil support and obedience is lost, power is also lost (Arendt 1970:).

Citing few examples, she argues that no government exclusively solely based on means of violence can survives. Even a totalitarian ruler needs few trusted followers and informers. It could only be done with non-human machine bodies. Even in most despotic domination by masters on slaves, a master was dependent on organized solidarity of masters. Single men without others to support them could never succeed to use violence successfully. To claim the validity of her argument she argues that this is the reason violence is used as a last resort in domestic affairs, when an individual refuse to be overpowered by the consensus of the majority (Arendt 1970:51).

Power need no justification, but it needs legitimacy since it is inherent in the very existence of political communities. Violence can be justifiable, but there is no question of

legitimacy to it. Power and Violence often appear together but whenever they are combined power remains the primary and pre-dominant factor (Arendt 1970:52). For her violence can always destroy power, but it can never create power. Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is lost. Politically often loss of power becomes a way to substitute violence for power (Arendt 1970:53). In Arendt's opinion nothing is theoretically more dangerous than organic thought in political matters by which power and violence are interpreted in biological terms by using organic metaphors. In these terminologies, as understood "life and life's alleged creativity" are common denominators so that violence can be justified on the ground of creativity. The organic metaphors tends to propagate more violence when it is concerned about racial issues. Racism, white or black is fraught with violence by definition because it objects to natural organic facts, no persuasion or power is capable of changing it. She says racism, like the fact of race is an ideology and the deeds in racism are not reflexive actions, but actions which are guided by pseudo-scientific theories. Violence in interracial struggle is always murderous but not irrational, for her it is logical and rational consequences of racism (Arendt 1970:76). Arendt calls violence by nature instrumental and says it is only rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching a justification to its ends. And since consequences of human action are always uncertain, violence can remain rational if it pursues short term goals. It does not promote causes like history, revolution, progress, reaction etc.; it can only serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention. It is more of a weapon of reform than revolution (Arendt 1970:79)

By taking a left humanitarian position, Arendt warns against the dangers of subscribing to violence. Arendt is arguing to be cautious that even if violence moves in a non-violent way, it is always true that the means overwhelm the end. If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result can be not merely a defeat, but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic. It is an irreversible practice and return to the status quo in case of defeat is not possible. The most probable outcome of practice of violence is in fact a more violent world. (Arendt 1970:80). Arendt reflects on the rise of new brand of nationalism which is usually understood as a swing to right, probably more evident in bigger countries. Formerly national feeling tended to unite various ethnic groups based on the political sentiments of the people. But emergence of ethnic nationalism begins to

threaten the oldest and best established nation states. (Arendt 1970:84). Arendt concludes her book by arguing that whether it is the government or the governed, the realization of loosing of power brings an open invitation to violence.

1.3 Structural Violence and Symbolic Violence:

Johan Galtung, a scholar of peace research, propounds the idea of structural Violence. Galtung tries and connect both peace and violence for mutual definition of the terms in relative sense. For him peace can be regarded as absence of violence. He writes that “ violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations”, argues that one needs to think about violence in broader framework going out if mere physical manifestations of it. Also the extended concept of violence must be in a logical sequence, ‘not merely a list of undesirables’ (Galtung 1969). He emphasizes on two key terms to define violence, they are ‘actual’ and ‘potential’. For him, violence is defined as ‘the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual’. To put it in simpler form, violence is the factor between to what it is and what it could have been. Galtung cites an example to substantiate his argument that if someone dies of tuberculosis in 18th century, it would be hard to term that as violence since it was unavoidable. But if someone dies of tuberculosis today, despite the fact that specific medical treatment of the disease is present, violence is considered to be present. So when in any case potential is higher than the actual, violence is present. But when the actual is unavoidable, even though the actual exists at very low level, violence is not present.

He defines the ‘potential level of realization’ with connection to certain ‘insights’ and ‘resources’. According to him, if the insights or resources are monopolized by a social group / class or used for other purposes, then the actual level falls below the potential level and violence is perceived to be present. In addition to these indirect violence there is also the concept of direct violence, where means of realization are not withheld, but rather destroyed; to cite an example, in the case of a ‘war’ where ‘actual somatic realization’ is certainly below one’s ‘potential somatic realization’. But even within this situation also there exist indirect violence insofar as insights and resources are not

channelized properly for constructive work to narrow the gap between actual and the potential. Again Galtung admits that the meaning of 'potential realization' becomes problematic when one moves from somatic aspects of human life to mental aspects. How one can be sure whether the realized value is fairly consensual or not, which according to him is never satisfactory.

To discuss them, he argues that it might be useful to understand in terms of influence as in the definition already mentioned. To approach this he uses six dichotomous categories as his interest of analysis where distinction between the two concepts within each dichotomy constitutes the violent action itself. He distinguishes *physical* and *psychological* aspects of violence, *negative* and *positive* aspects of influence, in a particular violence whether or not there is *any object that is hurt?*, whether or not there is *a subject who acts?*, between violence that is *intended* or *unintended* and traditional distinction between two levels of violence, *the manifest* and *the latent*.

Distinguishing between personal violence and structural violence, Galtung would argue personal violence is something which shows, it is visually manifested. In personal violence the object perceives the violence usually and might express discontent regarding it, while in structural violence the object can be persuaded not perceive it at all. Personal violence according to him change and dynamism whereas, structural violence is silent, does not get visibly manifested and static in nature. In a static society personal violence is documented in a formal way as in structural violence can be perceived as something natural. Conversely in a dynamic society personal violence may be considered somehow congruent, but structural violence becomes apparent as it appears as an obstacle constraining the free movement. Since structural violence is embedded into the structure of society, it shows certain stability, but since personal violence depends on the whims and wishes of individual people, it shows fluctuations over time.

Extending his argument of structural violence, he tries to conceptualize and define 'cultural violence'. He defines cultural violence as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, - exemplified by religion and ideology language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)- that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 1990). These according to him are part of the culture, not a complete culture, entire culture can hardly be classified as

violent. The possible opposite term for cultural violence can be 'cultural peace', meaning many aspects of culture which serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace. But making a peace culture is problematic since it contains temptation to institutionalize a particular culture, making it mandatory with an emphasis on internalizing it. This kind of approach would already mean direct violence by imposing a culture.

He argues that cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look right, if not at least wrong. Cultural violence brings into light the ways through which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus manufactured them to look normal within society. These types of violence changes the moral color of an act to legitimize that particular act or may be makes it normal. A scholar of 'Peace Studies', Galtung emphasizes on formulating typologies of violence like the same way he argues, pathology is among the pre requisites for health studies.

Bourdieu's Idea of Symbolic Violence:

Among the recent sociological theorists Bourdieu has propagated the idea of symbolic violence. While talking about a general theory of symbolic violence he gives emphasis on education and social reproduction and relationship between the two. The theory of symbolic violence has been comprehensively dealt in the first half of *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, as cited in Jenkins 1992:65). The theory was developed in the course of an empirical research on French education system but can be applied to any social formation to understand power relations between groups or classes. Bourdieu and Passeron attempts to argue in theoretical terms that in all societies order and social restraint are produced by a passive and cultural mechanism rather than direct and coercive means of social control. In discussing so they have largely been influenced by Weber's idea of authority and legitimate domination. The theory of symbolic violence is comprehensively dealt with in the first half of their work 'Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture', first published in French in 1970. Symbolic violence according to Bourdieu is legitimizing imposition of certain systems of symbolism and meaning on certain social groups or classes. The act of legitimacy obscures the power relation which allows the imposition of

those symbols and meanings to be successful. As long as it is accepted to be legitimate, culture adds its own force to those power relations, which contributes in their systemic reproduction. It is according to Bourdieu is done through 'misrecognition'. It is that process in which the power relations are not perceived as what it appears to be, but through deceptive mechanism which gives legitimacy of the power relation in the eyes of the beholder. Bourdieu refers to the term 'cultural arbitrary' by denoting that culture here is arbitrary in two senses, in its imposition and in its contents. The word arbitrariness refers that apart from empirically traceable history culture neither can be derived from a single notion nor from a relative value. All cultures are equally arbitrary and behind all cultures there lies the arbitrary sanction of 'pure de facto power'. (Bourdieu and Passeron, as cited in Jenkins 2008). Symbolic violence for him operates through pedagogic action, as pedagogic action reproduces culture in its arbitrariness. Thus pedagogic action also reproduces the existing power relation under which it operates. This he refers to as 'social reproduction function of cultural reproduction'. Pedagogic action reflects the interest of dominant groups or classes, and thus tends to reproduce uneven distribution of cultural capital among the social groups in question which leads to reproduction of the same social structure. Pedagogic action also operates through exclusion of certain ideas and positive inculcation of them and thus exclusion or censorship is one of the most effective tool in this process.

1.4 Violence and Micro-Sociological Theory:

Collins (2008) argues that micro sociology's concern to deal with the idea of Violence is to understand the "violent situations" rather than violent individuals. Thus it is to get a sense of the situation which influence an individual to get into an act of violence. He argues that types of violent individuals remains constant in every case and studying them does not result into a sound understanding about violence (Collins 2008:1). It is not appropriate to identify a 'potential individual' capable doing violence in a stereotypical sense of the basis of economic status, age, race, religion etc. Rather in different context any individual who may quite well affluent, of any particular background, may get involved in a violent act.

Collins argues that to move towards a sociology of violent situations, not of violent individuals, one needs a distinct approach. One needs to observe the violent interaction to capture the processes of how a violent act is performed. He criticizes our conventional approach to study violence where we rely upon statistics about violence, cases found under criminal justice system and upon interviews with victims after a violence. Interviews with victims is probably a right step forward, but it is limited for two reasons; first- the extent to which they tell us the truth and second- they themselves are not good observers of details and contexts of dramatic events. Thus an ordinary approach does not provide us a language in which we can define micro interaction of the situation. Rather it offers “a set of cliché’s and myths that predetermine what people will say”. Thus in many instances of military violence, riots, sports violence or even ordinary quarrels when victims talk about what went on, they use their own lights and idealized version of it (Collins 2008:4).

In this new era it has become possible to study violence from recorded video tapes, from security personnel cameras and from amateur video photographs. While reflecting on a ‘micro situational theory of violence’ Collins writes:

“Violence as it actually becomes visible in real-life situations is about the intertwining of human emotions of fear, anger, and excitement, in ways that run right against the conventional morality of normal situations. It is just this shocking and unexpected quality of violence, as it actually appears in the cold eye of the camera, which gives a clue to the emotional dynamics at the center of a micro-situational theory of violence.” (Collins 2008:4)

Referring to the modern era where we can witness real life situations like never before, Collins argues that the credit goes to combination of technology and sociological method. But it is not true that the visual representation of certain act will lead to profound analysis of a violent incident. One has to internalize adequate vocabulary and we have to train ourselves to see everything in micro details. A micro sociologist must be able to distinguish between “raw observational recording and artistically or editorially processed film, usually within seconds”. Raw conflicts are not engaging as that of a film, but as micro sociologist, one needs a thorough engagement with that (Collins 2008:5). Going beyond video tapes, still photographs of different wars and violence are important methodological tools to study violence within its micro context. In the study of riots, still

photographs dramatically shows the violent persons in the front as well as background of supporting masses. But danger lies only when people read those photos without sociological sensibilities by reading it through ideological or artistic lenses. We need to bring the micro sociological aspect of the conflict to it (Collins 2008:6).

1.5 Understanding the Idea of Collective Violence:

To approach our topic of study, we need to understand collective violence in its different forms and contexts. It becomes imperative to understand collective violence in varying forms to reflect upon and connect with our own concern of research. Collective violence could take various forms such as ethnic, racial, religious, and ideological or caste etc. Since collective violence is usually political, so it is deeply connected with the social structure in every particular case. There have been a number of scholarly works on collective violence in different contexts.

Beginning with the idea that most collective conflict is non-violent and most acts of violence are individual, Roberta Senechal de la Roche (2001) reflects on “collectiveness” of collective violence or tries to understand on what parameters collective violence qualifies to be called collective act. Roche argues that the collectivization of any kind of violence is comes from strong association. Such strong association arise firstly when a third party supports one party against the other and secondly when the followers of a group shares a common interest. When third parties are close to one party and distant from the other then support occurs. Support might also occur when one party is in relatively higher position than the other. Solidarity occurs when third party is interdependent or homogenous. When the third is neutral or the followers of a party lacks solidarity, then a conflict is less likely to be collective. Citing the example of lynching, he argues that in the act of lynching, “partisanship is both strong and radically unequal between the two of a conflict”. In the act of lynching, for Roche there is “strong partisanship toward the alleged victim and weak partisanship toward the alleged offender” (Roche 2001:140).

While talking particularly about ‘violence and collectivity’, Hannah Arendt at a theoretical level famously argues that “Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but

taking its own course it ends in power's disappearance" (Arendt 1970:56). Though Arendt argues that the effectiveness of violence does not depend on numbers, but in the case of collective violence the individuality tends to disappear. Rather there exists a group coherence which is more intensely felt and the bond proves to be much stronger than all the varieties of friendship, though it is more temporary in nature. By referring to Fanon Arendt would say that here the group identity helps one to transcend his link to the respectable society and gets admitted to the community of violence. Then each individual forms a violent link in the great chain which remains a part of the great organism of violence which gets spread. She terms Fanon's words on violence as "phenomenon of brotherhood on the battlefield, where the noblest, most selfless deeds are often daily occurrences". Out of all equalizers death here seems to be more potent by playing a political role, but death in any form of realization is quite ant political experience (Arendt 1970:67). Death is more glorified here by bringing into the notion of collectivity in action, which otherwise in general human experience indicates "extreme loneliness and impotent". In practice of violence individual death is negated by the potential immortality of the group we belong to. She argues that death as an equalizer hardly finds any place in political philosophy except in pre philosophic Greek thought where mortality of human as a fact was the strongest motive for political action. The certainty of death made men to seek immortal fame in deed and word and it encouraged them to establish a body politic which was potentially immortal (Ardent 1970:68). According to Arendt strong fraternal sentiments in collective violence misleads people into a new hope that new community will arise out of new men. But she calls this hope an illusion by saying it is most transitory feeling of brotherhood where life is always under danger. (Arendt 1970:69).

Charles Tilly (1977) in one of his earliest works "From Mobilization to Revolution" links the concept of 'collective violence' to the byproduct of a non-violent 'collective action'. For Tilly when a small portion of people, engaged in a collective action, damage people or object it takes a turn towards collective violence. This vandalizing act means that at least one of the parties engaged to the collective action took it seriously. He argues that "violence' makes collective action visible" and authorities, participants and observers keeps a record of the violent developments. More importantly for Tilly "collective violence therefore serves as a convenient tracer of major alteration in collective action"

(Tilly 1977: 6: 26-27). Again Tilly in his famous book “The Politics of Collective Violence” theorizes and talks about collective violence in its different forms. Talking about violent incidents of varying nature like American gunfights, Malaysian sabotage by peasants against their landlords and Rwandan massacres, Tilly argues that though these incidents do not appear to be in symmetry, but they all involve collective violence. While trying to define characteristics of collective violence, he says that these incidents have three “common episodic social interaction”. The first one is “physical damage on persons and/or objects”; secondly, it involves “at least two perpetrators of damage”; thirdly it “results at least in part from coordinating among persons who perform the damaging acts”. Going by such ideas collective violence excludes “purely individual action, nonmaterial damage, accidents and long -term or indirect effects of such damaging processes as dumping of toxic waste”. But the action includes a broad range of social interactions. Though there are no comprehensive definition which defines collective violence, some similar causes in different combinations and settings operates in all the cases. His book makes an effort to identify the pertinent causes, combinations and setting which constitutes the notion of collective violence (Tilly 2003: 3-4).

Tilly tries to understand “when, how and why do people get involved collectively in inflicting damage on other people?” While trying to understand social organization and character in different forms of collective violence, Tilly raises fourth distinct questions. First, what is it that causes people to make collective claims- violent or non-violent- on each other? Secondly to understand the reasons which encourages destruction on both people and objects in extraordinary situations in the process of collective claim making, but otherwise being non-violent. Thirdly, when do people subscribe to violence during the process of claim making and the factors that determines the extent of destruction? Fourthly, which factors influences collective violence to take different forms (Tilly 2003: 12-13). While answering these queries Tilly connects the idea of collective violence to contentious politics. He writes “Collective Violence, then, is a form of contentious politics. It counts as contentious because participants are making claims that affect each other’s interests. It counts as politics because relations of participants to governments are

always at stake” (Tilly 2003:26). While concluding his take on collective violence he writes:

“Collective violence occupies a perilous but coherent place in contentious politics. It emerges from the ebb and flow of collective claim making and struggles for power. It interweaves incessantly with nonviolent politics, varies systematically with political regimes, and changes as a consequence of essentially the same causes that operate in the non-violent zones of political life” (Tilly 2003:238)

Collective Violence and Xenophobia:

Xenophobic tendency often gets transformed into collective violence, whether instantaneous or organized form of collective violence. Xenophobic tendency could be witnessed by a particular or consolidated social group against the other social group on the basis of caste, race, religion, culture etc. In many contexts, even today xenophobic tendencies/violence can also be heard on social groups which have immigrant origin who might have different cultural or religious practices. Demmers and Mehendale (2010) in a very interesting analysis reflects upon the complexities of connection between Neoliberalism and Xenophobia. They talk about the rise of xenophobia and cultural assertion against the non-European or “immigrant” group in Europe in general and Netherlands in particular. They argue that neither the presence of radical Islam nor the presence of significant number of immigrants is responsible for this xenophobic assertion. Rather they argue that the xenophobia is a part of the larger process of neoliberal market controlled economy which forms a “symbolic form of collectiveness” in an increasingly “atomized”³ Dutch society (Demmers and Mehendale 2010:53-54). They talk about the how the coming of neoliberal economy changed the whole notion of collectiveness in Dutch society (both real and imagined) into “liquid forms of belonging”. Beginning from the history of Dutch society since post World War-II, they observe the gradual shift of the whole notion of collectivity in Dutch society. They argue that the earlier version of collectiveness had eroded by the influence of neoliberal atomization and it opened up the “spaces for the production of new symbols of othering and

³ “Atomized Society” commonly refers to the societies which are growing gradually to more individualistic one rather than collective, social participation in public events.

belonging” through the influence of the “recently marketized media” (Demmers and Mehendale 2010: 61-63). By referring to the distinctness of neoliberal context they argue that the targeting of minorities have become “socially meaningful” and “politically functional”. In particular the targeting has shifted from ‘racist’ to ‘culturalist’ notion, which is highly complex to put a counterargument. The culturalist defense will not apply any direct message filled with hatred on the basis of race or religion but rather they would say “people are equal, cultures are not” or “ We are not against Muslim, we are against Islam”(Demmers and Mehendale 2010:65). This process of otherisation in the Dutch context was particularly directed against “Moroccan Muslims” who were considered to be immigrant (or Dutch born allochthonen). The generalized notion that “Muslim culture” was “uncivil” full of “un-freedom” was incapable of integrating into society with liberal culture was propagated. The juxtaposition of secular, individual and sexually liberal Dutch society against Muslim immigrant’s “un-freedom” alleged incapacity to deal with freedom appeared to be successful (Demmers and Mehendale 2010:66). They conclude that neoliberal might be technically independent of the matters of culture and race, but the project of neoliberalism is well served by “permanent construction of an enemy (within or without) who can satisfy the otherwise alienated consumer-citizen’s need for inclusion and belonging” (Demmers and Mehendale 2010:68).

Collective Violence, ‘Cultural Trauma’ and ‘Social Suffering’:

Collective trauma or suffering out of a collective violence like racial genocide, religious or cultural violence becomes essentially connected to the post violence normal life of a social group. Though there remains individual cases of suffering, but it is the collectivity that becomes prominent in the matter of suffering because of their social identity. Jeffery C. Alexander (2012) attempts to give a general theory of ‘collective trauma’ in his work. He explains how “collective agency develops, or fails to develop in response to the experience of social suffering” which might be based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class etc. The trauma process for Alexander helps in understanding suffering, question of justice, agency of the victims and propose process to repair social condition to prevent such social pain again. Alexander tries to explain social suffering on a broader scale by talking about “exploitation and violence, war and genocide, the massacre of innocents,

and intense and often heinous religious, economic, ethnic, and racial strife” (Alexander 2012:1-2). He argues that cultural trauma occurs when people a particular social group is subjected to a horrific incident which leaves ineradicable marks on their group consciousness. It also puts a mark on their social identity forever in a non-reversible way (Ibid 2012:6). For Alexander engaging with a social theory of trauma might allow victims, audiences and even perpetrators to realize for making a reasonable distance or prevent some of the most horrific incidents.

1.7 Collective Violence in Indian Context:

Veena Das (2007) through her anthropological exploration of violence talks about how memories of collective violence gets folded into the ordinary life of the survivors. Das addresses two events in post-independent India – the first one is Partition of India in 1947 and assassination of the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi in 1984. Collective violence that broke out during these two events were of different nature. In the memory of partition violence, ten Pujabai families residing In Delhi who fled from Lahore during the time of partition. The memory of partition among was slowly fading away but in sometimes in everyday activities, interactions and rituals it tended to reemerge in certain context. On the contrary, the riots on 1984 was of a different nature. It was a fresh incident of riots against Sikhs in different localities of Delhi after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. (Das 2007: 10-12). With her ethnographic and anthropological exploration in both the incidents Das argues that narratives of a particular person or community who are deeply influenced by these events, describes how those events gets folded into their ordinary everyday life. In her work, she explores both “larger possibilities of phenomena and singularity of lives” (Das 2007:1). She is not going to the description of moments of horrors during this these events of violence. But rather she says that her intention in this work is to describe “what happens to the subject and the world when the memory of such events is folded into ongoing relationships” (Das 2007:8).

Chatterjee and Mehta (2007) with their ethnographic work engages with ‘communal riot and its aftermath’ in the context of communal riots that began in a locality called in Mumbai on 7th December, 1992. On 26th December, 1992 Babri Mosque was

demolished in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The violence in Dharvi happened in two phases- On 7th December which lasted a week, it was Muslim reaction to the demolition. In the second phase Hindus retaliated –starting from early January which lasted for 3 weeks. While the first violence was spontaneous, the second violence was planned through political influence (Chatterjee and Mehta 2007:3). They focus on the modes of rehabilitation and procedures of government that both precipitate and follow the riot. They focus on the process in which violence becomes a part of the continuity of life of those who have experienced it. They try to document how communal riot is imbibed in every layer of everyday life. They argue that the world of riot exists parallel to a normal world which people design consciously as a means of survival; they build new world forgetting the past. Their work figures out the event in ‘everyday world of work, housing and emergence of new spaces.’ Secondly, their work connected to the event of violence focuses on the response of the government in terms of rehabilitation. They also focus on how post-violence, the people dealing with police records and commission of enquiry also deal with the new process of initiating day to day necessary government document like ration cards and voter lists. This documents remain their fundamental claim of citizenship as well. Thirdly, in the process of rehabilitation, they focus on how their every life is imbibed in the process of negotiating between ‘violence’ and rehabilitation (Mehta and Chatterjee 2007:1-2). Referring to Das (1990) who argues that there is gap between ‘end of riots’ and ‘resumption’ of everyday life. Mehta and Chatterjee argues that their study is precisely located in this ‘gap’ where they try to understand how people devastated by violence resume everyday life. They are trying to establish a link between ‘collective disorder’ and ‘rehabilitation work’ and the process of it, they try to see how or through what process the locals ‘re-fashions’ their own world. After the riot the logical moral and local world cannot be found , rather there remains fragmented sense of community or locality , which again needs to refashioned through works of rehabilitation and strategies for peaceful coexistence with neighbors (Chatterji and Mehta 2007:3).

Robinson (2005) enquires how Muslim victims of communal violence in Mumbai 1993 and Gujarat 2002 reconstruct their life after being victims of brutal actual or symbolized violence. She enquires how individuals or households who are exposed to violence once

or may be in the entire generation, how the process of 'recovery' reshapes the way in which they look at themselves, their locality and their neighbors. She tries to understand how Muslims construct their identity in such conditions? Do they suppress the elements related to their identity which become symbols of targets? Or do they draw a more rigid boundary and re-stress their identity again? Or is there a possibility that the community tries to make reform within the community as negotiation to live in certain spaces (Robinson 2005:22)? She also raises another important question that becomes quite relevant in our context of research as well i.e. – how does the experience of violence reshape the set of relations not just with neighborhoods and communities but with the state as well. This question is quite crucial to approach our concern of study as to understand how survivors or second generation victims of brutal killings like the Nellie Massacre perceive the relation with neighborhoods and the state.

Thus as we can see that in most of the studies of collective violence in Indian context the 'communal clash' between Hindu-Muslim occupies the larger concern. Though the works are based on different contexts, still the communal angle dominates the narratives. After the partition of India, communalism took its own course through the otherisation of Muslims, resulting in 'we' and the 'other' – as famously argued by scholars like Gyanendra Pandey (2004). But in the context of Assam during 1979-85, most of the literatures deny the communal angle to look into it. Rather they argue that the binary of 'we' and the 'other' could be parallel to 'native' and 'outsider'. However in any case, violent developments during the Assam movement are less talked about by giving the ideology of the movement a moral high ground – i.e. by projecting it as a noble cause for the people of Assam. Piven (2002) questions the dominant tendency to project the movement as non-violent. In fact he argues that the history of movements have historically been related to mobs and riots. He argues that violence plays a critical role in the failure, success or emergence of a social movement. But there has been less attention given to the issue of violence during social movements (Piven 2002:19-20). On a similar note, collective violence that emerged during the Assam Movement is not given the attention it merits. In the next chapter, a historical background of the development of the movement will bring more nuances into light about the pattern of development of collective violence during the Assam Movement.

Chapter III

Assam Movement and Collective Violence in Assam

2.1 The Assam Movement (1979-1985):

Assam Movement (1979-85) has been the most significant event in post-colonial history of Assam. The Assam movement began in the state in 1979 after a bye-election in Mangaldai parliamentary constituency⁴. The constituency had significant number of Na-Asamiya Muslims⁵ and it was reported that the constituency's list showed a tremendous increase of number of voters since the previous election two years earlier. It drew a huge public attention and the event followed allegation of new large scale immigration from Bangladesh into the state (Baruah 1986:1192).

In 1979, sudden demise of Hiralal Patowary, a Lok Sabha MP from Mangaldai constituency left the Lok Sabha seat vacant. By the end of the very same year the Election Commission decided to conduct bye election in the constituency. The commission had started entries of voters in the updated list starting from April, 1979. But in the first week of the month of May, it was alleged that many foreigner's name was also included in the list and Congress (I)⁶ had done it to make their vote bank strong. It created a mass outrage to cancel the names of foreigners from the list and soon the office of election commission was filled with complaint letters. Significantly, election commission after enquiring, announced that almost 6428 alleged cases were true and by this logic almost 45,000 "doubtful citizens" were present in the constituency (Sharma:

⁴ Mangaldai, is the name of district headquarter of Mangaldai district, located in central Assam, on the Northern part of the river Brahmaputra.

⁵ East Bengal origin Muslims refers to those Muslims who migrated to present day Assam under colonial influence. They are called *Miya Muslims* a filthy or abusive sense which these days becoming normalized by a subversive discourse. They are also called *Bengal Origin Muslims*. In an assimilative sense many of the prominent Assamese writers refers to them also as Na-Asamiya (neo-Assamese) Muslims. For our purpose we might interchangeably use all the three terms.

⁶ Congress (I) refers to the faction of Congress Party which were supporters of the then prime minister of India Indira Gandhi.

2007). This led to a mass outrage against an alleged “demographic invasion” in the state by “outsider” which resulted in a six year long episode of bloodshed in Assam (1979-85). On June 8, 1979, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) called for a 12 hour general strike (*Bandh*) in Assam to demand the “detection, disenfranchisement and deportation” of foreigners. This was the first ever event of a protracted series of protest and agitations. On August 26, 1979, the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP)⁷ was formed as a temporary coalition of all the regional forces in the sustained statewide protest. A popular and significant mass upsurge followed in the form of sit-ins, picketing the government offices, strikes and symbolic disobedience of the law (Baruah 1986:1192). The leaders of the movement had given a boycott call of the parliamentary elections until the electoral rolls were revised. The presses refused to print the electoral list and protesters picketed the candidates which led to violent confrontation of the protester with police. Thus election could only be held in two, out of fourteen constituencies in Assam; that too in predominantly Bengali- speaking Cachar district (Baruah 1986:1195). Again in 1979, a civil disobedience call given by the movement supporter ended in economic blockade to resist flow of crude oil and plywood from Assam to the rest of the country (Baruah 1986:1194).

Between 1980 and 1982, there were 23 rounds of negotiations between the movement leadership and the central government. Though it is often called as mass movement, it had considerable disagreement among many within the state of Assam as well as outside. Negotiations and agreements regarding the notion of who was a ‘legal citizen’ occupied the larger concern of the movement. By the end of 1982, there was an agreement that migrants who came between 1951 and 1961 would be given Indian citizenship while those who came after 1971 would be deported; but the status of those who came in between 1961 to 1971 remained unresolved. During the negotiations held in 1980, it was reported that the government was keen on rehabilitation of these ‘immigrants’. There were several other disagreements between the movement leadership and government, like on the issues of proper method to detect a foreigner, proper documents for proving

⁷ AAGSP was a coalition of regional forces which had different units at every district, sub-division and town level.

citizenship etc. (Baruah 1986:1192). Thus, the situation become more complicated with failed negotiations and strikes; civil disobedience went on the part of the movement leadership with occasional breaking out of violence. It succeeded in significantly disrupting the functions of government in Assam including 1980 parliamentary election and the assembly election in 1983. The leadership of the movement almost became successful in proving that the established political parties were irrelevant to the problems of the state and successfully campaigned towards non-recognition of the state government in power. They argued the government to be illegitimate as it was elected on the basis of an invalid electoral rolls that includes large number of foreigners. President's rule had to be imposed sporadically as the elected governments lost their majorities in the state assembly (Baruah 1986:1193). Many a times it appeared that as if, not the government, but virtually the movement leadership was running the governmental procedures of Assam.

2.2 Speculation, Anxiety and Mass Outrage about Number of Foreigners in Assam:

The Assam Movement sustained for six long years through a constructed discourse of 'demographic invasion' mostly by the people from neighboring East-Pakistan (now Bangladeshi). Clichés like 'foreigners', 'outsiders', 'Bangladeshis' occupied most of the public discussion and a coming 'threat' was perceived. Speculation and estimation of number of foreigners with some exaggerated figure was necessary for the movement leadership to sustain the movement. So virtually the speculation about exact number of foreigners became the central issue in Assam movement.

Weiner (1983) argues that the Assam Movement was directly connected to 'large scale migration' and as an outcome, 'the demographic change' in the state of Assam. First, during middle of nineteenth century, labor force from tribal region of southern Bihar were brought in as 'tea pickers' by the British in newly established tea plantations in the state. Secondly, 'influx' of educated Bengali Hindus for jobs related to administration.

Thirdly, the largest migration after 1900, when “Bengali Muslims” moved into the Brahmaputra valley from East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The largest influx was from Mymensingh district, one of the densely populated districts of then East Bengal. Initially the Muslim migrants occupied the flooded lowlands all along the river in the southern side and gradually moved up the Brahmaputra valley⁸. Weiner accuses them of rapidly changing religious and linguistic composition of the state. Weiner compares decadal growth rate of India and Assam from 1901 to 1981 and makes it as the basis for his analysis. (Weiner 1983:282-283).

Comparative Decadal Population Growth Rate of Assam and India

Decades	population growth rate in Assam (in percentage)	population growth rate in India (in percentage)
1901-11	16.8	5.7
1911-21	20.2	-0.3
1921-31	20.1	11.0
1931-41	20.5	14.2
1941-51	20.1	13.3
1951-61	35.0	21.6
1961-71	35.2	24.8
1971-81	36.3	24.7

(Source: Weiner 1978 as cited Weiner 1983:283)

Thus, showing the sharp difference between population growth rate of Assam and India, Weiner directly makes a causal analysis between population growth and social unrest.

⁸ The Brahmaputra Valley is a region situated between hill ranges of the eastern and northeastern Himalayan range. It is spread throughout Assam from East to West on both Banks of river Brahmaputra. This valley includes most of the geographical territory of Assam.

Thus for Wiener, continuous migration from various parts of India to Assam changed the ethnic composition. It also created a political situation where questions of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘migration’ became central. He particularly argues that the ‘Bengali Muslims’ by having control over the government, consolidated their own position strongly in the state and attempted to use their position to facilitate further migration of ‘Bengali Muslim’ from East Bengal. This happened during 1930s and 40s when electoral politics was introduced in the state and the Muslims attempted to include Assam in the proposed Muslims majority state of Pakistan through the politics of Muslim League⁹. Muslim domination in Assam got over when the British government rejected Muslim league’s demand and incorporated Muslim majority district of Sylhet into Pakistan (Weiner 1983: 282-284). Guha’s (1980) analysis of demographic factors related to Assam Movement portrays a contrary picture to Weiner’s arguments. For Guha, there was a “fear psychosis” built into the Assamese mind, of being outnumbered by outsiders in due course. Though this fear had an objective basis, the middle class leadership misled people with ‘twisted facts’ and ‘false statistics’. Wild estimation about facts and figures of number of foreigners in Assam was circulated among people by the leadership. Guha writes that it is a well-known fact that population has been growing at an alarming decadal rate of 35 percent since 1951 due to migration from Sylhet – once a part of Assam and East Bengal. But, what is not said about is that more than four fifth of the decadal population growth is due to natural growth and only one fifth due to immigration (Guha 1980:1709). The indigenous tribes listed in Brahmaputra valley¹⁰ like Bodo/Bodo Kachari, Mech, Hojai Kachari/Sonowal, Tiwa (Lalung), Rabha, Deuri and Mishing (Miri) are insignificant outside the valley and conspicuously absent in Bangladesh or any other foreign country. Their rate of population growth is thus absent from any migration-induced demographic change. Yet for the decade 1961-71, rate of tribal population growth was as high as 41 per cent as against 18 per cent growth of Brahmaputra valley population as whole. This

⁹ Muslim League, original name All India Muslim League, political group that led the movement calling for a separate Muslim nation to be created at the time of the partition of British India (1947).

¹⁰ Assam is geographically divided into two valleys. One is Brahmaputra Valley and the other is Barak Valley. Brahmaputra Valley refers to those place which are located alongside at both Northern and Southern part of the river. These areas also influenced by the tributaries of river Brahmaputra.

explains the high natural growth of population against some myths of demographic invasion (Guha 1980:1709).

Guha also criticizes Sanjib Kumar Baruah, who, with respect to immigration in Assam writes- “on a scale that has few parallels anywhere in the world within a relatively short period”. But according to census of India data (on birthplace), migrants from outside the state constituted 15.7 percent of the population of West Bengal in 1961 and 11.9 percent in 1971. The comparable figures for Assam are 11.4 and 10.2 percent, less in both the cases and also decreasing. Despite the most number of workers in organized sectors of West Bengal being non-Bengali with a huge migration, there is an absence of migration induced social tension in West Bengal. He gives the credit to existing left government for not allowing chauvinism to grow in the state. (Guha 1980:1709).

Also in terms of statistics Guha gives an opposite picture than that of Weiner. He writes that Asamiya linguistic community has increased from 36 percent in 1931 to 62 per cent in 1951 and to 61 per cent in 1971. While, on the other side Bengali population grew more modestly. Steadily declining from 30 per cent in 1931 to 21 per cent in 1951 and 20 percent in 1971. During the period 1951-71, the state’s Bengali linguistic group extended only 71 per cent while the Asamiya linguistic group extended 80 percent. (Guha 1980:1710)

Guha (1980) accuses Sanjib Baruah of misleading with half-truth when he says -“origins of immigration into Assam began at the turn of the century when Assam’s virgin lands were opened up for East Bengal refugees”. In fact the migration started half a century earlier with coming up of tea garden labourers after big tracts of virgin lands were handed over to the tea planters. He doesn’t seem to have noted that nearly 15 lakh acres of government lands were settled with the foreign tea planters, as their private properties by 1940-41. Again another 11 lakh acres of government lands were settled with groups like ex-garden labour, for ordinary cultivation; of this only 5 lakh acres was settled with migrants from East Bengal. Guha criticizes Baruah for being a -historical when Baruah described the issue of influx as “sudden demographic change” and “emergence of plural society suddenly”. He accuses Baruah of presenting twisted facts to defend his own

position as ‘Assam was not free of immigration and plurality in any period of history’. Indo-Aryans and Mongoloid elements have always migrated to this population poor valley and intermingled to form Assamese/Asamiya society. The movement actually evidently took a racist turn by targeting only particular community like the Bengalis. (Guha 1980:1710).

In fact the myth that Bengali speaking people planned suppression of the Asamiya by introducing Bengali as a language in courts of justice and other government offices and schools was blasted by Benudhar Sharma a distinguished historian and life-long associate of Assam Sahitya Sabha¹¹. Sharma in an article in Pravandha-Saurabh (in Asamiya) long back quoted Francis Jenkins who was the then commissioner, had written “It was I, who was at the root of the advice in favour of introducing Bengali. I was in favour of Bengali. It was my order that Robinson carried out” (Sarma 1894 as cited in Guha 1980: 1711). Though many Bengali personalities extended active support to the cause of restoration of the status of Asamiya language, it was never recognized and appreciated by the Sabha. Exaggerating statistics, raising the number of foreigners from an initial 13 lakhs to 45 and even 70 lakhs contributed to a mass frenzy. Language wise Bengalis and Nepalis in Assam numbered only 29 lakhs and 3.5 lakhs in the year 1971. As per birth place data, there were no more than 10 lakhs of persons born in foreign countries, mostly in Pakistan (Bangladesh) in the same year. Thus it was an exaggerated target set by anti-foreigner movement, which was far in excess of the population of either category. This exaggerated figures made the minorities apprehensive of attacks on their own citizenship rights as well. This is, Guha says is one of the reasons why the social base of the movement later became narrower (Guha 1980: 1711).

Gohain (1980) says that there is no denying of the fact that Assam’s natural population growth rate ‘outstripped’ the national average. Without any dispute, a significant reason for this higher amount of growth is related to migration from Bangladesh (now Pakistan) and Nepal. But one should closely look whether the growth is due to natural fertility and

¹¹ Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS) is the most prominent literary organization of Assam and Asamiya language. It was founded in 1917. ASS played a very active role along with some other Asamiya organization in triggering of Assam Movement by raising questions of ‘Asamiya Nationality’.

fall of the death rate, especially among the immigrant Muslims who had come before partition and independence (Gohain 1980:418). The minorities were in anxiety and fear as total numbers of foreigners in the state to be detected and expelled were portrayed in a confused yet deliberate manner. Sometimes the estimated figure touched five million to seven million and every non-Assamese felt that they might be in the list of foreigner.

2.3: Myth and Reality of Abnormal Population Growth Rate of Na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam:

In the light of above developments about wild estimation about number of “foreigners” in Assam, an anxiety was formed among people of being outnumbered by ‘immigrant’ population. This anxiety was rather delivered systematically in the minds of people initially by a few colonial officials and then by middle class and upper caste movement leadership. British colonialism was mainly responsible for the increasing flow Muslims to colonial Assam due to effects of schemes like “colonization scheme” in 1928 (for details see Hussain 1993:205-206). But ironically in 1931, the then superintendent of census C. S Mullan, exaggerated that if flow of immigration continues in this scale then Sibsagar will remain the only district in Assam where the ‘Assamese’ race will find its own home. But Hussain (1993) argues that this propaganda was a part of the colonial tactic of “divide and rule” policy. Since the anti-colonial struggle attained a momentum during that time, so an ethnic conflict between the Assamese and East-Bengal origin peasants might benefit the colonial administration. Mullan’s reactionary comment as well as Weiner’s analysis (see Weiner: 1978; 1980) of growing immigrant and particularly Muslim population in Assam got acceptability in leadership and ideology of Assam movement. They could not get sense of colonial manipulative tactics of Mullan’s prediction. Mullan was proved wrong when the community later permanently adapted Assamese as their language and also got an entry to Assamese nationality as Na-Asamiyas (Hussain 1993:205-207). Hussain also explains the demographic data related to Muslims population growth in Assam which created much anxiety and outrage during

movement. He also explains the variations of population growth during six censuses conducted from 1921 to 1971. During the analysis he excludes the Muslim population of Sylhet district (which was incorporated in East Bengal after 1947) in order to systematically comprehend the Muslim factor.

Decadal Growth Rate of Muslim Population in Assam 1921-71

Year	Total Population	Muslim Population	Total Growth Rate in Percentage	Muslim Growth Rate in Percentage
1921	45,93,572	8,63,639	_____	_____
1931	55,03,518	12,66,985	19.8	45.8
1941	66,33,683	16,84,350	20.5	32.9
1951	79,70,998	19,80,780	20.2	17.6
1961	1,08,37,329	27,42,237	36.0	38.5
1971	1,46,25,152	35,42,124	34.0	31.0

(Source: Census of India, Reports of relevant years, as cited in Hussain 1993:207)

During two decades – 1921-31 and 1931-41 the number indicates a significantly high rate of Muslim population growth. This indicates that the migration of East-Bengal Muslim peasants were high in number. During (1921-41) this period the highest number of peasants came to Assam. But it was an internal migration through colonial influence within the same country. So it will be inappropriate to label the peasant Muslims as “Bangladeshi” or “Pakistani”. The migration took long before the concept of “East-Bengal” or “Bangladesh” came into existence. The labelling of Muslims as “Bangladeshi” or “foreigner” started along with the beginning of Assam Movement. However after independence of India, in 1951 and 1971, it recorded a lesser growth rate of Muslims in Assam. In 1961 the Muslim growth rate was 2.5% more than the total

decadal growth rate. This was due to return of many Muslims in Assam who temporarily fled away to East Bengal in suspect of communal riots following the partition and independence in 1950. However the Muslim growth rate decreased significantly in 1971. This data overall shows that the growth rate of Muslim population in Assam after independence is much less than the overall growth rate of Assam. This proves the allegation of Assam Movement leaders wrong who accuse that during the period 1951-71, significant Muslim migration happened into the state and the Muslim population growth rate was abnormal (Hussain 1993:207-208).

Hussain criticizes the leaders and supporters of Assam Movement, who pointed out a slightly high growth rate of Muslims during 1961 but remained 'conspicuously' silent on lower Muslim population growth rate during 1941-51 and 1961-71. He also criticized the Asamiya intellectuals for idealizing the arguments of C. S Mullan and American scholar Myron Weiner into Assam movement; while ignoring the 'colonial' and 'neo-colonial hegemony'. Weiner himself admitted that his way of determination of Muslim migrants in Assam was done in an over simplified manner. Weiner also failed to highlight that the flow of migration decreased after 1947 and exodus of Muslims from Assam during communal riots of 1950; which affected the growth rate of Muslims in 1951 census. Hussain accuses Weiner of 'overemphasizing the differences' and 'underestimating the assimilation processes' of Na-Asamiya Muslim into Assamese society. While explaining negative growth rate of Muslims, Hussain argues that during 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, a large number of Muslims, including known congressmen were arrested and Muslims of Assam became victim of prejudice and discrimination. Muslims' loyalty was questioned and it created a communal atmosphere in the state. The Assamese bourgeoisie press created a war like situation and even in the floor of state assembly some members continuously demanded the expulsion of 'lakhs of Pakistanis' residing in Assam. Their successful propaganda resulted in a scheme called PIP (Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan). Under P.I. P, many Na-Asamiya Muslim were harassed in the process of man hunting for "Pakistani" nationals. The Na-Asamaiy Muslim peasants became direct victims of P.I.P and only in Nagaon district during 1961-67 a total 71,081 infiltrators

were detected and 66,917 were deported. The police used extra-legal instruments on Muslims and sometimes used force for detection and deportation of Muslims. Most of the people deported were unorganized peasants without any agency in the state. The Asamiya elites and middle class were silent on the atrocities by Assam Police on Non-Assamiya Muslims (Hussain 1993: 208-17).

2.4 Different Perspectives, Debates and Criticisms of Assam Movement:

There have been significant debates, discussion and criticism on Assam movement. A huge number of writings on Assam Movement can be found in newspapers, magazines, books, periodicals and academic writing in the forms of books and research articles both in English and in vernacular. They contain different standpoints regarding the movement depending upon their own political affiliation and individual analytical considerations. *The Economic and Political Weekly*, a weekly peer-reviewed academic journal covering all social sciences issue became the most prominent site of intense and continuous debate among academicians and intellectuals concerned about the movement. Hiren Gohain (1980) comments on Assam Movement as chauvinistic and violent in nature. Gohain analyses Assam Movement using Marxist terminologies. According to him, the Asamiya ruling elite were lacking 'economic resources' and 'cultural strength' to accommodate non-Assamese group into Assamese society. Even in this circumstance, the ruling class did not leave the dream of a "national resurgence in a capitalist set up". Hence occasionally the class used chauvinism as a political tool to keep domination over the non-Assamese groups who might resist their domination. They also became an ally of the Indian ruling class who were also chauvinistic and hence essentially 'authoritarian and fascist'. He gives a historical understanding about how Muslims peasants, lakhs of tea garden labourers and skilled labour from outside the state came, settled and became prosperous. The local peasantry found itself in a disastrous position and it created a 'native anxiety' led by the local ruling elite. In this context he criticizes the violence

particularly on leftists and minorities by followers of the agitation. In fact Gohain exposes the involvement of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in communalizing the movement into Hindu -Muslim clashes. He questioned the democratic and non-violent credentials of the movement and argued that RSS almost succeeded in communalizing the entire agitation (Gohain 1980:418-20).

As a response to Gohain's analysis Baruah (1980) refuses to accept the movement as only "brutal occurring of incidents of violence." While Baruah on one side acknowledges and shares concern over the violent incidents, on the other side argues that the movement was a peaceful *satyagraha* by the masses. He accuses Gohain of diverting attention only towards violent incidents on 'Hindu Bengali' and 'Muslim Bengali' communities while ignoring the incidents of violence on 'Asamiya Community' by Central Reserved Police (CRP) and by the leftist forces. For Baruah the occurrence of violence had a "clear socio-political content". He criticizes Gohain's analysis of Assam movement as simply a conspiracy theory. For Baruah, Gohain's allegation that violence was directed against Communist Party of India -Marxist (CPI-M) and their student wing Student Federation of India (SFI) was not the sole concern of the movement. In fact by going back Baruah argued that CPI-M's insensitivity towards the state's issues alienated from people of Assam. Baruah criticized the CPI-M by saying that it was ruled by their party leaders from Bengal. Baruah also criticizes Gohain for not mentioning condemnation of RSS's communal comments by movement leadership and wrongly mentioning that the movement leadership directed people to detect and expel foreigners (Baruah 1980: 543). For Baruah, Gohain completely ignores the question of immigration into Assam which is the most prominent reason for unrest in Assam. For Baruah it were the issues of influx and demographic changes because of which non-Assamese could not get integrated with Assamese rather than 'cultural weakness' of Assamese. Baruah goes to the history of influx in Assam and alleges that before independence Muslims League government in Assam under Saadullah encouraged migration to make Assam a Muslim majority state to include it in Pakistan. For Baruah, the Assam's "tangled nationality" question was a

result of influx and this fact needs to be recognized. He disagrees with the Marxist way of seeing into the movement terming them as “irrelevant categories” (Baruah 1980: 544-45). In further response to Gohain in the same year, Baruah radically argues that one can only be ‘patriot’ and ‘traitor’ regarding Assam movement; there is no room in between these two. Baruah criticized Gohain for being short sighted by only highlighting the temporary violent outbreaks. He argues that one must go beyond the immediate concern and look the ‘tangled’ nationality question of Assam which grew out of immigration. Baruah in fact denied Gohain’s criticism of Assam Movement to be violent, anti-minority and anti-left. Rather he accuses Gohain of propagating these conspiracy theories through a particular set of journals like *India Today*, *Statesman*, *People’s Democracy* and much of Bengali language press. Rejecting Gohain’s allegation of the movement to be an alliance of local and national bourgeois, Baruah counter accuses the criticism to be an “alliance of foreign capital, Calcutta capital and CPI (M) revolutionaries of West Bengal centered strategy of socialism” (Baruah 1980: 876-877).

Tilottoma Mishra (1980) justifies the Assam Movement on economic ground. She argues that a sustained movement both at rural and urban level is due to the enormous colonial exploitation of resources of the state. Misra also rejects the criticism that the current movement on the basis of foreigners issue of Assam is diverting from basic issues of economic development. Rather she argues that the movement made people conscious about the historical exploitation of natural resource in the state by colonial rulers. It also raises the fundamental issues related to economy in the state (Misra 1980: 1357-64). Again in the same year in a letter to the editor of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Gail Omvedt criticizes most of the articles appearing in ‘left’ journals as “hostile to the Assamese people’s agitation”. Though she also recognized the issue of brutal violence against Bengali speakers in many parts of the Assam, she was not convinced by the framing of the movement as chauvinist by Marxist scholars in terms of its functioning. She questioned the criteria based on what Marxist scholars framed the movement as chauvinist. She also asked the communist writers to provide the framework of an

alternative way and invited to come out with assurance to Asamiya people that their culture and language was not in danger (Omvedt 1980:580).

Guha (1980) criticizes Gail Omvedt, Sanjib Baruah and Tilottama Misra for rationalizing the Assam Movement on the grounds of perceived threats like ‘loss of territory’, ‘Bengali influx to the autochthons cultural-national Identity’ and ‘economic exploitation of the region’ etc. (Baurah 1980; Misra 1980; and Omvedt 1980 as cited in Guha 1980:1699). Guha accuses them of exaggeration of the issues by putting a nativist tune while failing to recognize the ‘chauvinist and middle class’ character of the movement. He terms the movement as ‘Little nationalism’ which he defines as “spiritual sentiments that holds together a group of people claiming a common cultural -regional identity (to distinguish themselves from other groups) and desirous of a degree of autonomy within the larger nation-state” (Guha 1980:1699).

For him ‘Assamese’ refers to – “all inhabitants who have their domicile in the present state of Assam, whether of origin or of choice” and ‘Asamiya’ refers to as “those amongst them who profess Asamiya to be their natural or acquired mother tongue”. By his definitions the neo-Asamiyas, i.e. those immigrants and tribal autochthons who have adopted Asamiya as their language qualifies to be called as ‘Asamiya’ (Guha 1980:1699). Guha (1980) writes that the sustained Asamiya little nationalism had few demands on stack. They were –“local administration by and jobs for the son of the soil, introduction of Asamiya as the only medium of instruction in all schools, a halt to settlement of wastelands with immigrants for protection of the indigenous peasants interest and reorganization of the multilingual province into a linguistic one with Asamiya as the official language” (Guha 1980:1703). Guha also argues that it was due to the stiff position of Assam Congress and left parties in 1940 against the stand of all India Congress Committee, which failed the cabinet mission plan of 1946 to absorb Assam into the proposed territory of East Pakistan¹².

Guha (1980) mentions that Assam Pradesh Congress Committee accommodated all the progressive, democratic and legitimate demands raised by the Asamiya little nationalism.

¹² Before 1971, Bangladesh was also a part of Pakistan, which was referred to as East Pakistan.

It included issues like reorganization of the province on linguistic basis, line system as a check to uncontrolled immigration in the Brahmaputra valley. But the separate platform of Asamiya little nationalism was constituted of Assam Sahitya Sabha (started in 1917) and the Asamiya Samrakshini Sabha (started in 1926 and renamed as Asam Jatiya Mahasabha in the 1930s). Government Servants, client, intellectuals and congress dropouts were main stakeholders of these initiations. Nilamani Phukan (1880-1978) and Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri (1885-1967) were the emerging, ideal leaders for them. Bengali loyalist and chauvinist of Brahputara valley then tried form a forum in 1935 named “Assam Domiciled and Settler’s Association”. But Assamese mass paid less attention to this kind of divisive forces in the time of anti-imperialist national upsurge (Guha 1980:1705).

Guha (1980) accuses the Asamiya little nationalist platform for projecting British civil servants (like C S Mullan, PRT Gordon, Bampylde Fuller etc.) as saviours of Asamiya people; when congress and allied left parties were busy fighting imperialism. Imperialist force used people like Raj Bahadur S K Bhuyan (1894-1964) against the Congress, who did pain-staking and path-breaking research to invoke historical and cultural symbols of Asamiya Little nationalism. Though many Asamiya tea planters were with Congress, wealthier and more powerful ones clung to British Imperialism and the Asamiya Movement. They tries to use the middle class ideological apparatus to fulfill their own needs. Sivaprasad Barua, the biggest Asamiya and Indian tea planter of his times, started the first, though short lived, daily newspaper called *Dainik Batori*, with Nilmoni Phukan as editor to blackmail the Congress Movement. It was later in 1940 when masses started supporting the Congress as a continued response to the anti-imperialist struggle. The congress was in favour of separating Sylhet from Assam, but tried to maintain the broadest possible Assamese unity by rejecting parochial, divisive demands like imposition of Asamiya on the unwilling minorities. He writes “It was only after 1950s that Assam began to shrink in area with every retreat the congress made before the tide of rising chauvinism”. In 1980 Raha Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha, it was demanded that

major minorities should be denied of using their respective mother tongue as existing privileges. It sowed seeds of dissension in Cachar¹³ and Tribal Areas (Guha 1980:1705). Guha (1980) argues that in pre 1947 Assamese society, the Asamiya middle class and peasantry was under greater influence of the ideal of Indian nationalism rather than the region based little nationalism. Congress could not have had much influence over the tribal, Muslim and tea garden labour masses which lead to non-integration of Assamese society. Nevertheless, through slow economic, political and social forces of integration, in post-colonial period, the assimilation emerged stronger. (1980:1705)

As a part of economic development in last one century and a half, hundreds of thousands of peasants and workers came to Assam; mostly from neighboring Bengal. It lead to diversification and interpretation of social groups in Assam. Through the assimilation process, the society became numerically stronger and culturally more enriched. For Guha, it was to gain from the continuing process of voluntary integration. For him the solution of Assam's national question, looked at 'from a Marxist point of view', lies in 'assimilation' and a 'halt to further immigration' for the sake of 'national peace'. (Guha 1980: 1705).

According to Guha (1980) the roots of the Chauvinism was represented by Asam Sahitya Sabha , Assam Jatiyatavadi Dal and Purbanchaliya Loka Prishad (PLP) and these forces combined together constituted the Assam Ganga Sangram Parishad (AGSP) – the united front of all Asamiya Regional Nationalist forces. They had over 1200 branches in the state which was actively involved in the agitation. All Assam Student's Union (AASU) along with Asam Sahitya Sabha, spearheaded the 1972 Asamiya language movement, and was also in the forefront of Assam Movement. As Guha argues, "it represented the student power that has added respectability to chauvinism and a spirit of dedication to the cause". (Guha 1980: 1705).

Monirul Hussain (1993), gives a thorough analysis on Assam Movement in his work. Hussain states that post 1978 election to the state legislature, Asamiya masses felt that the two bourgeois parties in the state, namely the Congress and Janta Dal failed to meet their

¹³ Cachar is a District located in Barak Valley. The area is dominated by Bengali Speaking population, both Hindus and Muslims.

expectations. Also the left emerged strongly in the election, particularly CPI (M) by winning 11 seats. This sudden rise of the left as a political alternative created anxiety among the ruling class in Assam. In the process of intervening the growth of left in Assam, the ruling class used Assam movement as their cudgel against the left (Hussain 1993:100-101). Hussain argues that the high caste dominated Asamiya middle class played an important role in terms of providing the ideology and structure of the movement. It served their purpose by attracting those people for whom it was meant. The leadership of the movement transformed 'ideology' and 'organization' of the movement in a particular way to gain support of the state ruling class. Asamiya mass throughout the Brahmapura valley responded to the movement by participating in massive numbers. From November 1979 to mid-1980 the movement was at its peak and it gradually then started losing the intensity with declining support base. The movement then gradually turned violent from its initial method of peaceful *satyagraha* by resorting to bandhs, janata curfews, blackouts and non-cooperation etc. Though the movement leadership claimed it to be mass based movement, Assam was gradually exposed to more and more incidents of violence, both state and civilian. It significantly succeeded in influencing the electoral politics of the state by disrupting the elections of January 1980. The Assamese bourgeois press virtually became the mouthpiece of the movement. Both in its 'ideology and praxis' Assam movement had strong anti-left tendency (Hussain 1993:161-162).

2.5 Assam Movement and the Aspirations of Emerging Assamese Middle Class:

The middle class nature of Assam Movement is thoroughly analyzed by Amalendu Guha. Guha (1980) criticizes Sanjib Kumar Baruah (1980) for not bringing social issue about Assam's tangled national question but rather highlighting on issues of 'ethnicity', 'demographic imbalance' and 'plural society' as the key determinants of "the logic of political power". For Guha, without the mediation of a 'class' or 'class in making in need of political power', these categories are not autonomous. In Baruah's analysis students

and “socio-cultural and literary bodies” acts a mediators in the process of mass agitation. Guha terms those as- “fed with myths” or perhaps “a false consciousness”. Guha argues that in terms of economic interests these students and socio- cultural and literary bodies represent the interest of Asamiya middle classes, constituted of bourgeois landlord and petty bourgeois elements (Guha 1980:1705).

Guha argues that though it appears to be a student movement formally, the Asamiya middle class was behind it. He argues that Asamiya upper class terribly agitated about their economic stagnation who was ‘hard pressed by big capital from above’ and the ‘rising peasant and labour movement from below’, at the same time equally divided by caste politics. Not being resourceful enough and hardly being optimistic about pushing out big capital out of the state, they concentrated to monopolize on what residual was left over in terms of capital. Thus they concentrated on small industries, petty trades as well as professions and services in their state. They thought their survival will depend on three conditions – elimination of Bengali and other competitors, opportunities of intensification of labour exploitation by giving out call to smash Bengali dominated trade unions and unhindered control over the state administration for creating bureaucratic capital which could benefit the Asamiya upper classes (Guha 1980:1706).

Again, Guha (1980) writes that the cudgel of Chauvinism was handy for capitalists and landlords on several considerations. It could be used to cut out to size Bengali and other non-Asamiya competitors, their workers and tenant farmers (a large portion of whom are non-Asamiya) and by blackmailing the center through connivance with “clandestine treats of secessionism” so that more local power could be gained for Asamiya upper classes. The bourgeois landlord chauvinist successfully used the press and other communication media to portray Bengali as community opposed to the aspirations of Asamiya and that they are all leftist and a mere agency of Bengali expansionism in East India. This strategy was proved successful in terms of including the OBCs whose politics was distinct during Congress’s domination.

Guha (1980) argues that both at the all India and regional levels, the emergence of nationalism was a middle class phenomena. Under colonial constraints Assam failed to

develop as a viable capitalist of its own whereas the North Indian big bourgeoisie along with foreign capital were already dominating Assam's economy. There was no big Asamiya (as well as) Bengali big bourgeois who will compete with or share the market with them. There were only half a dozen Asamiya business houses who could qualify as 'middle bourgeois'. The Asamiya middle class therefore virtually consisted of small capitalist and other sections of petty bourgeois including professionals and servicemen; many of whom were small landlords. Thus the antagonism between Asamiya middle class and Bengali middle class was happening at the margin of a big capital dominated economy- in petty industries, petty jobs, petty businesses and petty administrative services. Apart from the land issue, it is these economic circumstances that traditionally explain the anti-Bengali edge of Asamiya little nationalism. Asamiya middle class, encouraged by the British civil servants, also believed that unless the influx of Bengali Muslim Peasants into Brahmaputra Valley since 1905, is stopped, their own people will turn into minority in their own homeland. He writes that this fear psychosis became part of their ideology which has been emerging and reemerging since the 1920s (Guha 1980:1703). In fact, till today the myth of influx has been the dominant tool to play out politics of nativity and symbol of mobilization of Asamiya little nationalism. There was an effort of glorification and revitalization of cultural symbols and icons to create its idealism of the little nationalism (Guha 1980: 1703). He in his concluding remark writes:

"The author concludes that the movement is national in form, chauvinist and undemocratic in content and proto-fascist in its methods. It has two faces – one, non-violent and peaceful, turned towards Delhi; and the other, coercive and often violent, turned towards the dissident minorities" (Guha 1980: 1699)

2.6 Assam Movement and Occurrence of Collective Violence:

Violence had remained one of the central issues of the six years long agitation, yet very few scholarly works have drawn our attention to the issue of collective violence during Assam Movement. Different minor incidents of violence took place in the form of

confrontation between protesters and police. Initially there was no definite pattern of violence, as weakening of general law and order fuelled the protesters to be violent against anyone who opposed the movement. Though people belonging to different ethnic groups were affected by violent outbreaks, it was the violence which happened against the Bengali speakers and later particularly against Na-Asamiya Muslims, which occupied the larger portion of it. Since the objectives of the movement were not clear in terms of methods of detection and expulsion of foreigners and also there was no discipline/control of the local level participants, the tendency to become violent got more prominence. Commenting on the violent developments, Hiren Gohain writes – “In north Gauhati students participated in a police attack on indigenous tribal peasants falsely given out as 'Bangladeshis. A river-boat carrying 'Bangladeshis' to the paper-mill at Jogighopa was seized and two helpless members of the Muslim crew were butchered near Goalkuchi on November 10.” Gohain states that most of the destructive violent incidents were planned and coordinated (Gohain 1980:419). Minorities became the ‘outsider’ and their nationalities were often questioned by the movement leaders and supporters. As a reaction to harassment on the genuine Indian citizens in the name of foreigners, All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) was formed which tried to accommodate both ‘Muslim and Hindu Bengali speaking citizens’. AAMSU demanded citizenship for all of those who migrated to India before 1971 which was vociferously opposed by AASU and it resulted in violent conflict between AASU and AAMSU supporters (Baruah 1986:1195). In the year 1981, opposing the newly formed government, terrorists killed one of the prominent and highest ranked civil servants. The government was determined to hold election in 1983 after several governments were collapsed and this led to the worst phase of violence in the state. By opposing the 1983 election, the movement leadership portrayed it as the ‘last struggle for survival’ by highlighting that the election was to be conducted on the basis of electoral roll of 1979. ‘East-Bengal immigrant’ population, on the other hand, chose to be loyal to the government by participating in the election in large numbers. Baruah calls it as “the breakdown of the framework of ethnic accommodation” (Baruah 1986:1198). Bloody clashes happened between the supporters

and opponents of the election. It led to several episodes of ethnic conflict including one of the most infamous and brutal incidence of violence in post-independent India; the genocide of Nellie (1983). In Nellie it took a completely communal turn where officially 1383 Bengal origin Muslims¹⁴, mostly women and children, were massacred within a span of few hours. However Arun Shourie (1983) refers the situation as not much of communalism but a total breakdown of the governance as there were multiple ethnic groups up against each other regarding the issue of election boycott. A community which was victim in one place was predator of violence in another place (Shourie 1983 as cited in Baruah 1986:1199).

Weiner (1983) explains that the immediate occurrence of violence during Assam Movement was because of the central government's decision to conduct election in Assam. He writes:

“The immediate circumstances for the violence were as follows: The Government of India announced that elections would be held from 14 to 21 February for the Assam state legislative assembly and for 12 unfilled parliamentary seats. Two political groups, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), declared they would boycott the elections since the electoral lists contained the names of large numbers of people who had entered the country illegally. Allowing these people to vote, they said, would in effect confer citizenship upon them and that was the very issue that was in dispute between the Assamese and India's central government” (Weiner 1983: 280).

On tracking the historical origins of conflict and violence in Assam, Weiner makes a strong causal explanation between migration, change in demography and violence. Apart from a nativist reaction out of a fear of being culturally overwhelmed by outsiders, issues of land and employment; it is for him the competition of taking control over the state apparatus and whether that control is threatened is often the decisive factors in ethnic conflict. He talks about multiple cartographic rearrangements of the present day geopolitical territory of Assam and how it led to demographic complexities at different times

¹⁴ Extracted from -<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830515-arun-shourie-turns-up-the-most-devastating-evidence-on-violence-in-assam-770641-2013-07-19>

(Weiner 1983:282). He, in the case of Assam, argues that Assam's population from 1901 to 1981 increased significantly higher than the national average and it had created an anxiety among the native population. He tries to justify his argument by showing the decadal rates of growing population comparing national average and Assam's average. By calling the migration of different groups into Assam as 'influx', he accuses them of rapidly changing the religious and linguistic composition of the picture (Weiner 1983:283). The transformed ethnic composition fostered a political climate where question of ethnicity and identity became crucial to get control of economic, social and cultural system. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali Hindus tried to dominate the administration through Bengali language and from 1930 to 1940s when electoral politics was introduced, the more numerous Bengali Muslims got control over the administration. By connecting the politics of Na-Asamiya Muslims to Muslim League, he accuses them of a conspiracy of bringing more Muslims from East Bengal and thus to include Assam in the proposed Muslim majority state of Pakistan. The British rejected the demand but partitioned Assam by taking away the Muslim majority district of Sylhet district to Pakistan ; after which as Weiner says, Muslims were no longer in a position to dominate the government. (Weiner 1983:284). In 1947 the Asamiya, particularly the Asamiya middle class won control over the government and Bengali Hindu middle class became their opponent in terms of gaining equal rights and in social and economic affairs. From 1952-1977, Asamiya middle class dominated Congress won every election supported by the Na-Asamiya Muslims to control over the middle class occupations, including the administrative services. Na-Asamiya Muslims got a sense of security to side with the Assamese government and even supported the government in imposing Asamiya as an official language in offices, schools, colleges and universities by going against the Bengali Muslims. This period (1952-77) as Weiner argues holds an alliance between Asamiya and Na-Asamiya Muslims. (Weiner 1983: 285)

Growing antagonism between Asamiya and Na-Asamiya Muslims:

Weiner (1983) writes that after 1977 the coalition between Asamiya and Na-Asamiya Muslims comes to an end. He tries to explain multiple reasons for which Asamiya middle class became hostile towards the Na-Asamiya Muslims. Firstly, it was the ‘speculation’ and ‘estimation’ of growing Muslim population. The then census commissioner concluded that during the period 1951-61, 221000 ‘Bengali Muslims’ entered Assam ‘almost illegally’. Again 1971 census reported an increase of 8,20,000 ‘Muslims’, which was ‘approximately’ 4,24,000 more than the number of natural growth of population increase (Weiner 1983:285). Since census could not be conducted in Assam in 1981, it was all about speculation and estimation that Assam’s population grew by 36.3 percent against the national average of 24.7, which created anxiety among the urban, Asamiya middle class. Weiner himself writes that the number of Bengalis that entered and remained in Assam after the 1971 Pakistan civil war and 1972 war between India and Pakistan is still unknown. Since natural population growth rate in Assam during 1970-72 and 1976-78 was below national average it was again ‘estimated’ that the immigration into Assam in 1971-81 was 1.8 million. Again Weiner writes that it is purely conjectural that how much of this estimated immigrants were from Bangladesh. Weiner also argues that in 1971 census, a slight (1,4%) decrease of number of Asamiya speakers and 1.7% increase of Bengali speakers aroused anxieties of many Asamiya regarding the ‘large Muslims population’ of Assam. Muslims, 24.7 of the total population in 1971, they speculated, could turn them to linguistic minority by declaring themselves as Bengali speakers by taking side of Bengali Hindus. Asamiya middle class was already a linguistic minority in urban places according to 1961 census (38% Bengali Speakers, 33% Assamese speakers). (Weiner 1983:286). However, Das (1980) suggests that the increase of the number of Bengali speakers between 1961 to 1971 was due to migration of Hindu refugees from East- Pakistan as a result of Hindu- Muslim disturbances there in 1965 (Das S. K 1980 as cited in Weiner 1983:286). Secondly, in rural areas there was a considerable resentment among Asamiya cultivators and few tribal groups that Na-Asamiya Muslims have occupied the low laying char lands along the river Brahmaputra.

The consolidated force of Asamiya and tribal desired to take control over those lands (Weiner 1983:287). Thirdly, as part of the political response to demographic changes, the Congress split into two parts, pro-Indira Gandhi and anti- Indira Gandhi factions¹⁵. It is because of this crisis that in March 1978, for the first time after independence, Congress failed to prove majority in the state election. This split within congress ended the post-independence coalition of Assamese Hindus and Na-Asamiya Muslims as the later perceived undivided Congress favourable ruling party for them. In fact many of the Na-Asamiya Muslims turned towards supporting Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India –Marxist (CPI-M) .Both these parties were regarded Bengali parties by many Assamese because of the dominant pro-communist vote in both West Bengal and Tripura. The agitation took an anti-communist turn when All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), an umbrella organization of 11 constituent regional bodies, accused the left parties in Assam as ‘agents of Bengalis’. (Weiner 1983: 288). Fourthly, many members of the urban Asamiya middle class, who own agricultural lands, leased to tenant farmers who became hostile to them and many were na-Asamiya Muslim peasants, allegedly supported by the communist forces. Though all the organizations participating in the agitation disavowed attacks on Muslims by saying that the agitation was against any illegal residents of the state, in many areas it took a communal Hindu-Muslim turn. (Weiner 1983:289). For many opponents of Mrs. Gandhi (Na-Asamiya Muslims were perceived to be a major source of her electorate support), it was an opportunity to make number of Na-Asamiya Muslims lesser to fulfill their own political goals. The agitating forces opposed the leftist parties and the Congress (I) to reduce the size of the overall Bengali electorate. (Weiner 1983: 289)

Violence against Bengal Origin Population in General and Na-Asamiya Muslims in Particular:

During the initial phase, both Hindu and Muslim from East-Bengal origin were directly threatened by the movement. A tendency emerged to portray all East-Bengal origin people as “Bangladeshis” or initially ‘outsider’ and then ‘foreigners’ irrespective of when they came to Assam. They were in constant fear of being marked as ‘Bangladeshi’. There were reports of increasing violent incidents on East-Bengal origin population though many a times the violence was condemned by a few stakeholders of the movement. Initially the victims chose to keep themselves out of sight, but threatened gradually, they tried to put up an organized opposition to the Assam movement (Baruah 1986:1195). Baruah argued that the leadership had to do some careful ‘conflict management’. Though it was supported by important organizations of the tea workers, there were report of clashes between tea workers and student picketers. Later AASU had to respond and clarify that it was not directed against them (Baruah 1986:1195).

Amalendu Guha (1980) writes that it was post 1947 and shaking off Sylhet ¹⁶that Asamiya middle emerged stronger with language or racial riots. The little nationalism degenerated into ‘chauvinism’ and ‘minority-baiting’ which resulted in ‘aggressive linguistic nationalism’. The same was noted by then census superintendent R P Vaghaiwala in 1951. Both at all India level and regional level, nationalism was a phenomena of middle class to create their own domination in the markets (Guha 1980:1703).

Guha (1980), also gives detailed account of gradual occurrence of large scale violence during the initial phase of the agitation. While Brauah argues the nature of violence to be context specific, Guha on the other hand was quite critical on violent developments of the movement. On August 26, 1979, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP) was formed. He writes that the initial peaceful agitation with the blessings of press, fed with myths and false statistics since 1978, culminated into a mass hysteria after September

¹⁶ Sylhet district until 1878 was part of Bengal Province under colonial administration. Then it was included in the newly created Assam Province and remained a part of Assam till 1947 (except during the brief break-up of Bengal province in 1905–11). In 1947 Sylhet (excluding sub-division of Karimganj) became part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) under the administration of Chittagong division.

1979 which led to large scale anti-Bengali pogroms in January and May-June of 1980. Untruths and slanders were spread against Bengali's role in Assam and against any Bengali cultural icon in Assam or elsewhere. From June 1979 onwards the press directed its hatred almost exclusively against the so -called Bangladeshis¹⁷. Printing press owners as an organized body had refused to print the electoral rolls for the parliamentary election of 1979-80. On December 10, 1979 the movement claimed its first martyr who reportedly died of lathi-charge of CRP jawan and hundreds of them followed later on. On December 18, lakhs of people took oath to carry on life long struggle (Guha 1980: 1706). Guha (1980) writes the since linguistic and political minorities were not disapproving some of the slogans and methods of the agitation, the leadership portrayed it as a peaceful agitation without any violence. But serial episodes of violence in different areas forced the government of West Bengal to open two camps in Jalpaiguri district¹⁸ to accommodate displaced people; mostly evicted peasants, tenant farmers, artisans and fishermen. Many of the Nepali refugees on their way to Nepal were graziers, peasants or retired army men. A fact finding committee formed by People's Union of Civil Liberties, reported that between August 1979 and 16 February , 23 persons got killed in Dibrugarh District alone; of them 6 including 4 claimed as martyrs dies of police firing and 17 were killed by mob violence or unknown assailants. As the name suggests 16 were Bengalis and one was an Asamiya. The January genocide in North-Kamrup caused death of some two hundred persons (some non-official estimates say 80 bodies were found) were killed and all of them except two were either linguistic or religious minorities. Almost twenty five thousand people were rendered homeless by large scale arson. Guha mentions that "the butchering of minorities went under reported and mostly unlamented in the local bourgeois press and the on the platform of the movement" (Guha 1980:1707). The left parties like CPI, CPI (M) and other parties called for immediate sealing off the India-Bangladesh border and solve the issue of foreigner according to the existing national and international legal agreements. They appealed for detecting and

¹⁷ Bangladeshi, in the common usage of the term is used in Assam to objectify a person who is an illegal migrant from Bangladesh, commonly stereotypes Muslims. The termed gained political significance during Assam

¹⁸ Jalpaiguri is the nearest District of the state of West Bengal to the western part Assam.

deportation of real foreigners and not to harass any citizen from minority community in the name of foreigner hunting. But the movement leadership termed this conditional support as halfhearted, even mischievous and violent attacks were propagated against them. Five CPI and two CPI (M) cadres were brutally killed and on August 17, on progressive newspaper printing press named *Kalakhar* was attacked and damaged by the students. (Guha 1980:1707)

Guha mentions that the minorities were submissive in general to the chauvinist Asamiya identity assertion (Guha 1980:1707). If one tries to look closely at the violent incidents post 1980 in Assam, it becomes evident that the violence was mostly directed towards the Bengali Muslims leaving many other 'outsiders' to the state. This distinct shift raises a crucial question- why violence was directed towards the Bengali Muslims as a new shift in the movement? There has always been a fear psychosis created among the Asamiya people regarding exaggerated number of 'Bangladeshi Immigrant' in Assam, particularly Muslims. As I mentioned earlier, these estimated figures often create public hatred and anger on the Bengali Muslims and fulfills the need of middle class chauvinist leaders of Asamiya nationalism. Guha (1980) mentions that according to the estimation of AASU and GSP almost one fourth citizens of Assam in 1980 were 'doubtful'. He also mentions that most of these Muslims, already assimilated or on the way to assimilation, are poor and illiterate. For this reason they often lose their 'border slips', camp cards and even refugee registration certificates during the process of constant mobility in search of a living.

2.6 Assam Movement and the Muslim Question:

The Assam movement raised some pertinent questions regarding "otherisation" of Muslims in Assam. Even though the agitation was claimed on secular basis by the leaders, series of violent planned attack particularly Muslims seriously questioned its secular credentials. In a certain sense, the Muslims got the peripheral position within the core domain of Assamese nationalism. Though many other migrant groups were present

in the group, in terms of violence, Muslims, particularly Na-Asamiya Muslims became soft target. Hussain (1993) says that Muslims were then categorized as 'Assamese' and 'Bengali'. Many a times Muslims were identified exclusively as a religious community as if they were not part of any nation or nationality. The communal elements within the movement tried to discover their dangerous connection with Pakistan or Bangladesh. In fact many of them labelled Muslims residing in Assam as foreigners indiscriminately. Conspiracy theory were propagated against them that they will outnumber the Hindus in Assam. "Negative labelling, wild doubts and apprehensions" were expressed against the community both in implicit and explicit ways (Hussain 1993:196).

Gyanendra Pandey (1999) argues that nationalism has taken its course by finding its core and alongside the core, there exists minorities or marginal communities where the questions of political, geographical or cultural boundaries are fought over. The minorities are not completely accepted as a citizen and they constantly have to struggle to prove their loyalty to the nation. After partition of 1947 thus terms like "Muslim Question" and "Majority" or "Minority" became quite prevalent (Pandey 1999: 608-609). In the context of Assamese nationalism too, thus, in a parallel to pan-Indian sense, Muslims (particularly Bengal origin) acquired the status of that constructed minority. Their loyalty to Assamese nationalism and their citizenship status became a subject of doubt for the torchbearer of chauvinist Assamese nationalism. Sanjib Baruah (1986) writes that the Bengali Muslim allied with ethnic Assamese on cultural policy issues, while Bengali Hindus were among the most vociferous opponents of these policies. However, in 1965 when relation with Pakistan were deteriorating, the state government under instruction from New Delhi began expelling Pakistani infiltrators. Muslims were being harassed in the process and many Muslim politicians from Assam threatened to resign from the assembly. Prominent Muslim politician from Assam like Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Moinul Haque Chaudhuri were persuaded to relinquish their claims to the state chief minister -ship as it might suggest growing political power of the 'immigrants'. (Baruah 1986:1191). Baruah, while glorifying the movement termed it as a "statewide cultural festival" where mobilization was based on distinct 'cultural and historical' symbols. Even

many 'plain tribes' who lost cultivable land to 'immigrants' were also part of the movement (Baruah 1986:1194). This analysis of distant cultural and historical symbols appears to be problematic as within Assam different ethnic group had their own cultural and historical symbols. This was proved right after the movement when different tribal group asserted their own autonomy in terms of language and culture, denying the dominant Assamese one. Thus using the dominant and only one type of cultural and historical symbols, the movement leadership converted the situation of possible ethnic clashes among different groups. Also the narrative that 'East-Bengal immigrants have encroached a huge amount of land' led to frequent violent targeting by objectifying them as foreigners. The land issue was a complex problem as in many areas the tribal Bodos were also targeted by caste Hindu people as 'land encroachers'. The Assamese upper caste domination was also evident when post Assam movement Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), a party of all ex -movement leaders came to power in state assembly election of 1985. Hussain (2003) points out that the AGP led ministry failed to provide adequate representation to the communities of the state. The Hindu Bengalis who constituted then more than 20 percent of the population remained unrepresented. The Na-Asamiya Muslims also did not get any share. A tribal MLA, full of anguish pointed out that out of six, five cabinet ministers were Asamiya Brahmin. 18 out 21 ministers were upper caste MLAs whereas only 4 tribal MLAs became ministers out of 18 (Basumatary 1988:4 as cited in Hussain 2003:987). This again supports the argument about Assam Movement as a middle class/upper caste dominated phenomena.

Makiko Kimura (2003) also raises the issue of violence on the "so- called" immigrant Muslims who were often harassed as foreigners and became the target of violence in the early phase of the antforeigner movement (Kimura 2003:68). There were reports of clashes between movement supporter and Muslims of East Bengal origin in places like North Kamrup in 1980. It was triggered by death of a high school student who had worked as a member of the AASU. He was killed in an East Bengal Muslim dominated village. His death led to attacks and counter attacks between Assamese nationalist and alleged immigrant Muslims, leading to first large scale group clash during the movement.

Though it was alleged that during the curfew, Assamese villagers were harassed while interrogated, most of the victims of the clash was Muslims. The AASU never did strongly condemn the violence perpetrated against the Muslims; rather they excluded the people who were against the movement coming in confrontation with the AAMSU (Kimura 2003:69). This act of ostracizing the Muslims by movement definitely helped the movement in taking a communal turn. There are different estimation of magnitude of violence and destruction. During the election disturbance in 1983 the death toll reached 3,000 according to the official report (Tewary Commission Report 1984:424-425; as cited in Kimuara 2003:69).

Amidst these violent targeting and prosecution of Na-Asamiya Muslims, some significant incidents of collective violence occurred on the community. A close analysis of these incidents will help us understand the nature of violence and agency of rioters and victims during Assam Movement. Also looking at a particular incident of violence will help us in understanding the incident of violence considering the local and larger issues connected to it. For our purpose we shall take the case of Nellie Massacre (1983) which till today remains the biggest and one of the least discussed violence of post-colonial Assam as well as of India.

Chapter IV

Nellie Massacre (1983) and the Question of Muslim Agency in Assam

3.1 Nellie Massacre – The Communal Turn of Assam Movement:

Nellie massacre (1983) has been the most significant incident of political violence in post-colonial Assam. There have been very few extraordinary incidents of violence of this scale in post-colonial India which makes a parallel to Nellie; like Partition violence during 1947, anti-Sikh massacre in 1984, communal violence of Gujarat in 2012, Mumbai 1992-93 and Ahmedabad 1985 (see Das 2007; Robinson 2005; Shani 2007; Mehta and Chatterjee 2007 for further details). In most of these incidents of collective violence the issue of ‘communalism’ or ‘Hindu –Muslim riots’ occupies the larger concern. Though in the context of Nellie, the existing literature (see Kimura 2013) denies an outright communal turn, the victims do not always reject the communal tendency against Muslims, which is often denied by giving the issue of “native-outsider conflict” an upper hand. The incident put a question mark on the secular credentials of Assam movement. The Nellie massacre exposed the xenophobia towards Muslims and prompted communal polarization of Assamese society which continues till today. Writing on Nellie violence, Myron Weiner (1983) terms it as an attack by mobs of Lalung tribes, along with some ‘Assamese’ on ‘immigrant Muslims’ from Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. He also writes that some observers describe the massacre as quasi-genocidal attempt to prevent the reproduction of Bengalis (Weiner 1983: 281).

Nellie massacre can be framed as a turning point in post-colonial Assam after which the question of Muslim agency became more prominent in the state. Post-violence the political agency for Muslims in Assam became pertinent through organized political forces ¹⁹to fight against harassment of genuine Indian citizen as ‘foreigners’. Nellie

¹⁹ Parties like All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) was formed specially to raise the issue against minorities in Assam in the name of alleged “foreigners”.

massacre qualifies to be called as a critical event ²⁰ which significantly influenced post 1980 Assam's politics and debates, discussions of Assamese public sphere. It would not be an exaggeration to say that post Nellie, the so called consolidated Asamiya Nationalism split into various 'micro- nationalisms' when different tribal groups accused caste Hindu-middle class leaders of Assam movement of betraying them.

The contemporary crisis of seeking of autonomy by various tribal groups by going against the dominant Assamese language and culture is the effect of historical splitting of consolidation of Asamiya nationalism in post-Nellie Assam. The incident of massacre raised the vulnerability of Muslims, particularly Na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam. It also highlighted the need of an alternative politics concerning the question of 'Muslim Political agency' in Assam. The All Assam Minorities Students Union (AAMSU), a student organization of minorities in Assam, has been constantly raising the issues of minorities in the state, many a times going against and confronting the Asamiya nationalist All Assam Students Organization (AASU). The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) started in 2005 by a Muslim businessman turned politician named Badaruddin Ajmal, also holds the demands of securing minority human rights against illegitimate harassment of genuine Indian citizens. Thus, a larger shift concerned with identity politics seeking a Muslim political agency in Assam is essentially a post-Nellie phenomenon. Das (2007) reflects on how memory of particular events gets folded into ongoing relationship of everyday life and how it reemerges and becomes part of their narratives. Thus, event and memories are always interconnected and the memory of the event of Nellie always reemphasizes the need for creating a different political agency to negotiate with state for the Muslims in Assam.

3.2 Election Boycott and 'Naghabanda' Violence- The Background of Nellie Massacre:

Defying the boycott call given by movement leadership in 1983, the central government decided to go ahead for assembly election in Assam in two phases. The movement

²⁰ The Concept is taken from Veena Das's book "*Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*," (1997)

leadership pleaded to the supreme court of India for cancellation of the election. On 1st February, 1983, the Supreme Court rejected the plea. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi started campaigning for the election in the state despite protest by the organizations leading the movement. Since opposing the election by confronting the powerful state machinery looked impossible, the protesters had given an election boycott appeal. Though a section of the people responded to the boycott positively, some of the religious minorities voted in the election. It was not taken very easily by the protesters and a map indicating the presence of ‘foreigners’ in different areas of Assam was prepared. Situation was turning violent as the movement leadership portrayed it as a struggle for survival of the community. Amid this turmoil, a news came to the Asamiya nationalist camps that a large number of “Bangladeshi” people have voted in Nellie. Soon, by the initiation of movement leadership in nearby villages of Nellie, an attack was planned on 18th February, 1983. It was also discussed how, where and when they will attack the “illegal Bangladeshis” in Nellie (Sharma 2007: 14).

In the light of above developments, before going to Nellie massacre, we must mention Nagabandha massacre that happened in just 30 km away from Nellie. Nagabandha massacre was a replica of lower intensity in comparison to Nellie and an alarming event to prevent larger massacre. On 16th February 1983, predicting an attack by agitators of Assam Movement, some villagers, through intervention by the peace committee of civil administration and police administration took shelter on Nagabandha High School. Most of them were from nearby villages with a significant number of women and children. Around 10 am, a huge mob led by police personals indiscriminately fired on the temporary shelter. Then some of the attackers set the school on fire. Few of them tried to escape through back doors and windows but hardly succeeded. Those who tried to save lives by climbing the nearby trees were also not spared. The violent and barbaric agitators attacked them on trees with sharp and long weapon. A total of one hundred and nine people were killed and few hundreds got injured (Azad 2016). Just before two days of Nellie massacre, this significant incident was a clear sign of a larger crisis coming ahead which was completely ignored by the administration and police. In fact by remaining quiet or at times helping the perpetrators of attacks in different areas, they became passive participants of massacre. Abdul Kalam Azad (2016) thus connecting both the

incidents mentions that, the Nagabandha massacre appears to be quite crucial for our study as it bears similarities with Nellie and raises some pertinent questions regarding the infamous Nellie massacre. Nagabandha massacre was executed just two days before the Nellie Massacre. One important similarity in both the incidents was that both the perpetrators and victims were from the same communities. Na-Asamiya (Miya) Muslim dominated Nagabanda was surrounded by the villages of Tiwa (Lalung), Koch and Nath-Jogi communities. In the context of Nellie too, the Tiwas were main perpetrators and Muslims were the victims. Here, in Nagabanda too, the victims were Muslims and the participation of Tiwas was apparent. In both the cases Muslims were massacred because of their participation in elections of 1983 (Azad 2016)²¹

3.3 The Massacre of Nellie:

Description of the sites of Violence in Nellie:

Nellie is located almost 70 km east from the capital city of Assam, Guwahati. It takes about two hours from Guwahati to reach Nellie. Nellie village was part of undivided Nagaon district till 1989, surrounded by an agrarian economy. The villages around Nellie produced paddy and jute which were mostly inhabited by Muslims of East Bengal Origin, Tribes such as Tiwas and Assamese Hindus. It had very less caste-Hindu population, most of them belonged to scheduled castes such as the Hiras and the Koibartas, or the Other Backward Classes such as the Kochs. (Kimura 2003:70).

In Nellie, at an open place in front of highway, a weekly market caters to the need of residents in and around the village. There is a middle school and a high school along with a market with necessary shops. Well off families and middle class occupation people in this area tend to own houses just on the sides of highway which is around Nellie village. Few Caste Hindus by their profession also preferred to gather around the market for living. The villages of Muslims, the Tiwas and others (Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes) are located away from the national highway towards the Kopili River. The massacre took place in the Muslim villages about 10 km North of Nellie village. It is called Nellie massacre since relief camps were set up in middle and high school in the

²¹ Abdul Kalam Azad (2016), "Nagabanda Massacre and the other side of Assamese Intelligentsia" Taken from : <https://abdulkazad.wordpress.com/2014/02/16/nagabanda-massacre-and-the-other-side-of-assamese-intelligentsia/>

Nellie village. Most of the people killed in the massacre are from ten villages on the Northern part of Nellie, just south of Kopili River. Most of these villages were inhabited by Muslims but bounded by Tiwa and Koch villages on both South and North (Kimura 2013: 71). Location of Nellie and Nagabandha is shown including its major surrounding areas in image-1.

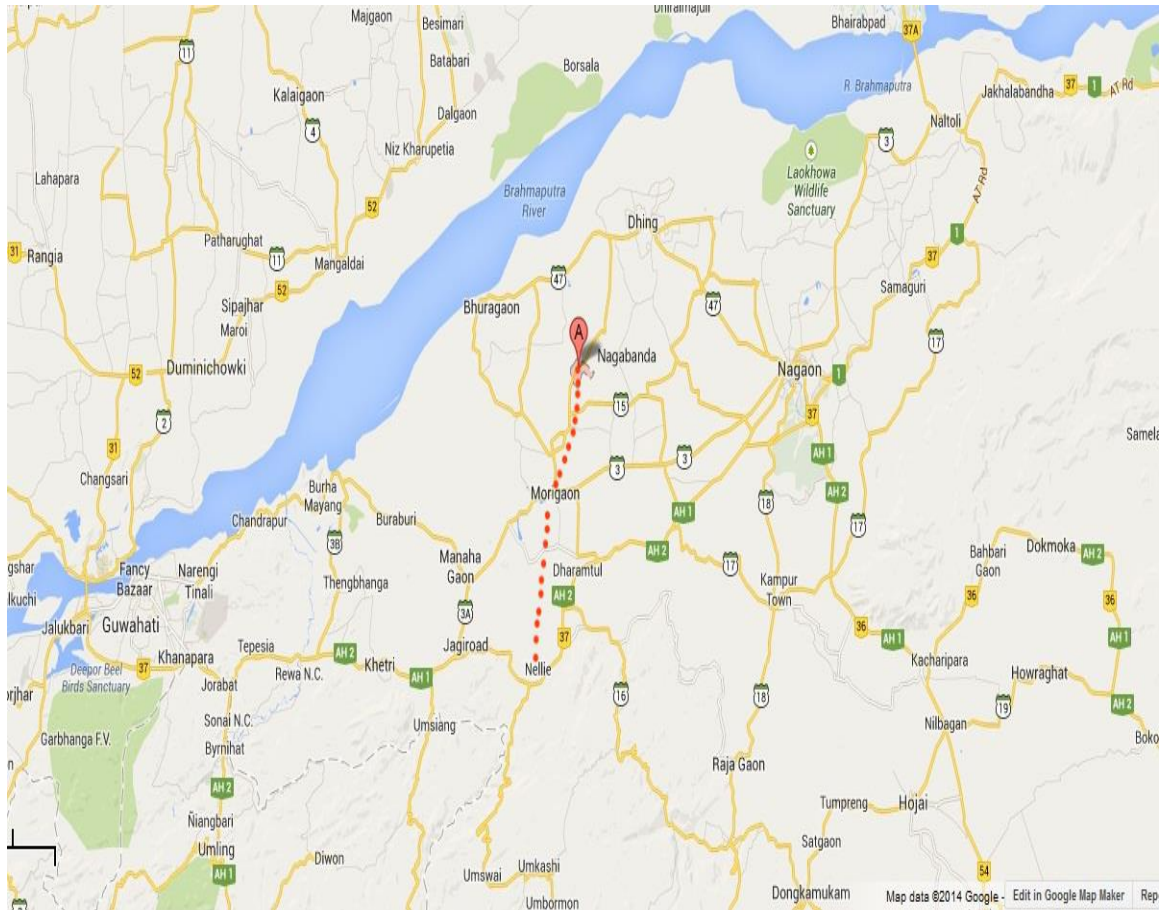


Image-1 (Source:<https://abdulkazad.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/nagabandha-map-copy.jpg>)

The Incident:

On the ill-fated morning of 18th February, 1983, the attack began in Northern Nellie, in a village called Borbori. After unleashing the first attack on Borbori, the attackers numbering in thousands attacked the villages from North, East and Southern side. Some attackers dressed like army men fired with gun too and others were setting houses on fire. The villagers could not resist and gradually all of them started running for life. The narration of the victims about the carnage on that fateful day match no word (Ahmed 2105: 40-44). Hemendra Narayan, an eye witness of the incident, who was then with the *Indian Express* wrote about the violence that it was a complete butchering of people. The attackers had *dao* (machetes), bows and arrows, *jatti* (spears), *posa* (multi-point spears), sharpened bamboo spears, bagful of earthen shots for catapults and a few guns. The attackers shouted slogans like *Joi Aae Assom*²² and one of the attackers shouted that “We have become *bideshi* (foreigner) on our own land” (Narayan 2008:2-3). Most of the victims were women and children as they could not keep the pace with the males while running for life. Altogether 14 villages and parts of Nellie was attacked which lasted six to seven hours starting from about 10 in the morning. The massacre left 370 orphaned and 2191 men, women and children dead from the villages around Nellie. They were lying dead in the fields. Though unofficial sources say that the numbers are much more than this. Most of the people were killed by *dao* (machete), a weapon which is frequently used in Assam and generally used in hills all over the India. The CRPF soldiers were late by hours to reach the spot (Narayan 2008:6). Narrating the horrific butchering, Narayan writes about the brutality of the event:

“...In a desperate dash for survival, the women and children could not keep the pace with men. One by one, they were hacked to death by hundreds of rampaging tribal. So they were first to be hacked with daos. Standing on the other bank Demal, I could count 22 women lying on the already harvested paddy fields. A woman tried to cross Demal. She was speared” (Narayan 2008:13-14)

The event so deeply affected the memory of the people that doctors working in that area after the butchering of people later talked about tormented survivors with psychological

²² *Joi Aae Asom* which literally means ‘hail mother Assam’ became the most prominent slogan for a native assertion. It was immensely popular and was shouted in almost every meetings and agitations related to Assam Movement.

disorders. Another eye witness of the incident Mr. Lahkar from Guwahati also told that post-violence there had been several incidents of suicides in the area (Narayan 2008:7). After setting the houses on fire and leaving no place to escape, the attackers then started to kill the Muslim villagers. People started to run towards the West, where the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp was located. Thus some of them were able to save their lives, but already many women, children and elderly people were brutally killed. Among those who were killed, only 10 percent were men. Most of the victims were women and children as statistics says that 70 percent of the total victims were women and 20 percent were elderly (Mehta Commission Report 1985:167 as cited by Kimura 2013:73). After the horrifying massacre most of them fled to the surrounding hills and they returned after a few weeks as the tension seemed to be slowly fading away. Muslim children who became orphan were given shelter in Save Our Soul (SOS²³) children's village. Many of them used wake up on nightmares of horror and death (Hazarika 2000:52).

Attackers only dispersed between three and half past three in the afternoon, only when CRPF troops reached on different sites of attack. In many cases the survivors lost more than ten persons from a single family. There are contesting facts and figures about the total number of victims in the incident. Government data, non-government data and enquiry commission reports came up with varying number of estimated victims. The government figures suggests that the death toll raised to 1,819 persons (Sharma 2007:22). Again Azad (2016) writes that the official figure of killed persons was 1600 while unofficial sources say it is more than 5000 in number²⁴. The Mehta Commission Report states that in the incident, about 1600 people lost their lives. Again some other sources say that the death toll reached 2000 .Post-massacre the survivors stayed in refugee camps set up in Nellie, who lost their houses (Kimura 2013:74). The 'Tewary Commission Report of Enquiry' , related to election violence in Assam during 1983, which submitted its report a year later, states it to be a communal clash where 661 Muslim people were

²³ Save Our Souls (SOS) is a non-governmental organization who works to protect vulnerable and poor children from trafficking and child labor slavery. They give the children a chance for education, medical attention and food

²⁴“ *Nagabanda Massacre and the other side of Assamese Intelligentsia*” extracted from:(<https://abdulkazad.wordpress.com/2014/02/16/nagabanda-massacre-andthe-other-side-of-assamese-intelligentsia/>)

killed, out of which 143 bodies could be identified. The remaining 516 bodies could not be identified; in addition to this, 169 person sustained injuries and 22 persons were reported to be missing. Altogether 590 investigations were proceeding (Tewary Commission Report 1984:271). Whatever be the contested number of victims, it is sure to stand at least anywhere between 2000-2500 according to most of the writings and reports. It remains as the most brutal political violence in post-colonial Assam which shook the collective conscience of the people of Assam.

State of Impunity:

Out of 6888 cases registered in the massacre, only in 310 cases charge sheet was made. This remains the most objectionable part connected to the massacre and quest for justice. Mander (2008) writes that the government gave compensation of 5000 rupees per death compared to for instance 7, 00,000 rupees for survivors of anti-Sikh riot of 1984²⁵. This shows the differential treatment of the government and the administration. The ruling Assamese middle class after coming to power, diverted the issue of justice by manipulating the political instruments of the state. In many instances, they even do not recognize the massacre, leave alone the question of justice. In several incidents it was also noted that the middle class leadership of Assam movement in a very selfish manner throws away the blame of massacre on the Lalung tribes, to erase their name from the list of propagators. Even the remaining 378 cases were closed down after a final report, citing that there was not enough evidence. One of the senior Assam government officials said that “All the Nellie cases were dropped. The chapter is closed” (Narayan 2008:10).

Nurjaman Bhuyan of Borbori village, a survivor of the massacre still awaits justice who lost 12 members of his family that day. He identified 13 of his familiar neighbors that day who came in the form of brutal killers. Case number 86/83, G R number 231/83 was registered and the final charge sheet is also made. Many of the accused are not alive now and he did not get any justice, yet till today with charge sheet filed in 1985, this cases

²⁵ *Nellie: India's forgotten massacre* by Harsh Mander; Published in *The Hindu* on 14th December, 2008.

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sundaymagazine/Nellie-Indiasquot-forgotten-massacre/article15402276.ece>

remains one of the most special documents in terms of fighting for justice (Sharma 2009:35-36).

3.4 Understanding Nellie Massacre from a Macro Perspective: The Role of Movement Leadership, State Government and the Police:

Apart from the local factors, there exists a politics of blame game on a broader level among different perpetrators directly or indirectly involved with the massacre. No one seems to accept or share the responsibility of the brutal killing which also tends to bring enormous guilt conscience. The middle class, caste Hindu leadership at the higher level denies their involvement with the killing by blaming the local leadership and perpetrators; while the later accuse the middle class leadership of movement of making them foot soldier in executing a brutal killing of around 3000 people, mostly women, children and orderly. Monirul Hussain (1993) in his pioneering work on Assam Movement, argues that the Lalungs (Tiwas) were used by the movement leadership to execute the killing. It was the middle class/upper caste movement leadership who were the powerful forces from behind by controlling the action of the tribal. The leadership prepared the blueprint of the massacre in a systematic way, fixed the time and date of execution and did all the necessary arrangement to give it a final verdict. This to a sociologist or political scientist working on a social movement, clearly provide some inside that how movement based on some secular claim may turn into non-secular in expression (Hussain 1993:142).

Perspectives of this kind depicts that there was no direct enmity or confrontation between Peasant Muslims and low caste Assamese Hindu /Tribal neighbors of them. Rather the tribal attackers was a clear victim of a carefully orchestrated plan by the middle class leadership. But on a very sharp and contrasting manner scholars like Sanjoy Hazarika terms it as a “retaliation” by the land deprived Tiwas on Muslim peasants by justifying a brutal violence. He mentions it as a “pay –back-day” for the Tiwas (Hazarika 2000:46). Clearly Hazarika’s narrative lacks a deeper analysis into the incident by ignoring the larger political developments in the state and at the level of the center. It

would be completely vague on one's part to see the event of Nellie in isolation, rather it needs to be looked through a broader lens of changing politics and society. Such a perspective also depicts that the Tiwas were independent in their decision making and the middle class leadership is not involved in the incident, which seem to be very unlikely when looked through a bigger lens into the incident.

For Kimura (2013) it is difficult to say that the violence was solely created by middle class leadership but the middle class led anti-foreigner's movement definitely influenced it. For her the violence was a result of negotiations between movement leaders and local residents of the area like Tiwas and Kochs. She argues that the movement leaders provided the "ideological" basis to drive out the foreigners by the movement's slogan. At the same times the local residents of the area interpreted the "foreigner" as Muslim Peasants, because of whom, they thought they suffered land alienation. The Tiwas and Kochs interpreted the "Ideology and functioning" of the movement which suited their interest in keeping their own regional context and decided to attack the Muslims, who were already identified as the enemy or the 'other'. The middle class leadership took advantage of their desperate situation and supported the move as for them it meant support and cooperation to the election boycott (Kimura 2013: 80-81). Precisely the middle class leadership supported the attack as it meant "teaching a lesson to those who voted".

Two things at least become quite apparent here through her analysis- firstly, the very act of interpreting the movement proves that the agitation did not have a 'universal ideology'. Also the movement could not unite the or at least create a common conscience based on a single concern through the length and breadth of then geographical territory of Assam. Also different ethnic conflicts among many ethnic groups of Assam raises the question on integrity of the agitation. Rather in some sense it was fragmented, mass frenzy in different places of the state, where the agendas of agitations and violence were completely diverse in nature. Secondly, it also becomes clear that the agitation was a project of anxiety and anguish of caste Hindu, middle class section who benefitted the most out of it. A secular ideology, ideally is fixed and universal and doesn't encourage killing of different ethnic groups in different regions of the state. Hence in almost every

sense it was the ideology of middle class whose lives were less vulnerable than that of perpetrators and victims of violence.

In the case of Nellie apart from the attackers, the student leaders and the victims, the fourth factors also needs to be considered. – The Congress party which was in power in the center. (Kimura 2013:80). She argues that the blame should go to the Congress government which failed to give a working solution related to the agitation. The breakdown of the order in the state threatened both minorities and supporters of the movement. Rather few of the minority leaders gave some provocative speech. For minorities, it was the threat from the movement supporters and for movement supporters it was the anxiety of possibly becoming minority in their own state if the congress government wins. In her study she accuses the government of instigating violence rather than concentrating on holding a fair and safe election. However, the congress seem to play the reverse game by putting blame of massacre on movement leadership. Hazarika (2000) writes that Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, rushed to Nellie in a helicopter from Guwahati. She refused to take any responsibility for the brutal massacre amidst criticism that center has actually conducted election in an inappropriate time. Rather she told that the student agitators were to blame for the massacre as they refused to held talks with the government (Hazarika 2000:52-53). Shourie (2013) also criticizes the role of the government, particularly the casual approach on their part to hold the election. He argues that though the state machinery completely collapsed, the government was not ready to accept the fact. There were intelligence reports of adequate number of security forces in the state, incidents of violence and prediction of communal riots, but the government miserably failed to read the situation and went with the decision to conduct election, where only their self-interest mattered²⁶.

The role of the police was disgraceful as rather than controlling and preventing the massacre, their role was towards encouraging the violence. The Tewary Commission Report (1984) in this regard states that the wireless message sent by the Nagaon Police

²⁶ “Arun Shourie turns up the most devastating evidence on violence in Assam” by Arun Shourie, republished in India Today, 19th July, 2013 (Published earlier in the same Magazine on 15th March, 1983).

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830515-arun-shourie-turns-up-the-most-devastating-evidence-on-violence-in-assam-770641-2013-07-19>.

Station to the 5th Assam Police Battalion were denied by the all three officers in charge. In the concluding phase of the report it was termed as “bewildering” that none of the officers admitted to have received the message before Nellie event (Tewary Commission Report 1984: 292-93). The Report also concluded that certain acts of the in charge of Jagiord Police station was questionable. Al though the officer got information regarding the attack at around 10:35 in a.m. on February 18, he did not rush to the spots, rather they were busy in rescuing the victims drowning in river Kopili. The officer in defense of his act argued that he did not know the proper roads to immediately reach to the spots. This argument was not convincing enough for the enquiry commission. Thus it becomes clearer that the police machinery was virtually completely influenced by the movement leadership by creating a gap between the police and the government in center.

In a very unusual sense in this particular case the state government could not control their own policemen. In most cases of communal or ethnic violence the state administration and police force remains under the fold of similar ideology. But in the case of Nellie majority of the low rank Assam Policemen was from the same region and was sympathetic to the cause of the agitation. In fact there are allegations that some of the leaders who planned the attack came to know that police would not work against them. Thus in a very unique sense in this violence local police did not fully obey the government order to prevent killings. Moreover CRPF and other armed police battalions were mainly brought from outside Assam and were mostly deployed in polling booths. (Kimura 2013: 87). Sharma (2009) says that in fact the reluctance of the police in preventing the massacre was exposed by a report of home ministry. On 3rd April, 1983 ‘The National Police Commission’ came up with a report which severely criticizes the shameful role of Assam Police. It says:

“..... The National Police Commission has found that there is tendency among the police officers to shun responsibility for dealing with communal situations. They either avoid to go to the troubled spot or when they happen to be present there, they try not to resort to the use of force when the situation so demands or better still slip away from the scene leaving the force leaderless. (Sixth Report, dealing with recent Communal riots and role of the Police as cited by Sharma 2009:27).

2.4 Understanding Nellie Massacre Within its Regional Context- the Micro Factors: History of Migration in the Region:

The Nellie Genocide is one of the largest incidents of collective violence that took place in India's rural areas since partition in 1947. Considering this distinct characteristic about Nellie genocide, it becomes imperative for us look at the possible causes that might help us to understand the incident of violence within its regional context. For this purpose, it is very crucial to understand the socio-economic history of the region. The Present day Nellie comes under jurisdiction of Morigaon district in Assam and of Jagirod Police station. But prior to reorganization of the districts in Assam, Nellie was part of undivided Nagaon district. The erstwhile undivided Nagaon district was rural and prior to colonization, a Tiwa kingdom called Gobha was located between Guwahati and Nagaon. Nellie is located very close to the capital of erstwhile Gobha kingdom and there exists a substantial Tiwa population. They constituted 10% of the total population of Nagaon district. The main crops grown in the district were jute and rice, and both were predominantly cultivated by Na-Asamiya Muslims. The migration of Na-Asamiya Muslims into Nagaon district was outcome of well documented colonial policy enacted by British in the early 20th century- particularly through policies like "Grow More Food"²⁷ under Muslim League Government in 1940. In 1920s and 1930s the Na-Asamiya people started settling down near close to banks of river Brahmaputra, which constitutes the Northern border of the district. According to the census of 1971, 39.39 percent of the total population of the district was Muslim. During 1920s and 1930 thus, as mentioned in previous chapter, migration through colonial intervention increased in Assam, Nagaon district was also no exception. It is shown in table 1:

²⁷ Grow more food was a campaign which started in mid-1940 to deal with food crisis of post –famine Bengal by the British administration.

Table 1: Number of persons born in East-Bengal who migrated into each district of Assam in 1911, 1921 and 1931.

Year	Goalpara	Kamrup	Darrang	Nagaon	Sibsagar	Lakhimpur
1911	77,000	4000	7000	4000	14,000	14,000
1921	151,000	44,000	20,000	58,000	14,000	14,000
1931	170,000	134,000	41,000	120,000	12,000	19,000

(Source: Census of 1931 as cited in Kimura 2013:92)

Though, the method of determination of a migrant is not mentioned in Kimura's work, it is evident from several other scholarly sources that colonial government encouraged more migration into Assam during 1911-31. Nellie initially had less Na-Asamiya population but by 1940 the population increased significantly. In 1943, Muslims League led government of Assam headed by Saadulla, opened up some of the government lands such as Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) for new settlement in the area. During the time of violence, there were 9-10 villages in the PGR area and all of them were targeted by the attackers (Kimura 2013:90-93). As argued earlier in second chapter, by scholars like Hussain (1993) about migration data in different phases, it is of no dispute that there were more migration from 1911-31, but less has been talked about socio-economic backwardness of Na-Asamiya Muslims which affects their reproductive behavior. Na-Asamiya Muslims largely remained isolated from mainstream society through schemes like line system²⁸ coupled with severe socio-economic backwardness. Thus residing in peripheral riverine area, involved only in agriculture and hard labor with almost no formal education and health facilities, they tend to reproduce more number of children. Ahmed (2015) writes that though Na-Asamiya Muslims in villages around Nellie are residing since before 1940, many of the local mainstream newspaper including *Agradut*

²⁸ Line System (in Assam) Line system was a system introduced in Kamrup and Nagaon District of Assam for the first time in 1920 under which the Muslim Peasants from East Bengal, now Republic of Bangladesh, more particularly from Mymensingh District, were required to settle in certain areas of the Bramaputra Valley of Assam.

reported that Muslims migrated to these region after 1979. He argues that this kind of twisted historical facts by local media remained one of the key factors for turmoil in those areas during election of 1983 (Ahmed 2015:37-38).

Was Land Ownership a Cause of Violence?

Tiwas, originally from the hills, used to practice shifting cultivation even after migrating to the plains. The British administration termed it as “fluctuating cultivation” and ineffective way of using land and thought of abolishing it by encouraging Na-Asamiya Muslims for intensive cultivation. Also private land ownership system introduced by the colonial administration encouraged hard working Na-Asamiya Muslims to buy private lands (Kimura 2013:93-94). Thus, the Tiwas perceived to be an encroachment on their traditional land. This gradual change of land owning pattern in the area subsequently led to ambiguous claim on land ownership both by Na-Asamiya Muslims as well as Tiwas. Though land issue appears to be a general problem, this was more evident in Northern part of Nagaon, where there was a high number of Na-Asamiya Muslims. Nellie was on the Southern part where Tiwas, Kochs and other Hindus outnumbered Muslims. This brings the possibility of several local factors which acted as an immediate reason for the massacre; apart from the dominant narrative of colonial migration and land settlement pattern.

Hazarika (2000) writes that the immediate reason for the violence ‘appeared to be’ reported abduction and rape of four Tiwa women by Na-Asamiya Muslims. And the second reason as he identifies, is long term resentment that the ‘settler’ Muslim population was gradually grabbing ‘traditional Tiwa lands’. The Muslims first worked under Tiwas as sharecroppers, then became tenants and finally ended up acquiring lands. He accuse the Na-Asamiya Muslims for illegally buying and acquiring land as non-tribals in those areas were not allowed to buy land under British made laws. In Nellie and its surrounding areas, Tiwas sold land to Muslims. The antagonism grew between Tiwas and Muslims when the Tiwas saw their previously owned soil nourishing with more crops and the Muslims making more profits (Hazarika 2000:45-46). However, Kiumra (2013), after conducting her study found that surprisingly, there were lack of narrative of land alienation among the rioters. In a group interview in that area, many complained that

since 1982-83 the Muslims used to kidnap their girls and kill. So the the main issue with the Muslims was not land. They gradually informed the matter to AASU and Asamiya people in that area. Also in another village, the Tiwas said that their cows were stolen and killed by Muslims. They also used to steal agricultural products. These minor incidents used to affect the relationship between them. But villagers also admitted that these reasons were secondary and the election boycott call given by AASU and its later developments were the main reason of the massacre (Kimura 2013:98-99).

Role of Rumors:

Like elsewhere in the case of collective violence, in Nellie incident too, role of rumor played an important role in instigating violence. Rumor of Tiwa people under attack in several areas by the Muslim was being circulated heavily. In fact after the violence the Lalung Darbar ²⁹submitted a memorandum to the prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi stating that there were several incidents of small scale violence on the community from 12/02/1983 to 15/02/1983. These activities, as they refer was done by “Immigrant Bangladeshis” which in that particular context referred to Na-Asamiya Muslims (Narayan 2008: 16-19). Though there is no particular way of determining the validity of the case; in any case these rumors got spread out as “truth” among the Tiwas. It also helped to generate a larger ‘insecurity’ and as an outcome resorting to violence to protect their own “community”. The favorable context then, for a violent collective act was provided by the ASSU led movement and subsequently the election disturbance. Also Kimura (2013) argues that many of the rioter used a language of ‘we’ and the ‘other’ which demarcated the gap between the two communities. Narrative of “outsider” or “foreigner” parallel to the state wide protest also became part of the local narrative. Thus narratives and role rumor became an important process in this particular act of collective violence.

3.5 Report of Enquiry Committee: Could Nellie Massacre be prevented?

There has been number of debates and speculations about whether an incident like Nellie genocide could have been avoided. There are different perspectives around the debate as well as different answers and opinions from the government, victim and perpetrators’

²⁹ Lalung Durbar is traditional of council of Tiwa (Lalung) tribe in Assam and Meghalaya. These council is a social organization based on their tradition who solves social disputes and other problems concerning the villagers.

side. The first question which, for us arises is – Was it by any means safe to conduct election in Assam when a virtually parallel administration was functioning in the state? In a reply to that when the then prime minister Indira Gandhi visited Nellie after the incident and she denied to take responsibility of that. Rather she held the students and the agitators responsible for creating a climate of violence and encouraging killing (Hazarika 2000:52) Tiwary Commission Report states that the report of the attack reached the Jagirod police station much earlier. Jahiruddin Ahmed, the officer in charge (O.C) of Nagaon police station, stated that on 15th February, at noon some people inform him that – on 14th February night, about 1000 Asamiya people gathered in Nellie by beating drums with sharp weapons. The person who had told this information to O.C told that they could not travel to Morigain and requested the O.C to convey this message. Ahmed forwarded this message to commandant of 5th Assam Police Battalion in Morigain, O.C of Jagirod Police station and (Sub Divisional Police Officer) S.D.P.O, Morigaon. Ahmed produced a copy of the message sent to the officials, in front of the enquiry commission. However, Ahmed admitted that he could not report to Superintendent of Police (S.P) of Nagaon in person as they were not available at that time. There seems to be a clear ‘disruption of communication’ between Ahmed and O.C of Jagirod Police Station as on the day of attack the O.C sent second officer D. Gogoi to nearby area of Nellie Amlighat. Gogoi along with a troop of CRPF personnel, who reached the spot 11-30, whereas killing started at around 10. Finding no incident of violence there, Gogoi went to the Nellie side, where they could see that the attack has already begun much earlier (Tewary Commission Report 1984: 291-293). This clearly shows the casual attitude in terms of dealing with sending a message of probable riot. If the police force would have taken necessary action the massacre could have possibly been prevented. Now it is difficult to say at what stage the ‘disruption’ of the message happened, but it is definitely certain that at an entirely volatile situation across the state, the security arrangements was not adequate. A significant and major role is played by government in riot management, which in the case of Nellie was inadequate.

Shourie (2013) going through various report, information and police complaints, raised three important points. Firstly, People across Brahmaputra valley of the state was full of anger and humiliation when central government ordered to conduct the election in state.

The outcome was severe violent incidents like Nellie. Darrang district, the then largest of Assam, stretched more than the distance between Delhi and Chandigarh; yet in normal situation only 1000/1200 police men were there for 'peacekeeping'. Secondly, the decision to hold election created a difference between the policemen and few of government's loyal officer. Many of the local police saw the decision as oppressing their own people and opposed the election, going against the order from Delhi. Thirdly, the election was just to be held like a ritual. The selfish officers who tried to use it for their promotion or personal gain, were concerned about the security of about 8,000 election officers, probationers and others who were brought from Delhi by air. Their purpose was just to conduct an election, not bothered by the safety of masses.

Faced with severe criticism the government in July 1983 ordered to form an inquiry commission into the matter under supervision of a retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer T. P Tewary. Which later became famous as Tewary commission Report.

The commission members visited spots of violence including Nellie, local community people, examined and interviewed major government officials like Deputy Commissioner, superintendents of Police, divisional commissioners and other low-and high ranking government officials. The report was completed and printed in May, 1984. But it was never made public and common people till now do not have an access to it.

After the findings of the report, the movement leaders denying a judicial inquiry into the disturbance rejected the credibility of Tewary Commission. Rather the "Asom Rajyik Freedom Fighters Association" decided to constitute a private enquiry committee which consisted of T U Mehta (a retired chief justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh), and two Assamese person G C Phukan (retired IAS) and Raihan Shah (retired professor of Cotton College, Guwahati). They were told to enquire the election disturbances of 1983 including violent incidents before and after the election. But sadly both the report doesn't provide any details of the attackers involved in those violent incidents except statistics about number of violent incidents that happened during that period. The allegations that top leaders of AASU and AAGSP are involved directly or indirectly in many violent incidents could only be heard in newspapers, weekly magazines and other alternative journals. No enquiry committee was able to prove it. There is no unbiased enquiry into the incident till today and both enquiry commission served purposes and

perspectives of government of India and student movement leaders respectively (Kimura 2013: 83-84).

3.6 Electoral Politics and Violence: Understanding Nellie Genocide through Wilkinson's Idea of Relation between 'Electoral Competition' and 'Violence':

Can we understand the incident of Nellie by analyzing closely the local electoral politics? Since Nellie incident is directly connected violence related to election, it becomes imperative for us to look at the electoral aspects of violence. Just few days before election, a rumor got spread out that one who does not vote, will be considered as a foreigner. This rumor mostly got circulated in some sensitive areas especially in districts like Nagaon, Barpeta, Darrang etc. where minorities have a significant population. Out of this growing fear of being marked as a foreigner, a section of people came out for voting. In Nellie too, on 14th of February few people voted and this became the reason for hostility on them by another section of people. Many of the agitators perceived that the act of voting was a conspiracy to include oneself in the list of citizen from the status of a foreigner (Sharma 2007:24).

Steven I. Wilkinson (2004) argues against the dominant narrative that 'riots are spontaneous'. He argues that riots, by nature far from being spontaneous are eruptions of anger are often planned by politicians for a clear electoral purpose. Using necessary data on Hindu-Muslim communal riot in India he demonstrates that – electoral incentives at two levels – the local constituency level and the level of government that controls the police combines themselves together to decide where and when ethnic violence against minorities will occur. More importantly, it also determines whether the state will choose to intervene or not (Wilkinson 2004:1). He argues political competition itself results in ethnic violence and they are interconnected. Ethnic violence are often been portrayed as outcome of a rational, if disgraceful, strategy used by political elites to win and hold power. Citing Bates in the context of Africa he argues that “electoral competition arouses ethnic conflict.” (Bates 1983:61 as cited in Wilkinson 2004:1). The case on Nellie too, the violence far from being spontaneous, appears to be quite well organized and planned. It was done obviously to influence the electoral politics of the state for the quest of gaining power. Referring to the conclusion of worldwide survey on ethnic violence in

1990s by the organization 'Human Rights Watch', Wilkinson points out that ethnic riots and pogroms are caused by political elites who take advantage of the existing communal tension to set up their own political agenda. As discussed several instances above, the middle class in Assam aspired to be political elites by taking control over the political instruments of the state.

In the context of Nellie, using Wilkinson's town level and state level electoral incentives, one can witness some distinct characteristics which are different from conventional communal Hindu-Muslim violence in India which happen out of electoral competition. At the local level there was an 'anti-immigrant' mobilization by a consolidated group of 'native' people. Wilkinson uses the word "anti-minority" in his analysis; for our purpose, let us take the word "anti-immigrant" as parallel to his word. Thus at the local level one could witness a huge anti-foreigner/immigrant mobilization under middle class movement leadership which was consolidation of different ethnic groups in the localities like Tiwas, Kochs, Karbis and Low Caste Assamese. So there was growing enmity and there was a possibility of violence at any point of time. But again for him these are not the only factors, the breaking out of violence depends on the role of the state. It is on the part of state government that whether it is keen to control or prevent a violence. In this context here, the role of the state government is quite complex. Though many of the representatives assured the minorities protection from the movement supporters, it eventually failed due to lack of cooperation from the police force.

He explains the local and state level factors more elaborately. In the local level people might have ethnic or non-ethnic identity which one might identify politically. It becomes the task of politicians to identify the particular identity with which majority of the people identify themselves. Thus a majority ethnic mobilization favours their party in the run up for an election. Parties which represent elites within ethnic groups, often do anti-minority mobilization and thus get support of a wider ethnic community. Thus the party identifies itself with majority ethnic identity rather than a party based on economic redistribution or some ideological agenda. Thus through a minority counter mobilization (preferably violent counter mobilization which appears to be a threat for majorities) will polarize the majority ethnic group towards that particular political party which has

strongest anti-minority projection. Thus ethnic violence is the probable outcome of this kind of mobilization.

Thus the local electoral incentives are quite important in terms of understanding ethnic riots as in where and how they will break out. But these are not the only local level factors which invigorate or dispirit violence. There exists a more important question than that of local incentives - “the response of the level of government that controls the police or army.” Wilkinson is of the view that in most cases, whether violence is durable or of short term, does not depend on local factors; rather it depends on “will and capacity of the government that controls the forces of law and order”. (Wilkinson 2004:5)

Wilkinson also bring the aspect of violence where army/police units and civilians forms an alliance to execute an incident of violence. Referring to massacre on Chinese in Indonesia in 1960, quoting Robert Cribb he argues that the execution of that violence was a shared responsibility of army units and civil vigilante groups. Though in some cases army attacked directly, they mostly supplied weapon, provided training and strong encouragement to civilian gangs who carried out significant number of attacks (Cribb 1990:3 as cited in Wilkinson 2004:5). In the case of Nellie too, we see that police, most of whom were sympathizers of the movement formed an alliance with the attackers. In few instances there were rumors of police being involved in many attacks directly. Whatever be the case here, police and states virtually appeared to be separate in terms of command and functioning.

According to Wilkinson government protects minorities only when there is an electoral interest. The increase of supply of protection towards minorities increases in two conditions – when minorities are direct support base of the party or support base of a party under coalition or the overall electoral situation is competitive in terms of effective number of parties that they might to depend on minority votes in future. (Wilkinson 2004:6). Through this he explains Gujarat violence of 2002 where except two major political parties others were not significant (means few effective number of parties) and the ruling party BJP was never dependent on minority votes. Though Congress (I) government leaders used Muslims as vote banks, they were unable to stop the violence.

Wilkinson tries to explain ethnic riots in different states of India using the pattern of electoral politics. He uses state and town data of Hindu-Muslim riots of past 50 years in

India (1950-95). In addition to these data on ethnic violence, he collected government documents to operationalize and test the main theories of ethnic violence. For example to test institutional decay theory which says that slowly declining bureaucratic and coercive capacity of the state leads to ethnic violence, he gathered data on politically motivated transfers, changing caste and ethnic balance in police and administration and statistics on corruption. (Wilkinson 2004:11).

Wilkinson also refers to partition massacres in 1946-47 that took place in Punjab, Bihar and Bengal. He argues that in these the local elected government, who are from majority ethnic group did not act against their community for anti-minority pogroms. Referring to the anti-Muslim riot that broke out in Bihar in October, 1946 he says that the Hindu premier refused to allow the British troop to intervene and control the situation. He also ignored the congress leaders' involvement into the matter and held no one responsible for a violence in which 7000-8000 people were killed, except few token arrests. (Damodaran 1992: 354-56 as cited in Wilkinson 2004:5).

3.6: Genocide or Massacre? Locating Nellie Massacre in the Debate:

When an incident of collective violence does qualifies to be called genocide? Whether a genocidal tendency against a particular religious, racial, ethnic or caste group lead to act/acts of collective violence or an act of collective violence can be understood in isolation? Keeping in mind these concerns, the question that bothers us here is that-could we term Nellie massacre as an outcome of a genocidal tendency? Even Weiner (1983) terms Nellie violence as “quasi-genocidal” act to control the reproduction of ‘Bengalis’. To have a clear idea about what commonly referred to as genocide, let us first visit the standard definition of genocide by United Nations. “Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”- Adopted by the general assembly of the United Nations on 9th December, 1948, defines genocide as --

“Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring

about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”³⁰

Tewary Commission Report (1984), states that entire Assam was on chaos and state of lawlessness. There were no pattern of violence and in different districts, different ethnic groups were victim of collective forms of violence. Nevertheless, in any case, one universal development of the movement was “otherisation of Na-Asamiya Muslims”, irrespective of their origin of birthplace. The otherisation was necessary to run the movement by the middle class leadership. They were initially termed as “*bohiragoto*” (outsider) and “*bideshi*” (foreigner). The rhetoric of *bideshi* became so enmeshed in everyday language of people that it later converted to hatred and violence considering them as a different ethnic group. This almost bears similarity to the definition of genocide by United Nation when the definition talks about – “destroying, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, and racial or religious group by killing their people”.

As mentioned in chapter -1, Demmers and Mehendale (2010) in a very interesting analysis reflects upon the complexities of connection between Neoliberalism and Xenophobia. In the context of Netherland, they talk about how xenophobic tendency developed towards “immigrant” groups in Netherland. They argue that neither visibility of ‘radical Islam’ in Dutch society nor ‘cultural difference’ is leading to xenophobia. Rather they argue that the xenophobia is a part of the larger process of neoliberal market controlled economy which forms a “symbolic form of collectiveness” in an increasingly “atomized” Dutch society (Demmers and Mehendale 2010:53-54). In the case of Assam, portraying Na- Asamiya Muslims as “immigrant Muslims” and having ‘cultural difference’, the Asamiya movement leadership almost portrayed the movement towards developing hatred towards the community, which eventually led to violent targeting. Though Demmers and Mehendale talk in the context of neoliberal economy, in the context of Assam, it was a struggle of Asamiya middle class/upper caste movement leaders to get hold of the instruments of the mode of production of the state. As, scholars like Guha (1980) earlier points out that Assam Movement was a project of Asamiya middle class that felt alienated from the state’s economic process and administration

³⁰ Extracted from - <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>

which was earlier dominated by British backed Bengali middle class. Goswami (2013) reflects through her lived experience about the growing intense xenophobic tendency in Assam, as she was growing up. In terms of xenophobic tendency she refers to growing ‘anti-Bangladeshi’ slogans which eventually got converted into ‘anti-Bengal sentiments’. Calling Nellie violence a genocide, she argues that because of certain visible or invisible marker of identity, Na-Asamiya Muslims were always projected as the ‘other’ and not fully Assamese; though they made a conscious decision to assimilate with the ‘mainstream’ Asamiya culture. For her, the issue of ‘illegal immigration’ was just an “excuse to target minorities in Assam”. This was evident in Assam movement when many ethnic minorities were also targeted. But most of them have started fighting back and Na-Asamiya Muslims still remain a soft target for ‘dominant Asamiyas’³¹. In fact a genocidal tendency was encouraged and well-defended. Post-Nellie massacre, Hazarika (2000) in the context of massacring Na Asamiya Muslim writes:

“Tiwas, as their resentments growing, sharpened their *daos*, oiled their muskets and twanged their bows and arrows, preparing for what they regarded as judgment day. Perhaps it would be better described as pay-back day” (Hazarika 2000:46). Thus he forms Nellie massacre as an ‘event of revenge’ which was obvious to happen. Incitement of hatred and violence against a community comes out of a xenophobic tendency which in the case of Nellie, seems to be largely similar. He also wrote that “the immigrant and every-single non –tribal had no business to be there” (Hazarika 2000:53).

3.7 Nellie Massacre, Communal Developments and Assamese Public Sphere:

Habermas (1964) defines the Public Sphere as that forum of social life where private individuals come out to assemble a public body, to discuss matter of general interest, where a public opinion can be formed. In its extended form where there is a larger public, there is requirement of specific means to pass information or influence people those who receive it. In this context today’s newspapers, magazines, televisions are the media of public sphere (Habermas 1974: 49). It is in this context that I am using the word ‘Public

³¹ *Nellie, Me and Impunity* by Uddipana Goswami, published in Kafila on 20th March, 2013. <https://kafila.online/2013/03/20/nellie-me-and-impunity-uddipana-goswami/>

Sphere' in a Habermasian sense to portray how a communal turn became inevitable in newspapers, magazines, public discussions and in other dominant media forms during the election disturbance. Muslims, particularly *Na Asamiya Muslims*, became the essential enemy of a chauvinist Assamese nationalism. Though the violent incidents during Assam movement in general and Nellie violence in particular is studied from different perspectives like colonial migration and demographic change, native politics, middle class leadership etc., the communal angle to look at the violent incident is seldom mentioned. Though a vast literature in vernacular as well in English deny the incident to be out- rightly communal as in the case of most north-Indian communal violence, but a close look at the communal developments might bring a new perspective to look into the matter. Since the beginning of the movement Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) elements tried to divert the movement 'into anti-Muslims channels and nearly succeeded'. In fact the then general secretary of RSS Rajendra Singh visited Assam and said that Hindus from Bangladesh should be allowed to stay in Assam while Muslims should be sent back (Gohain 1980:419).

Kimura (2013) says that the labelling of Muslims as the "enemy" had already started in 1980 where in North Kamrup, where Muslims were attacked (Kimura 2013:81). Nellie Genocide (1983) was planned during the frustrating phase of chauvinistic Assamese nationalism loosely called Assam Movement (1979-85). It was in that phase of the agitation where violence was normalized and legitimized in some context for the 'greater benefit' of Asamiya community. Sharma (2007) writes:

"The entire planning for the Nellie genocide was done through arranging different meetings in and around the area. A significant number of people said so when we visited the greater Nellie area of the place where one of the biggest massacre of 20th century was planned and executed. According to them it was planned before 2-3 days ago, immediately after the election on 14th February. Series of meetings were held in and around Nellie by local movement leaders along with many tribal leaders. And in these gatherings only the massacre was proposed. Significantly, though some people belonging to minority community was predicting some unfavorable situation, nobody could image a genocide of this extent. A section of the movement leaders planned it in an organized way." (Sharma 2007:24)

Post Nellie, Atul Borah, one of the prominent student leaders of the movement had given a call to revitalize the movement which was losing its support base with a new approach. In one of the interviews which was published in the Assamese magazine *Prantik* on September, 1983 Borah said “Asamiya people must leave humanity for the cause of national interest at least for twenty years. Had humanity been always in the first place, killing of Tamils would not happen in Sri Lanka; similarly Indians in Uganda”³². His comments prove the fact that rather than being apologetic and concern about large scale massacre like Nellie, the leadership wanted to carry on the movement using any means. The leadership of the movement did not seem to be bothered about the question of communal targeting of people which was largely visible in the case of Nellie. Rather, he was blaming Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India for growing communalism in the state among different political forces. Interestingly he blamed Gandhi for being closer to both RSS³³ and Muslims League³⁴ as the both Hindu and Muslims voters equally mattered for her. Surprisingly while referring to the month of February, the specific event of Nellie was not mentioned anywhere, which is supposed to be most questionable act of violence during the entire movement. Again he was blaming the government of Delhi (central government led by Indira Gandhi), Dispur (Assam state government) and West Bengal (West Bengal state government) for diverting their energy to in favour of communalism. While accusing West Bengal government of conspiring in the Assam Movement, he was in a way complimenting with what Amalendu Guha (1989), who as earlier mentioned, pointed out three years back- that how the chauvinistic movement leadership projected the entire CPI (M) led West Bengal Government as anti-Asamiya.

In fact in most of the writings and speeches after the incident of Nellie, it was denied that the functional rhetoric of Assam Movement like ‘outsider’, ‘foreigner’ and ‘Bangladeshi’ was gradually carrying a religious connotation. Kimura (2003) through her study on Nellie massacre, argues how the whole notion of outsider was a ‘Bangladeshi’ who is essentially a Muslim. She writes by defining the Muslims as “Bangladeshi,” the

³² For Details see – *Pratiti*, Year 1, Issue 5, September, 1983.

³³ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is an international Hindu Right wing organization which was founded in 1925.

³⁴ Founded in 1906 in Dhaka, Muslim League was a political party which advocated for a separate country for Muslims on the basis of religion.

movement and its ideology provided ‘legitimacy to harass the Muslims’ and minorities in the state. This kind of tendency to harass Muslims in day to day life was visible when it was practiced by most of the Asamiya people including government officials and police personnel. It also provided legitimacy to instigate violence against and innocent minorities and people did not bother to raise voice against that. In this way the movement leaders made the situation favorable for creation of a riot (Kimura 2013:70).

The Muslims, particularly the Na-Asamiya Muslims, thus, post-Nellie became the ‘other’ of Assamese nationalism. It created a communal division which befitted the religious right wing groups to place their own agendas more easily. It also questioned and exposed the secular credentials of the movement. The brutal attack also reflected the frustration of Assamese caste Hindu, middle class leadership without any ideological base of the movement. Muslims peasants (Na-Asamiya Muslims) became the soft target of violence and the essential ‘other’ to make sustain their own kind of nationalism.

Communal Division of Movement Leadership and the Muslim Question

Post-Nellie, on 11th and 12th of April the Muslim students of AASSU held a special meeting to raise concern and discuss the disturbing developments of the movement. The meeting was presided under Md. Nurul Hussain, the then Vice president of AASU. Later they submitted a 15 points memorandum to the leadership of the AASU. Eventually Nurul Hussain was suspended from the post and many other Muslim members’ membership was cancelled as a sanction for holding a separate meeting and submitting the memorandum. The memorandum raised serious concern about the recent communal developments in the course of the movement since 1979-83. It also protested against the targeting of Muslims in many incidents of violence by reminding the significant contribution of Muslim people towards Assamese society and culture. They clarified that it also included the contribution of the Na-Asamiy Muslim (Bengal origin Muslims who are often called *charua*, *pamua* and *bhatia*). It also tried to question the alleged connection of Jayanath Sharma, who was the then superintendent of the voluntary service group of AASU with radical Hindu right wing organization named Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He was one of the prominent leaders of the movement who played an active part in the Nellie incident. They questioned Sharma’s silence on the

matter even after this huge allegation (Sharma 2009:59-60). In fact the effort of communalizing Assam movement was exposed by Shourie (2013), who wrote that extremist from both AASU and RSS were trying to instigate communal violence in Assam prior to elections of 1983. In January 19, two RSS leaders instigated mobs to attack the police in Nagaon. The action of RSS in the movement also befitted the Muslim communal parties to polarize their supporters.

The memorandum also questioned AASU's discriminatory approach while helping people affected by violence. They also criticized AASU's politics of martyrdom to get sympathy from people by asking to clarify the term "martyr" with respect to the movement. They argued that the attackers killed in violence cannot be called as martyr. There must be some proper criteria to declare one as martyr. They opposed any kind of religious organization to influence AASU including both Hindu and Muslim right wing organization. They challenged AASU not to hide anything related to the brutal violent incidents. The memorandum also demanded an end to how every attack was portrayed as an attack by *Bangaldeshi, Miya or Bhatia Muslims* in leading newspapers in Assam. It stereotypes a certain ethnic group and thus the memorandum proposed to use the word "foreigner" instead of objectifying any communities. (Sharma 2009: 61-62). After two weeks ASSU replied to the memorandum defending its own position and again claimed a secular base of the movement. But these developments were enough to create a communal division among people of Assam due to an immature, mass frenzy in the name of casting out foreigners till today in Assam.

In most of the writings on election violence during 1983 in Assam including Nellie and its subsequent developments, an outright communal turn is largely denied. Rather it is often put as a 'native' against the 'outsider' conflict. But a quasi-genocidal tendency like Nellie violence shook the collective conscience of the people and the communal turn got manifested for the first time. In fact the Asamiya Muslims, who are not usually labeled as 'immigrant,' questioned the functioning the movement when influence of racial Hindu right wing organization like RSS with the movement leadership came into light. In fact Ahmed (2015) argues that between 14th to 19th February, in Muslims villages under Jamunamukh and Kampur of Nagaon district several violent episodes targeting Muslims were reported. This areas are allegedly strong hold of RSS in Assam (Ahmed 2015:32).

The argument about communal turn becomes more convincing when, in we see a substantial presence of AAMSU among Muslims of upper Assam's district like Jorhat, Sivasagar etc. where Na-Asamiya Muslim have insignificant population. Incidents like Nellie and communal targeting of innocent Na-Asamiya Muslims forced the Asamiya Muslims to think in religious terms which again could be substantiated by the presence of AAMSU in those areas. Thus overall a communal polarization in Assam is a post –Nellie phenomena. The event substantially changed the Muslim question in Assam and the political process in the state. The rise of AIUDF in 2011 election with 18 assembly seats indicates the tendency of looking for a political agency by many Muslim citizens of the state. This developments needs to be studied in more detailed and nuanced manner considering all the post Nellie social and political developments in Assam.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to understand the nature of collective violence which occurred during Assam Movement (1979-85) in general and the Nellie Massacre (1983) in particular. It was in the context of Nellie Massacre where around 3000 Na-Asamiya Muslims were butchered within a span of 7-8 hours that the question of hatred and violence towards the community got prominence as a matter of academic enquiry. The following questions becomes prominent here --- Where does the Na-Asamiya Muslims stand today within the larger Asamiya identity, which includes everyone who have adopted Asamiya language and cultural practices irrespective of their origin. How collective as a phenomena affected Na-Asamiya Muslims in terms of memory and everyday life and how does it gets reflected in contemporary Asamiya society?

As scholars like Pandey (1999, 2004) argues that in the context of communal violence particularly in India, the image of the Muslim as the 'other' is essentially a post-partition phenomena. It is in the context of partition that words like 'nationalist Muslims,' 'majority/minority' etc. came into discussion. There is no term called "nationalist Hindus" as parallel to "nationalist Muslim" rather it is the word "Hindu nationalist" which is popularized. By this logic nationalists happen to be Hindus and Hindu religion and culture is given 'pride of place' making core of nationalism where Muslim occupies the peripheral position. In the context of collective violence in Assam, unlike North or Western India, the narrative of 1947 partition is not directly visible; rather in the context of 'otherisation' of Na-Asamiya Muslims the politics of 'native against the outsider' is given an upper hand. Though most of the scholarship on Assam denies a pan-Indian Hindu-Muslim communal narrative, they try to conceptualize the Assam Movement and subsequent violence on Na-Asamiya Muslims as a result of 'native' reaction against the 'outsider' due to enormous demographic shift in Assam. Scholars like Baruah (1980, 1981, 1986) terms Assam Movement as a peaceful *staygraha* by giving a causal explanation between migration and demographic complexities, which resulted in 'tangled' citizenship question in Assam. Brauah even acknowledges the mass violence in Assam to be an unfortunate and temporary part of the movement. He rejects

the criticism by Guha (1980), Gohain (1980, 1982) and others who argues Assam Movement to be a project of interest of Asamiya bourgeois and middle class. Baruah also rejects the criticism of Assam movement to be 'chauvinistic' and directed towards vulnerable minorities. What Baruah and other scholars, who shares a similar concern seemed to have missed out is the gradual development communal tendencies in Assam prior to Assam Movement. As scholars like Hussain (1993) points out that after independence, during the communal riots 1950, there was mass exodus of Muslims from Assam in wake of a communal development. Again, Hussain argues that during 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, a large number of Muslims, including known congressmen were arrested and Muslims of Assam became victim of prejudice and discrimination. Muslim's loyalty was questioned and it created a communal atmosphere in the state. Under PIP scheme Na-Asamiya Muslims were harassed in the process of man-hunting Pakistani nationals out of Assam. The police used extra-legal instruments on Muslims and sometimes used force for detection and deportation of Muslims. Most of the people deported were unorganized peasants without any agency in the state. Thus this communal developments of only targeting Na-Asamiya Muslims, among many migrant groups in the state, though on a very different context in Assam, shares resonance with pan-Indian communal narrative as pointed out by scholars like Gyanendra Pandey (1999).

Thus, overall the nature of collective violence in the context of Assam movement and particularly in the context of Nellie massacre seems to be different in nature than most of the incidents of collective violence in India. The local and national factors connected to Nellie massacre appears to be different than that of significant incidents of collective violence in India like the partition violence of 1947, Gujarat riots in 2002, Mumbai communal violence in 1992, anti-Sikh riots of 1984 etc. In these cases there were certain immediate reasons for breaking out of communal or ethnic violence. But in the case of Nellie massacre the reasons appear to be multiple in nature rather than usual Hindu-Muslim / majority- minority religious group conflict. The local antagonism between na-Asamiya Muslims and Tiwas regarding ambiguous land ownership was manipulated by the leadership of the movement. Again there was conspiracy by radical right wing forces to communalize the movement leadership by mobilizing people violently against na-Asamiya Muslims. So, unlike elsewhere in India, the communal angle related to Nellie

massacre was not directly visible. Rather the communal forces in very carefully orchestrated manner, appropriated the language of the local politics initiated by the AASU. Thus very subtly, the communal forces within the movement was successful to projecting the na-Asamiya Muslims as the 'other' of Asamiya nationalism. The communal forces did not use Hindu-Muslim communal narrative directly, rather they tried to manipulate the narrative of anti-immigrant politics to 'anti-Muslim immigrant' politics. In fact, the agency of rioters during the election violence in 1983 on na-Asamiya Muslims varied in different places. There was not a single ideology to propagate violence, rather every local groups in their own context identified the na-Asamiya Muslims as perceived threat, as in the case of Nellie too. Also in the context of Nellie, it was probably the biggest incident of collective violence which happened in a rural area in post-Independent India.

The Incident of Nellie Massacre was singlehandedly enough to question the secular credentials of Assam Movement. In fact Kimura (2013), also concludes in her study on Nellie massacre that the event had a tremendous impact on Hindu-Muslim communal harmony in the state. In was rare before Assam movement and the incident of Nellie that na-Asamiya Muslims were subject of collective targeting. AASU was on the forefront of the movement and the secular claim of movement was validated through participation of different ethnic and religious group of students in AASU. But immediately after the event of Nellie, the Muslim student leaders of AASU hold a secret meeting related to communal turn of the movement. They presented a 15 point memorandum related to the disturbing developments during that time. This resulted in suspension of Md. Nurul Hussain, the then vice-president of AASU, who presided the meeting. The memorandum raised serious concern about the recent communal developments in the course of the movement since 1979-83. It also protested against the targeting of Muslims in many incidents of violence by reminding the significant contribution of Muslim people towards Assamese society and culture including the Na-Asamiya Muslims. They also questioned the question the alleged connection of Jayanath Sharma, who was the then superintendent of the voluntary service group of AASU with radical Hindu right wing organization named Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This developments brought a communal turn and sense of mistrust in everyday life of people in the state. Also, Nellie massacre

remains a crucial point in post-colonial history of Assam as the discourse of 'Muslim question' in "Muslim agency" in Assam appears to be a post-Nellie phenomena.

There is a scholarly reticence in referring to Nellie massacre as genocide. Even Weiner (1983) terms Nellie violence as "quasi-genocidal" act to control the reproduction of 'Bengalis'. By the term 'Bengali' he also includes the Na-Asamiya Muslims. But the liberal scholarship on Assam movement and its allied areas till now is hesitant to bring the lens of xenophobia while talking about Nellie massacre. The violent targeting of Na-Asamiya Muslims during Assam movement increased gradually. The hatred and violence against the Na-Asamiya Muslims as "immigrants" became a general trend of the agitation during its later stage. Nellie massacre also planned during the frustrating phase of the movement. The forms and expressions of all these developments, against general violent targeting of a particular community, resembles the sign of xenophobia. In fact, as mentioned earlier in chapter IV, the definition of xenophobia, adopted by the general assembly of the United Nations on 9th December, 1948, shows similar parameters which was in the case of violence on Na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam. Projected as 'outsider' or an 'immigrant' with distinct 'cultural' and 'religious' markers on them, the Na-Asamiya Muslims in the case of Nellie massacre was clearly victims of a xenophobic massacre. However the liberal scholarship consciously makes a distance from framing Nellie massacre as genocidal violence, as it exposes the flaws with the functioning of Assam movement.

Post-Nellie massacre there have been significant social and political developments in Assam at broader level. It would be interesting to look how Nellie as an event influenced in all these developments. Also, after the massacre, today the Tiwa and other perpetrators of violence distanced itself from AASU and movement leadership, as did the Na-Asamiya Muslims. Both are oppressed till today and not given their share by the government. Whether indigenous or allegedly 'illegal', their class situation remains the same (Sharma: 2009).

Both the victims and perpetrators have come back to a 'compromised normalcy' now. They seem to have consciously ignored the memories of massacre in their ordinary life by participating together in market, tea stall and in cooperatives. Their children also shares the same school. But as scholars like Chatterjee and Mehta (2007) argues, that

“there exists a world of riots, parallel to the normal world”, it would be crucial to see how things returned back to this level. More precisely, how they are dwelling and making adjustments between ‘violence’ and ‘rehabilitation’. Though very few survivors of Nellie is left, it would be interesting to see how the second generation victims of the massacre perceive the event of Nellie in their day to day life. Do they remember the massacre vividly, partly or it is forgotten from their ordinary life? How does that second generational memory affect their intercommunity relationship or that of with the state? What agency they could found to negotiate with the state or may be for assurance of safety for their own people so that violence of this scale does not repeat again. These sociological questions needs to be answered more carefully with detailed ethnographic work.

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